

Job Explained & Applied 18

Ger de Koning & Tony Jonathan



Why Suffering?

The Book of Job

Explained and Applied

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Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Book of Job

Introduction

Preface

The authors of the commentary on the book of Job have been deeply impressed by this book. The intense suffering of Job that is described, and his struggle with God over it, have touched us deeply. It felt like we were present at the conversations that Job and his friends had about this.

We have witnessed conversations in heaven between God and satan about Job, which Job was unaware of. We have listened carefully to the orthodox statements of Job's friends *about* God and Job's reaction to them. In his reaction, Job not only speaks *about*, but also *to* God. Some statements of Job we have listened to with bated breath. How dare he say this? We have realized that these are utterances by a man who has been pushed to the breaking point by unbearable and hopeless suffering, and that he cannot come up with any explanations for his suffering. The only Person Who can tell him is the One Who brought it upon him. This is why he rushes forward to God.

The silence of God during all of the questions that Job fires toward heaven is impressive. God does not allow Himself to be provoked and at the same time He gives Job the space to ask all of his questions and to express his grave doubts concerning God's righteousness. All these questions and doubts show that he does not let go of God, but clings to Him instead.

When the conversations between Job and his friends have come to an end, a fourth friend steps forward. He too speaks to Job, but adopts a different tone from the other three. Elihu, who is this fourth friend, acts as a mediator between Job and God. Elihu's contribution is the preparation for God's speaking to Job. Job does not react to what Elihu says.

God's appearance to Job has also made a deep impression on us. God shows Job some of the wonders of His creation, and also how He controls everything, and that Job cannot verify what He does. After all, He is God! God does not have to account for His government. Job does not receive

an answer to the question on the meaning of suffering. Nor do we. When things happen in our lives that we do not understand, He wants us to learn to trust that He is in complete control and has not lost control of our lives.

Job has become deeply aware of God's greatness and his own smallness. We have also come to realize this. We hope that this will not be a passing realization. It is our prayer that the reader will experience the same.

Ger de Koning / Tony Jonathan

Middelburg / Arnhem, March 2016 (Translated April 2020)

Introduction to the book

The book of Job is a part of "the sacred writings" (2Tim 3:15). Therefore, it is a Divine book. It is "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2Tim 3:16-17).

The book of Job belongs to the Old Testament. That is remarkable, because while the Old Testament displays a clear, Jewish character, as an exception this book does not share that characteristic. We can compare this to the letter of James in the New Testament, a letter which, as an exception in the New Testament, displays a clear Jewish character.

It is understandable that this book does not have a Jewish character when we consider that this is the oldest book written in the Old Testament. There are clear indications that it is written in the time of the patriarchs, years before Israel is established as a people. In addition, the subject of this book is about more than the people of Israel, because this is a problem that affects all of humanity, namely the problem of suffering.

The Old Testament can be divided into three parts, namely the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (cf. Lk 24:44). To this day, this is the common Jewish division of the Tanakh – which is the Old Testament. The Law teaches us about God's thoughts. In the Prophets we hear how God speaks to His people. The Writings describe the experience of the believer in this world.

The book of Job is part of the Writings. While the Psalms, as the most characteristic book of the Writings, speaks of the experiences of Christ and His people in this world, Job, as a non-Jewish book, speaks of the experiences

of a believer with regard to the suffering in this world. This is already reflected in the name Job, which is both the title and the name of the main character of the book. This name means 'where is (my) father'. This meaning fits in well with the theme of the book, as Job wonders where God is during his suffering.

The book of Job is about the intense and profound experiences of the individual human being. In it, we discover the absolute insignificance of man in the deepest suffering, amidst the loss of his possessions, the loss of his most loved ones, and the fiery arrows of the reactions of his friends, which have gone right through his soul. However, in the end, we witness the struggle with his own righteousness and lack of understanding of God's way with him.

When Job has reached that low point in his struggle, an 'interpreter' comes who leads him to a higher ground, where he can hear the voice of God. In the encounter with God Himself, he learns to know himself, but above all, God. Finally, this gives him peace in his soul right through suffering. Then comes again the abundant blessing of God and he can also be a blessing for his friends as an intercessor.

These are lessons from the book of Job which we too, as believers living in the modern twenty-first century, still need to learn in order to be, as quoted above, "equipped for every good work" (2Tim 3:17).

On the basis of Scripture there is no doubt as to the historical correctness of the book of Job. His name is mentioned twice in the Old Testament (Eze 14:14,20) and once in the New Testament (Jam 5:11). In Ezekiel 14 he is presented by the LORD together with Noah and Daniel as someone who is personally a righteous one. The reason is the condition of Israel which has become so bad, that even if these three men would have lived in Israel at that time, they would only save their own lives and not Israel as a nation.

The letter of James sets Job as an example of endurance. There we see how the end of his history is "the outcome of the Lord's dealings" literally "the end of the Lord", which means that the Lord has reached His goal with him. We also see there that we can learn from his history "that the Lord is full of compassion and [is] merciful" (Jam 5:11). Throughout all the suffering, Job has come to know the LORD personally in a special way (Job 42:5).

Possibly Moses is the author of this book – so according to the Talmud; the Dead Sea scrolls point in the same direction – and is it written even before Genesis. If so, Job is the oldest book in the Bible with the theme of suffering. Old interpreters suggest that Moses wrote this book in Midian, where he was a shepherd for some time (Exo 2:15-25; 3:1). He would have written it with the intention of comforting and supporting his suffering people in Egypt in their troubles and turning their eyes to the ultimate blessing that God has ready for His people, just as He ultimately blesses Job.

Job lives in the land of Uz, an area of the Edomites (Lam 4:21). The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, identifies Job with Jobab, a king of Edom (Gen 36:33).

Job must have lived before Moses. In Psalm 90, Moses speaks about the age of men. There he says that normally, just as it is today, that age is seventy to eighty years (Psa 90:10a). Job, however, reaches an arch paternal age of over two hundred years. We can see this from the fact that before his suffering he has ten adult children, while after his suffering he still lives for 140 years (Job 42:16).

Another indication is that the offerings mentioned in this book are burnt offerings, even in case of sins (Job 1:5; 42:8). The distinction in sacrifices is only given by the giving of the Law at Sinai (Leviticus 1-6). We always find burnt offerings in the book of Genesis. Also, the name 'LORD' is mentioned relatively sparsely, while the name 'God' often occurs.

Job is someone from the Gentiles, he does not belong to Israel. Yet God speaks with him in a way He did not even do with an Abraham. This book expresses the great value that a single person has for God, Who is no respecter of persons. The book of Job proves that this interest in a single person is not a retrospective thought of God when Israel has corrupted his way, but that from the beginning God's interest is in every individual human being, without distinction. It is therefore impossible for the Jew, with the book of Job in his Bible, to say that someone from the pagan nations is not relevant to God.

The book of Job is one of the two most tragic books of the Bible. The other book is the book of Lamentations. That book too has suffering as its main

theme. The difference is that Lamentations is about the suffering of an entire people, while the book of Job is about the suffering of only one person. The book of Job gives insight into the enigma of suffering that God brings about on someone in His government, without solving that enigma itself. What we do see, what we do gain insight into, is “the end of the Lord” (Jam 5:11), or the Lord’s purpose with it. It is about questions such as:

1. Why do God-fearing believers suffer?
2. If God is love – and He is! – why does He allow His own to be affected by adversity?
3. How is the suffering of the righteous compatible with the righteousness of God?

As we have seen above, the book shows us the struggle of the puny man with the great problem of suffering. It also allows us to look behind the scenes, in the throne room of the reign of the great, sovereign God of eternity. He is personally involved in the suffering of His creatures in general and of each individual human being in particular. The book appeals to all who are in suffering. Peter in his first letter answers the question of the purpose of suffering, which is “that the proof of your faith, [being] more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1Pet 1:7).

There is no need to make a long story about Job’s prosperity. Only a few verses are devoted to his prosperity, which serve as a backdrop to everything that happens to him. Contrary to the few words about his prosperity, the Holy Spirit has thought it right to tell us in detail about everything that happens during his tests. He considered this worthwhile for the benefit of all God’s children until the end of time.

Job is the great example of a man’s faith in the midst of overwhelming suffering. We see a man learning the lesson of his own nothingness, in the fierce fire of deep trial for robbery, loss, and sickness, who also has to face the rigid philosophy and harsh attacks of his friends. Moreover, he learns to know his own pride, his own righteousness and unbelief. Until an ‘interpreter’, Elihu, is heard, who brings him to the point where he listens to

God and teaches the lesson of all centuries that God is only God and that in his acknowledgment of this lies his blessing and that of every human being.

The great problem addressed in this book is the reign of God, which is not directly as with Israel, but indirectly, in providence. A direct government means that God punishes a man's evil immediately and rewards good deeds immediately. An indirect government, a government in providence, means that it seems that one can do evil unpunished and that good deeds remain unrewarded.

Job's friends – but also Job himself – understand nothing of God's government. They assume a direct government of God. They state that Job must have done sin, otherwise he would not suffer so much. A superficial view of life can lead people to judge that they are suffering according to the extent of the sins they have committed. Job's reaction is also wrong. He does not understand God's government either. He states that he is innocent and that God makes him suffer unjustly.

Although Job does not sin with his lips, the conversations with his friends do show what is in his heart. Although the friends do not understand God's government, they do say many true things about that government for other cases. The question that plays in the background for Job and his friends and that brings them to their statements is this: How can God be both good and sovereign when you look at the suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the evildoer?

It has always been difficult to explain why the wicked prosper, while oppression can so often afflict the God-fearing. This difficulty disappears when we realize that we are living under an indirect government of God. As has already been said, in a direct government, God punishes evil immediately and rewards good immediately. In an indirect government, evil is not punished immediately, although the punishment certainly comes, and good is not rewarded immediately, although the reward certainly comes.

In Psalm 73, Asaph had the same questions until he "came into the sanctuary of God" (Psa 73:17). Likewise, Job's questions are brought to an end when he says: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5b).

The discussion rounds and the ‘protagonists’

There are three dialogues or discussion rounds between Job and his friends (Job 4-27) and three monologues: of Job, Elihu and God (Job 29-41). The dialogues and monologues are separated by a speech of Job about wisdom (Job 28).

The ‘protagonists’ in the book are, after Job, his three friends and Elihu. After these five people have spoken, God speaks. He does not speak as Someone Who, after the attempts of the friends and Elihu, makes a final attempt to convince Job. He cannot be compared to any of the previous speakers. He is God and speaks as God. When Job comes face to face with Him, he retracts and repents.

Of those who speak from Job 3 onward, we can mention some characteristics as an introduction:

1. Eliphaz is the first to respond to Job’s expressions of misery. There are good reasons to assume that Eliphaz is an Edomite. There is talk of Eliphaz who is the first-born son of Esau. This one has a son named Teman (Gen 36:4,15). Several prophets mention Teman as a place or region in Edom (Jer 49:7,20; Eze 25:13; Amos 1:12; Oba 1:8-9).

- a. Apparently Eliphaz is the oldest of the three friends, because he speaks first. He is also addressed at the end of the book by God as the spokesman of the three (Job 42:7). In his speeches he shows a wider spirit than the others, accepting Job as a God-fearing man, but who has gone astray. Although he shows lack of compassion, he is the only one of the three to show some compassion and respect.

- b. In his reactions to Job’s words it appears that he considers everything from his personal experience. We hear this in the words “according to what I have seen” (Job 4:8). He, as the oldest, represents ‘the old school’.

2. Bildad is the second. He is not mentioned in any other book of the Old Testament. He considers Job’s struggle about God’s righteousness as blasphemy. His learning, his knowledge and the tradition of ancient wisdom he uses to prove that Job’s family members have received what they deserve, and he warns Job of the same fate.

Bildad judges the situation of Job from the tradition and authority of antiquity. We hear this in his call to Job: "Please inquire of past generations, and consider the things searched out by their fathers" (Job 8:8). He represents the middle-aged.

3. Zophar, the third, is the most sarcastic of his friends. His message is that Job must repent or else he will die a horrible death that the evildoers deserve.

Zophar looks at Job from the sphere of law and religion. He says to Job: "If iniquity is in your hand, ... do not let wickedness dwell in your tents; then ... you would be steadfast and not fear" (Job 11:14-15). He is convinced of his own sharp judgment, 'that is how it is and not otherwise' (Job 11; 20).

4. Job, in his attempts to defend himself because of the suspicions and negative judgments of his friends, indirectly accuses God of injustice (Job 10:7-8).

5. Elihu is younger than the three friends and therefore keeps himself out of the discussion and waits until they are all finished speaking (Job 32:4-6). He is a type of Christ as the Mediator. He speaks in the name of God (Job 33:4-5).

6. When all speakers are silent, God takes the floor. He shows Job His divine wisdom and His power in nature. In contrast, Job sees how completely insignificant he is.

Division of the book

I. Introduction (Job 1-2)

--A. Job's prosperity (Job 1:1-5)

--B. Job tested (Job 1:6-22; 2:1-13)

----1. Satan's accusation of Job (Job 1:6-12)

----2. Job remains standing at the loss of family and possessions (Job 1:13-22)

----3. Satan's further accusations (Job 2:1-6)

----4. Job stands firm in his personal suffering (Job 2:7-10)

----5. The arrival of Job's friends (Job 2:11-13)

II. The dialogues or the disputes (Job 3-27)

- A. Job's opening complaint (Job 3)
 - B. The first round of discussions (Job 4-14)
 - 1. Eliphaz (Job 4-5)
 - 2. Job's reply (Job 6-7)
 - 3. Bildad (Job 8)
 - 4. Job's reply (Job 9-10)
 - 5. Zophar (Job 11)
 - 6. Job's reply (Job 12-14)
 - C. The second round of discussions (Job 15-21)
 - 1. Eliphaz (Job 15)
 - 2. Job's reply (Job 16-17)
 - 3. Bildad (Job 18)
 - 4. Job's reply (Job 19)
 - 5. Zophar (Job 20)
 - 6. Job's reply (Job 21)
 - D. The third round of discussions (Job 22-26)
 - 1. Eliphaz (Job 22)
 - 2. Job's reply (Job 23-24)
 - 3. Bildad (Job 25)
 - 4. Job's reply (Job 26)
 - E. Job's closing address to his friends (Job 27)
- III. Intermediate chapter on wisdom (Job 28)
- IV. The monologues (Job 29-41)
- A. Job's closing speeches (Job 29-31)
 - 1. Job's former honor and blessing (Job 29)
 - 2. Job's current dishonor and suffering (Job 30)

---3. Job's last statement of innocence (Job 31)

--B. Elihu's speeches (Job 32-37)

----1. Introduction (Job 32:1-5)

----2. First speech: part 1 (Job 32:6-22)

----3. First speech: part 2 (Job 33)

----4. Second speech (Job 34)

----5. Third speech (Job 35)

----6. Fourth speech (Job 36-37)

--C. God speaks to Job (Job 38-42:6)

----1. God's first speech (Job 38-39:30)

----2. Job humbles himself (Job 40:1-5)

----3. God's second speech (Job 40:6-24; 41:1-34)

V. Job's repentance (Job 42:1-6)

VI. The ending (Job 42:7-17)

--A. God judges (Job 42:7-9)

--B. The restoration of Job's prosperity (Job 42:10-17)

In summary, the book is composed in this way:

1. Job 1-2

The historical introduction containing Job's godliness and prosperity and his suffering through satan in destroying his possessions, his family and his health.

2. Job 3-31

The dispute between Job and his three friends. It reveals the futility of human reasoning in relation to

a. explaining the ways of God in the disasters that come upon a man;

b the deep-rooted self-righteousness of the human heart.

3. Job 32-37

The testimony of Elihu concerning God's features of holiness and mercy.

4. Job 38-42:6

The testimony of God Himself from creation through which Job is tested and what brings him into the dust.

5. Job 42:7-17

“The end of the Lord” (Jam 5:11), that is, the result of God’s ways with Job, Who restores him and gives him a greater blessing than he has lost.

Job 1

Introduction

Both the introduction of the book (Job 1-2) and the conclusion of the book (Job 42:7-17) have the character of a narrative, while the conversations in between are poetic. The enigma of suffering is sometimes compared to an embroidery. The narrative shows us the topside of the embroidery, as the suffering is seen from heaven, by God. The conversations in poetry form show us the underside, the earthly side of suffering, people's attempts to understand the government of God with regard to suffering.

Job 1:1-3 | The Piety and Prosperity of Job

1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. 2 Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3 His possessions also were 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

In these verses we are told the dwelling-place, the name, the eminent characteristics, the family, the possession and the prestige of the main character of the book. The Holy Spirit does this to show what is taken away from him. We see from what great height he is thrown down and how enormous the pain is that such a fall causes.

The book begins with the words "there was a man" (verse 1). There is a man among the many people who live in the time in which the events of the book take place on whom the spotlight is turned. This man lives "in the land of Uz" and is called "Job". Just as God knows where this man lives and what his name is, He knows that of every man – see, for example, Saul (Acts 9:11) and Simon Peter (Acts 10:5-6). No one can hide from God in the crowd. To Him there is no nameless mass either, but He is concerned with each individual, He has attention for each individual.

Possibly, as already suggested in the introduction, Job is a king of Edom (Jobab, Gen 36:33). If so, then his title has been omitted here. It is not about

his position in society, but about his place as a man in creation before his Creator, before God.

There is more to say about Job than just that he is a man who lives in Uz and is called Job. These are external characteristics. Characteristics of this man are also mentioned that make it clear that he is in connection with God and lives in a way that is a joy to God's heart (Acts 10:34b-35). Those are inner characteristics. These characteristics may also be visible in his life, but they come from his inner being, his heart. The virtues that are recorded of him do not come from his own mouth, but are the testimony of the Holy Spirit. God repeats this testimony – and thereby affirms it – in the face of satan (Job 1:8).

1. He is first and foremost “blameless”, that is to say, inwardly perfect, sincere. Job stands right before God. This is so in the midst of suffering, right through the accusations of the three friends and the silence of God.

2. Immediately associated with this, he is said to be “upright”. This is evident from his testimony to those around him. He is not a hypocrite, not an actor. ‘Upright’ means as much as ‘going straight’. “Blameless” is inner. “Upright” is the expression of that. Job has a balanced character.

[This is also reflected in the numbers in verse 2, his seven sons and his three daughters. The number 7 is the number of completeness, and the number 3 has to do with revelation and testimony. Also compare the 7000 sheep and 3000 camels in verse 3].

3. The inner side (blameless) and the outer side (upright) we also have in the two following characteristics. The third characteristic, “fearing God”, is inner. His inner is directed toward God. In his heart is reverence for Him. Further on in the book he says: “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” (Job 28:28a).

4. The fourth characteristic, “turning away from evil”, is outward appearance and indicates an attitude to life that is a consequence of his fear of God. Job confirms this when he says: “And to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28b).

By the way, all this does not mean that he is sinless (Ecc 7:20). This is evident from the course of the book.

After we are told how Job is related to God, the blessings of Job are mentioned in his family (verse 2). He has seven sons and three daughters. Job sees his children as gifts from God (verse 21).

After his relationship with God and the blessing in his family his wealth is listed (verse 3). This is done in terms that also describe the wealth of the patriarchs (Genesis 12-13). God has blessed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but in His grace He is able to go further and bless others as well, even though they have no part in the covenant He made with the patriarchs. God's grace is not limitable, not restricted.

We see that with Job: Godliness and prosperity go hand in hand. This is not self-evident. People who are doing well are often people who abandon God. That is not the case with Job.

Job 1:4-5 | Job and His Children

4 His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings [according to] the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Except that Job is blessed with many children, he is also blessed with a good bond among them. Children are a blessing. It is an extra blessing if the children also get along well with each other. When the children are out of the house, it is customary for some families to have a family day every year, for example. It is a great privilege when all the children come and like to see each other again.

The sons of Job organize a feast regularly and in turns, to which the sisters are also invited (verse 4). There is no evidence to suggest that such feasts are revels and drinking bouts. It is not likely that unlawful things are happening. Job has raised his children to independence and taught them to make good choices. It also seems that Job is not present. It doesn't make him jealous or bitter. It is good that parents allow their children to meet without them being present.

Although Job was not invited to the feasts, he did not forbid them, but allowed them. That does not mean that he considers them too good for doing wrong things or making wrong choices. This becomes apparent “when the days of feasting had completed their cycle” (verse 5). Then he calls them to himself and consecrates them. For this purpose he gets up early in the morning and brings each of them under the power of the burnt offering he brings for each of them. He does this because he believes there is a chance that his children have “cursed God in their hearts”. This is not a one-off action of his, but he does so “continually”.

We see in Job the involved father. He recognizes that blessing and satiety are the danger of his children ‘cursing’ God in their hearts (cf. Pro 30:9a). Cursing God means that they disengage themselves from Him and withdraw from Him and His authority. Prosperity and feasting can easily cause us to forget that we are dependent on God. There are also circumstances in which one sometimes comes to statements or actions that one does not come to in normal circumstances.

Although Job is not present at the feasts organized by his children, he is closely involved in them. He is with them in spirit and sympathizes with them. He does not do this as a proud father, but as a father who knows the spiritual dangers to which his children are exposed, especially during family gatherings. It is there that one loses self-control easily. The fact that he knows his children and recognizes the spiritual dangers, shows that he also knows himself. He is a father who realizes that his children have the same sinful nature that he himself has.

Father Job, like the patriarchs, acts like a priest in his family. He rises “early in the morning”, which means that he hurries with the sacrifice. He makes sure that the children are there. Everything indicates that his children do not make any objections. They come and Job consecrates them. This means that he dedicates his children to the LORD again. It also means that he asks about their behavior during feasts. If they have done or said something that is not right, they can confess it. In this way they are consecrated again, i.e. in agreement with God. He then offers a burnt offering for each of them, which in a New Testament perspective means that he places them on the foundation of Christ’s sacrifice.

Job knows his children and does not consider them too good to sin. But he does not only look at outward behavior. He looks deeper. Perhaps they have always behaved well, but in their hearts there has come a deviation from God. That is why he wants to consecrate them and to show them the offering. Job is the committed father who is actively committed to the spiritual welfare of his children. He is conscious of what Solomon later wrote down as a proverb, that from the “heart ... [flow] the springs of life” (Pro 4:23).

Is this the way we look at our children (if we have them), and do we take to heart the mind of their hearts? Is that more important to us than their school results or other achievements? Does that also determine our dealings with God and with them?

Job realizes that his children are only pleasing to God if he places them before Him in the pleasantness of the sacrifice. We know that God looks forward in this sacrifice to the work of His Son on the cross of Calvary. Job appeals, as it were, to that sacrifice for his children. That they are *his* children, the children of the God-fearing and exceptionally blessed Job, has no meaning for him. On the contrary, because they are his children, they are sinners and God’s judgment rests on them (Job 14:4). We must also be well aware of this in relation to our children.

Job 1:6-8 | The LORD Reminds Satan of Job

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” 8 The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.”

From the earth in verses 1-5 we now go to heaven (verse 6; cf. 1Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1). In Job 1 and 2 we find several times a change of scenery. One time we are on earth, the next time we are in heaven. Because we are allowed a glimpse into heaven – that is, into the part of heaven where satan still has access – we learn that the suffering of Job – and of believers in general – is

related to a struggle in the heavenly places. We are made partakers of a conversation in heaven between the LORD and satan about Job, in which the LORD allows satan to test Job. Job himself knows nothing of this whole conversation.

We, Christians, know from the New Testament that since the ascension of the Lord Jesus we have an opened heaven (see for example the letter to the Hebrews). This conversation gives us light about events on earth that would otherwise remain a mystery to us. It makes it clear to us what the background is to everything that happens on earth, whether it concerns the life of a human being or whether it concerns nations. What happens on earth is governed by heaven. Heaven decides what happens on earth. The friends of Job and Job himself wander because they do not know the heart of God. They try to explain what is happening on earth without knowledge of its heavenly origin.

One day “the sons of God” come to the LORD. Satan is in their midst. We see here that satan has access to the throne room of God. Satan is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), of the fallen angels. When he is in the throne room, he is always there as “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev 12:10; Zec 3:1). The angels here are called “sons of God” (e.g. Septuagint, Job 38:7; Gen 6:1-2), for God is “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9), which means that He created them; they came forth from Him. These angels come “to present themselves before the LORD”. They come because they have been summoned by Him to account to Him for their activities. They are there as subordinates (cf. 1Kgs 22:19-22; Dan 7:9-14; Psa 89:7). The servants must stand (1Kgs 22:19), an attitude that indicates that they are ready to serve.

Further this is about the LORD and satan. The angels are the setting. They stand there and must listen. The LORD begins to speak, not satan. Whoever He calls to Himself must respectfully wait until He speaks. The LORD asks satan where he comes from (verse 7). It is clear that it is not a discussion between equal persons. Satan must answer, simply because the LORD asks him something. He is completely subject to Him, just as the whole universe is subject to Him and must obey Him. And, like men, they cannot see Him fully, for no one can ever see God (1Tim 6:16). Even the seraphs

cover their faces when they call out the Name of the three times holy God (Isa 6:2-3).

Satan hates God, but must nevertheless do what God says and answer. God knows the answer, but He wants us to know it too. With the question “from where do you come?”, God commands satan to account for his activities. The answer shows that satan is a restless roamer, which also indicates that he is *not omnipresent*, which God is. His roaming about on the earth does not imply anything good. He roams about on the earth to see who he can hurt. The believer may know that the eyes of the Lord also move to and fro throughout the earth, but then to strongly support him (2Chr 16:9; Zec 4:10).

By way of exception satan is introduced here speaking. This does not happen very often in the Bible, although we do read a lot about him. Three times we read that he says something: here in Job to the LORD, in Genesis 3 to Eve in paradise (Gen 3:1-5) and in Matthew 4, and in the parallel verses in Luke 4, to the Lord Jesus in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-3,6,9; Lk 4:1-3,6,9-11).

In the speaking of satan to Eve in paradise and to the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, we see that these are extremely important situations. With Eve he has had success, through which sin has come into the world. With the Lord Jesus he had no success, through which the work of redemption could be accomplished. Against this background it becomes clear what enormous interests are at stake if he is also introduced in the history of Job. Will he succeed in making Job curse God, or not?

Not satan, but the LORD then directs satan’s attention to Job: “Have you considered My servant Job?” (verse 8). The initiative for everything that happens to Job comes from God and not from satan. God knows what His servant Job needs. If He asks satan whether he has also considered Job, it is because He Himself has considered Job. And His testimony is even greater than what is written in verse 1. God says here of Job that “there is no one like him on the earth”. This is not to praise Job, but is the result of his relationship with God. Surely it must have made Job a special target of satan.

Satan cannot bring anything against God’s testimony about Job. God gives that testimony with a purpose. He also wants to use satan to achieve that purpose. Satan – who is very cunning, but knows nothing of God’s purpos-

es – is only an instrument to fulfill the purposes of God’s grace. God keeps everything under His control, nothing gets out of His hand. Everything goes according to His plan. This can be a comfort to us in all circumstances in which we feel a plaything of the evil one. God is at the beginning of it, not the evil one. He also determines the end and not the evil one. Between the beginning and the end is a path that is also determined by God and not by the evil one.

Job is a servant of the LORD. He does not belong to the covenant people of God, but he has his own unique ‘covenant’, his own relationship, with the LORD, and the LORD with him. Twice the LORD calls Job “My servant” (Job 1:8; 2:3). And at the end of the book He still calls him thus (Job 42:7-8). Whatever happens between the beginning and the end, Job appears at the end as a faithful servant.

Job 1:9-12 | Satan Challenges the LORD

9 Then Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.” 12 Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

Satan must answer. He does so entirely according to the incorrigible depravity of his evil nature. He not only hates God, but all who live according to God’s will. He can’t stand it when someone is praised by God, because he himself wants to be praised. We see this in Saul’s attitude toward David. Saul is also jealous of the honor that David gets from the people, while he does not get that much honor (1Sam 18:6-9).

Satan cannot deny Job’s piety. What he, as “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev 12:10), can do, however, is to suggest that Job’s piety is not real, but feigned. With his question “does Job fear God for nothing?” (verse 9), he expresses the assumption that Job has good reason to fear God. Job fears God, not for Whom God is, but only because of the benefits it brings (verse 10). ‘Look’, he says to God, ‘all that you have given Job: protection of his

family and all that he has; prosperity in all that he does; his territory is expanding. Quite logically, he fears You.'

Then satan comes up with a proposal (verse 11) which also shows his wicked nature and his cunning (2Cor 11:3,14; Eph 6:11). He challenges God to put forth His hand against Job and take away everything He has blessed him with. It is remarkable that satan does not tell God if God will allow him to take everything from Job. Satan also knows that everything is in God's hand. God must turn His hand against Job to take everything away from him. Job later rightly says: "The LORD has given and the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21b).

Satan says as it were: 'Take away all these benefits, then something else will turn out!' He supposes that Job will curse God right in His face for losing everything. Satan supposes that Job's dedication is the result of God's blessing. This shows that he is *not omniscient*, which God is. Satan questions both the uprightness of Job and the righteousness of God He shows in blessing him.

We see this reflected in the main characters of the book:

1. The friends of Job question his uprightness. They are sure that he has sinned in secret, but that he does not want to admit it.
2. Job, because he suffers innocently, cannot understand how God can allow him to suffer so. He therefore doubts God's righteousness.

The big question in the book of Job is whether Job will curse God or not. Satan wants to use all the suffering in our lives to separate us from God, while God wants to use the suffering to get to know Him and ourselves better. Satan wants us to get worse, while God wants us to get better. If Job would curse God, Job would not be the loser, but God. However, God sees in Job what satan does not see: endurance.

God allows satan to storm Job (verse 12). He gives everything that belongs to Job into the hand of satan, showing that satan is *not omnipotent*, which God is. It is remarkable that in verse 11 satan speaks about God putting forth His hand against Job and that God now allows satan to put out his hand against Job. This shows that the hand of God is above the hand of

satan. We therefore do not take the suffering from 'the second hand', that of satan, but from 'the first hand', that of God.

At the same time God determines the limit of the actions of satan. He also says that he may not put forth his hand against Job himself. Satan will therefore not exceed that limit by a millimeter. Without God the Father, no sparrow will fall to the earth, and even the hairs of our head are all numbered (Mt 10:29-31).

Satan departs "from the presence of the LORD", as it also says of Cain (Gen 4:16), pleased with what he is allowed to do and what he will do quickly (cf. Lk 22:31-32). We see here that in heaven decisions are made, of which the consequences become visible in events on earth.

Job 1:13-19 | Job Loses His Possessions and His Children

13 Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

From heaven we go back to earth. There will come a day (verse 13) when disasters will strike the life of Job. It is an "evil day" (Eph 6:13), a day which according to its content follows the day when the sons of God came to the LORD (verse 6). Satan is in a hurry to perform his evil work, but he also knows how to wait for the right moment. In the disasters that occur

in Job's life, we hear or see nothing of satan himself, yet the disasters are his work.

The day when satan will carry out his evil intentions has been carefully chosen by him. It is a day when the children of Job are all together again to eat and drink (cf. verse 4). Job will again feel richly blessed to know them together and at the same time realizes the spiritual dangers of such a gathering (cf. verse 5). It brings him, as usual, to intercede for his children. He looks forward to consecrating them again and offering a burnt offering for each of them when they have finished their feast.

Job is cruelly disturbed in his pious deliberations in the presence of God by a messenger who brings him a doomsday message (verse 14). The messenger reports to him a disaster that has come upon him. He tells of the oxen that were ploughing – from which we can see that it is autumn – and of the donkeys that were feeding in peace and therefore did not wander around. The servants looked after them. Everything speaks of care and a sense of responsibility for the work.

There is no carelessness or negligence, yet in this scene of peace and quiet a rough gang of Sabeans penetrated. They rob oxen and donkeys and kill the servants (verse 15). It shows that our prudence and thoughtfulness cannot prevent disasters from happening to us at times (cf. *Psa* 127:1). It can happen at times when we handle our possessions responsibly.

This first disaster strikes Job in one of the evidences of his prosperity (verse 3). It is the means by which he gained prosperity (*Pro* 14:4). Only one of those who faithfully guard these means is spared. This is not because he is 'lucky' that the disaster did not affect him. He is spared as an eyewitness to be able to report in detail to Job what he has seen happen. This servant has not hearsay it.

While the witness has not yet completed his account of the disaster, a second messenger arrives (verse 16). The speed with which satan acts shows his malevolent desire to overpower Job and overload him with grief. Job has no chance of coming to terms with the shock of the disaster that has struck him and of recovering from it. Disasters become more difficult to bear the faster they succeed each other.

The servant who comes to tell Job about the second disaster is the only one who barely escaped the disaster, and also with the intention of telling Job about it as an eyewitness. This second disaster was not caused by a gang of robbers, like the first one, but by “the fire of God ... from heaven”.

The escaped servant speaks of ‘the fire of God from heaven’. Like Job, he doesn’t know that satan is behind it. Satan is the prince of the power of the air and has received permission from God to use this fire against Job. The fire has struck Job’s sheep and destroyed another proof of his prosperity (verse 3), as well as the servants who took care of them, except for this one.

The destruction of the sheep affects Job in his source of clothing and food. The fire of God speaks of His judgment. It reminds us of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24) and to the men of King Ahaziah who are to capture Elijah (2Kgs 1:9-12).

The escaped servant has not yet finished speaking about the horrors caused by God’s fire, when another messenger is coming (verse 17). He interrupts his predecessor to inform Job of another disaster that has struck him. In this disaster, the third, people play a role again. This time it is the Chaldeans. They have robbed the three thousand camels that Job possesses (verse 3) and killed the servants with the sword. In order to rob that enormous amount of camels, the Chaldeans had divided into three bands. With this loss, Job was struck in his trading expedition. Also here one of the servants is spared to tell Job.

Job is not given the opportunity to think about what happened, because without a break, even while the third messenger is still reporting, a fourth messenger comes forward. This messenger, too, immediately begins to tell what has happened. He tells Job about his sons and daughters, who were eating and drinking “in their oldest brother’s house” and how a great wind had suddenly come up from the east – “from across the wilderness” – which struck the house from all sides and caused it to collapse, resulting in the death of all his children (verses 18-19).

The fourth and final disaster is, like the second, another natural disaster caused by satan. We see here again that the prince of the power of the air – though under the permission of God – uses natural elements against one of God’s servants. We also see this in the storm on the lake that is being

rebuked by the Lord Jesus (Mk 4:39). The Lord rebukes that storm because it was unleashed by satan with the intention of killing Him and His own. The Lord does not rebuke acts of God.

This last disaster is also the worst. All the children of Job are killed. The only one who has escaped is a servant to bring the calamity to Job. Job always prayed for his children, they had a good relationship with each other, yet they all die prematurely – “the young people” –, suddenly and at the same time.

It indeed is hard that Bildad insinuates in his first speech that their death is the result of committed sins (Job 8:4). This harsh judgment proves that he has little feeling. Who, like Job, has ever buried ten children on the same day and stood at the graves of his ten children? A suffering unfathomable to us must have plagued his heart.

The tidings of the disasters reach Job in an unprecedented rapid succession. The misery piles up to unprecedented heights in a very short time. Not only do the disasters follow one another without a break, but they intertwine, because one has not yet finished speaking when the other is already beginning to tell. While Job listens to the last part of the report of one disaster, another disaster penetrates into the ongoing story. The disasters reinforce each other. The burden is unbearable.

Job 1:20-22 | Reaction of Job to His Loss

*20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 He said,
“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked I shall return there.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.
Blessed be the name of the LORD.”
22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*

Job’s reaction shows his deep mourning and intense sorrow, but also his submission (verse 20). He stands up to tear his robe and shave his head as signs of his mourning and sorrow (cf. Gen 37:34; Jos 7:6; Ezra 9:3,5). Then he falls to the ground, not in despair, but to bow down in adoration before the LORD. From one moment to the next Job has fallen down from happi-

ness and prosperity, and is plunged into sorrow and poverty. But he has not fallen down from the love of God into the cursing of God.

Someone's response to a disaster that strikes him reveals what spirit or mind is in him (verse 21). Job did not forget to honor God when he was prosperous. Now that he is in misery, that mind continues to characterize him. Job acknowledges that all that he possessed was given to him by God. He also acknowledges God's right to take back what He has given (cf. Ecc 5:14; 1Tim 6:7).

Job does not say: 'The LORD has given, the Sabaeans have taken', or: 'The LORD has made me rich, and the devil has made me poor.' Our tendency is to dwell on the external causes of our difficulties. Job doesn't do that. He doesn't look at the Sabaeans or the storm. He recognizes that the hand of God controls all of this – only he doesn't yet realize that it is a loving hand.

The way in which Job accepts this loss puts satan in the wrong. Job's reaction makes it clear that his piety was not in his own interest. His piety remains, even now that everything has been taken away from him, and he does not withdraw his trust in God. Satan wanted to drive a wedge between Job and God. The effect is that Job is driven closer to God. Instead of saying goodbye to God, Job praises him.

Accepting evil from the hand of the LORD is different from saying that the LORD caused evil. What Job says gives no ground for the assumption that God is the Author of evil, its origin, which suggests that evil comes from Him. There is "no darkness in Him" (1Jn 1:5) and He tempts no one to do evil (Jam 1:13). It does mean that the LORD in His unfathomable wisdom has allowed it because it fits into His plan.

The statement of Job, "the LORD has given and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD", has always been a comfort to many believers who had to miss dear family members. However, grace is needed to repeat it in faith. It must not become a flag that does not cover the charge, a word that is imitated purely rationally or out of a faint resignation.

The fact that God created man with the ability to sin does not mean that He laid the principle of sin in man from within Himself. If it says that He creates evil (Isa 45:7), it has to do with the punishment for sin. In this context it is also good to quote a word from Amos: "If a calamity occurs in a city

has not the LORD done it?" (Amos 3:6b). It is always, and certainly here, necessary to see the connection with the verses around it. Then it becomes clear that God is not the Processor, the Author of sin. Evil has a punitive character here. The idea that God would work sin is completely misplaced in all respects.

The closing verse (verse 22) testifies that Job does not sin with his lips. He is not sinless, which he knows well himself (Job 9:20), but he does not commit the sin of attributing to God incongruous things. If we can't reconcile things, it doesn't mean they are incongruous. Job does not understand God's actions, but he does not call God to account for them. Later he will.

Job 2

Job 2:1-3 | The LORD Reminds Satan Again of Job

1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." 3 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause."

Now that Job has lost all his possessions and all his children, the scene moves from earth to heaven again (verse 1). Again there is a day when the LORD calls the angels, including satan (Job 1:6). Of satan it is also said separately this time that he "came among them to present himself before the LORD". After the loss of the first round he is summoned for the second round.

Again the LORD begins to speak and addresses the word to satan with again the question where he has come from (verse 2; Job 1:7a). The answer of satan is the same as the one given last time (Job 1:7b). Also the testimony about Job is as given in Job 1 (verse 3; Job 1:1,8). For the third time this testimony sounds, but this time it is a testimony that is surrounded by the glimmer of a trial endured. In spite of the great affliction into which Job has fallen, so the LORD testifies against satan, Job holds fast his integrity. Job is "struck down, but not destroyed" (2Cor 4:9).

In addition, the LORD bears witness that there was no reason for Job to suffer this. The words "although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause", reaffirm that it is not only satan who has robbed Job, but that the LORD is in control and uses satan to accomplish His purpose. Here the LORD uses the words "without cause" which satan used earlier to insinuate that Job does not fear the LORD "for nothing" (Job 1:9). With

this He says that satan was wrong in his assertion that Job only serves Him because of the benefit it would bring.

Job 2:4-8 | Satan Again Challenges the LORD

4 Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." 6 So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." 7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

Satan does not give up. He will never give up, as long as he is given the opportunity to do his pernicious work. His reaction to what the LORD says about Job and about the actions of satan testifies to this (verse 4). He does not come to acknowledge his defeat, but fancies new wickedness. In his depravity he will always seek new reasons to separate God's children from God and plunge them into ruin. He can only act according to his immutable wickedness.

He contradicts God and says that Job has not yet been tested to the extreme. All previous trials have affected his possessions and his children, but not him personally. Satan claims that Job will be prepared to give up another person's skin – his relationship with God – in order to save his own skin. Let the LORD make Job feel pain and torment, then Job will really curse him (verse 5).

The LORD allows satan to do with Job as he pleases, but Job's life must be spared (verse 6). The LORD sets the limit. Satan is not allowed to cross it, nor does he do so. By the way, this does not make the trial lesser, but greater. Death would put an end to the trial and thereby shorten its grief. How Job longed for death in the midst of suffering! But the fact that Job remains alive enables God to reach His goal with him.

Satan goes away to do his pernicious work here himself. After this we hear nothing more of him in this book. With this terrible action he disappears from the story. God no longer needs him. Satan does what he is allowed to

do. He smites Job with a disease with which God threatens to smite Israel if the people are unfaithful to Him (verse 7; Deu 28:27,35).

If satan is allowed to have his way, he does not do half the work. He beats Job in a way that Job loses all personal satisfaction and dignity. He has lost everything: his possessions, his children, his prestige, and now also his health. All that Job has left on earth is unbearable mental and physical pain. He is covered from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head with sore boils on which also worms grow (Job 7:5). His breath stinks (Job 19:17). He is slimmed down to just skin and bone (Job 19:20) and suffers unbearable pain (Job 30:17). His powers are demolished by high fever (Job 30:30). He is tormented by anxiety (Job 6:4) and suffers from sleeplessness (Job 7:4), and when he sleeps, he has nightmares (Job 7:14).

Job goes to an ash heap, possibly outside the inhabited world, where he sits amidst the dust in solitude and takes a potsherd to scrape himself (verse 8). However, the lowest point has not yet been reached.

Job 2:9-10 | Job and His Wife

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" 10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

While Job is plunged into the greatest misery and sorrow, his wife appears on the scene. She begins to talk to him (verse 9), but that is not to encourage him. On the contrary, she turns against him. At first she blames him for still holding fast his integrity. How can he do that? Surely it is foolish to rely on God in the midst of all the misery, isn't it? A God Who inflicts such suffering on someone who so faithfully serves Him is not worth taking into account. If you take Him into account, all you get is misery over you.

This completes the trial. She who has to be a help to him, as she is meant to be (Gen 2:18), collapses in the trial. It seems that she has not shared in the integrity of Job. Now that his integrity is being tested and he, and she too, has lost everything, it no longer makes sense to her to trust in God. To her, God is no longer necessary. She has given up her trust in God.

As a result, she no longer honors her husband. Drawn away by her emotions, she urges him to “curse” God and end his life. In the proposal she makes to Job, she utters the same words as satan and thus becomes his spokesman. This is a temptation for Job that surpasses the previous one. If Job had listened to his wife, satan – the accuser – would have emerged as the victor in this battle after all.

Job retorts his wife. He tells her that her speaking is like the speaking of “foolish women” (verse 10). Job does not call his wife a fool. She is his wife and he loves her, but he must reprimand her. He tells her she speaks as foolish women do. A fool is one who does not want to know about God, who denies the existence of God, because “the fool says in his heart, There is no God” (Psa 14:1; 53:1; 1Sam 25:25). Job takes everything from the hand of God, although he does not understand why all this is necessary. He speaks of “we” when it comes to taking from the hand of God whatever happens to him and to her – they are also her children and Job is her husband.

“In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” There’s not a rebellious word coming out of his mouth. Job acknowledges with his mouth that the LORD kills and makes alive (Deu 32:39; 1Sam 2:6), that He wounds and heals (Job 5:18). For the second time, Job refutes with his reaction the lie which satan has spoken about him.

If the book had ended here, the great goal of God with Job’s life would not have been achieved. Nor would we be able to learn the lessons we can learn now. The book would be an indictment of all the ‘whys’ we can have if things are against us in life. After all, there would have been someone who, despite all the suffering that has afflicted him, would not have ascribed anything incongruous to God – namely Job. That is why it is of great significance that later, when Job starts to think about everything, he comes up with his ‘whys’ and bitter reproaches in the direction of God. But then satan has already disappeared from the scene. As said, we will hear nothing more about him after the second chapter.

Job 2:11-13 | Three Friends Visit the Sick

11 Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the

Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him. 12 When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. 13 Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that [his] pain was very great.

With the coming of the three friends the book really begins. When “Job’s three friends” hear of “all this adversity” described above, it leads them to go and visit him (verse 11; cf. Pro 17:17). It takes a few months before they are with him (Job 7:3). The three friends are mentioned by name and also their origin or background.

“Eliphaz the Temanite” is mentioned first. Teman is an area of Edom that is proverbial for its wisdom (Jer 49:7). This Eliphaz may well be the eldest son of Esau (Gen 36:10-11). In any case, he is an Edomite. He is the oldest and most important of the friends. In the dialogues that begin after seven days, he is the first to speak. He starts the rounds of conversation and is the first in each round. The other friends support him, each with their own arguments. God also addresses Himself to him when He reveals His anger to them about the way the friends speak (Job 42:7).

“Bildad, the Shuhite” is mentioned second. He is also always second in the following rounds of conversation. Shuah is not far from Teman, because Bildad and Eliphaz make an agreement to go to Job. Bildad is most likely a descendant of Abraham and Keturah, through Shuah their youngest son (Gen 25:1-2).

Job’s third friend is “Zophar, the Naamathite. Naama is a nomadic tribe from central Arabia. Zophar always takes the third dialogue with Job. He, too, will have lived near the other two friends, for he too is included in the appointment to visit Job.

The friends’ motive was “to sympathize” with Job “and comfort him”. Uz (where Job lives) and Teman (where Eliphaz comes from) are in Edom, Shuah (where Bildad comes from) is on the border of Edom, and Naama (where Zophar comes from) is a little further away. Some time will have passed before they hear the news of the disasters that have struck Job.

Then they go to him, a journey that also takes some time. A few months later, when they arrive at Job and see him in the distance, they do not recognize him.

How great must be the suffering of Job, and by how many horrors, both physical and spiritual, he must have passed through, that his friends do not recognize him (verse 12). His torn clothes and his shaven head reveal the festering ulcers that cover his whole body in all their horror. This awful sight they have deeply absorbed for seven days.

We also see, for example, in Naomi's case, that the time of trial has apparently made her unrecognizable. When she returns to Bethlehem, they say of her: "Is this Naomi?" (Rth 1:19). Naomi is marked by the hardships she has experienced in her life. However, the passage of time also plays a role for her. That is not the case with Job. From one moment to the next, he has changed from a prosperous man to a wreck of a human being. Job has endured all the trials and tribulations. Yet he remains sick. This is because God wants to teach him things now.

In the months that passed between the disasters that struck him and the visit of his friends, Job will also have thought about the meaning of what happened to him. It is in this state that the friends find him. What Job has thought about and what the friends see will characterize their conversations.

The friends do not lack real concern and compassion (verse 13). When they see him, "they raised their voices and wept". They do not suppress their feelings, contrary to what we sometimes do. His misery touches them deeply. Just as Job did, "each of them tore his robe". Every friend is personally involved. As another expression of sadness, they throw "dust over their heads toward the sky".

Thus they sit "with him". The words "with him" show that they are really there for him, to share in his grief. They sit "for seven days and seven nights" with him (cf. Gen 50:10; 1Sam 31:13). All this time, not a word is said by them. They don't pay a quick visit to a sick bed. They have an eye for his great sorrow, they see "that [his] pain was very great".

Today's man turns his head when he sees suffering. He does not want to be confronted with it. Life has to be fun and attractive. Where can you find

this kind of pity and compassion like Job's friends today? Is it present with us, children of God, or do we prefer to run away from it? The friends of Job stay "with him". They endure the awful sight and stench of his festering wounds. Are there still such friends? Where are they? Who can compare themselves to them? That they later speak wrong of their friend is another matter, but doesn't change the example they set here.

The friends will have thought about Job's suffering and its cause on the way and in those seven days. Their view is that Job must have sinned very much, given his enormous suffering. Their big mistake is that they, each in his own way, hold on to the accepted theory that God, because He is righteous, never causes undeserved suffering. They can only imagine suffering as retribution. How different, richer and deeper, are God's purposes with suffering that He permits over His own than their strict and hard theories. The pity of friends shows that all human help is ultimately insufficient. God is our true Helper and, finally, only Helper (Psa 60:11; 146:3-5; Isa 2:22).

Unfortunately, Job thinks in the same direction. He too cannot get away from the thought that God wants to punish him through suffering. And because he is not aware of any evil, he comes to blame God for His injustice, which leads him to consider Him his enemy. Job's greatest need is not the loss of everything, but that he experiences that God has turned against him. At the same time, this is proof that he is not cursing God, but that he misses Him. God will lead Job to get the right thoughts about Him. He will show him that His ultimate goal of all suffering is to know Him better and to see that for those who love God, "all things ... work together for good" (Rom 8:28).

There are some big differences between Job and his friends:

1. The friends have suffered nothing – Job is a believer who is desperate because of suffering.
2. The words of the friends are calm, well-considered – the words of Job are often intense and deeply emotional.
3. The friends are firmly convinced of the truth of their claims, they defend God and warn and condemn Job – Job struggles desperately and seeks the meaning of his suffering.

4. From the words of the friends it is clear that they have a certain degree of knowledge of God, but that true fellowship with God is lacking – with Job, in addition to expressions of rebellion about which he later repents, we also see expressions of great faith and trust in God.

5. The friends say nothing *to* God, they only speak *about* Him, they philosophize and theologize, but they never speak *to* Him – Job is perfectly clear and transparent, he wants to be honest toward God, he tells Him everything, all his feelings of doubt and fear.

Job 3

Introduction

Here the largest, and in many ways, most complicated part of the book begins. It contains a large number of arguments, charges, accusations, imputations, denials, partly correct theories, philosophies and theology. Here we see a ray of faith and hope. Everything that is said happens in beautiful poetic language, often using beautiful oriental imagery. This is in contrast to the beginning of the book (Job 1-2) and its end (Job 42:7-17). Both parts are written as prose, narration.

Job's complaint in this chapter is the beginning of this large section. We can divide this chapter into three more or less equal parts:

1. Job curses his birthday (verses 1-10);
2. Job curses that he was kept alive as a baby (verses 11-19);
3. Job curses the fact that he must continue to live (verses 20-26).

Job 3:1-10 | If Only I Had Never Been Born!

1 Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his [birth]. 2 And Job said,

*3 "Let the day perish on which I was to be born,
And the night [which] said, 'A boy is conceived.'*

*4 "May that day be darkness;
Let not God above care for it,
Nor light shine on it.*

*5 "Let darkness and black gloom claim it;
Let a cloud settle on it;
Let the blackness of the day terrify it.*

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

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

8 *"Let those curse it who curse the day,
Who are prepared to rouse Leviathan.
9 "Let the stars of its twilight be darkened;
Let it wait for light but have none,
And let it not see the breaking dawn;
10 Because it did not shut the opening of my [mother's] womb,
Or hide trouble from my eyes.*

"Afterward" (verse 1) means after all the preceding days and events, up to and including the past seven days, that his friends sit with him silently. But during the silence the thoughts do not stand still. That appears when Job and then the friends open their mouths.

Job's patience has run out, he can no longer remain silent. He sees no hope of enlightenment or consolation in his fate. He can no longer stand it and collapses. His first words are words of curse. This curse concerns the day of his birth (cf. Jer 20:14-18). His curse does not concern God! He does not curse God, but holds on to Him all through everything. He who wrestles with someone is at the same time very closely connected to such a person (cf. Gen 32:24). He who wrestles with someone does not want to get rid of him, but wants to overcome him.

It is more often the case that a person endures a great trial, but collapses when, over time, the pain of the situation begins to penetrate. Especially overwhelming events sometimes give a superhuman strength to endure the shock. But when silence comes after the shocking events, the struggle often comes too.

Job is the first to break the silence (verse 2). He takes the floor to give an answer to the situation in which he has ended up. The spiritual tone of Job's life changes dramatically here. The man of patience and faith sinks into a state of despair and spiritual depression. This is a situation that is so often the main problem for those who have to endure severe and prolonged physical illness or weakness.

It is conceivable that the change in Job's behavior is the result of a change of thoughts about God. The word 'God' is here for the first time the singular *Eloah* instead of the common *Elohim* (God in the plural). This shows the question marks Job has here about God. First Job saw Him as the good

Director and Controller of the elements. But it seems that as the trial continued, Job began to doubt God's righteousness and goodness.

It feels to him as if he is in the hands of a judiciary that makes him suffer for what he has not done, without a way to escape. This makes him desperate, and that is why he wishes he had never been born. The only one who has ever been declared that it was better if he had not been born – and that by the Lord Jesus Himself – is Judas, the traitor of the Lord (Mt 26:24-25).

As long as his suffering is external or physical, Job is calm; but when doubts about God enter his heart, he collapses. Nevertheless, satan does not triumph here either, for never does Job curse God. He curses the day of his birth, but not God. He continues to hope on God, no matter how much he despairs because of what God has done to him (Job 13:15a).

This chapter is a source of consolation for those who are similarly tested when they see that even a great man like Job can have such a struggle with faith. God prefers that we speak frankly to Him, even in moments of deepest somberness, rather than express ourselves in vague clichés that are far removed from reality.

We must also consider the following. In Job we have an example of unprecedented suffering, and we can take comfort from his history when something bad happens to us. Job did not have such an example. He had to settle it all by himself with God. This aspect also makes him unique.

Only the Lord Jesus rises above Job. He has gone through all the suffering that can afflict any human being. He has never been rebellious in this, for He entrusted everything to Him Who judges righteously (1Pet 2:23). On top of that, He has also been in a suffering that could only afflict Him and that is the substituting suffering because of sin.

In a terrible complaint Job pours out his heart about his birth (verse 3). It is a wild outburst of a stuffed-up and unstoppable stream of feelings. The bomb bursts. He wishes that he had not been born, or even better, he wishes that that day and that moment had not existed at all. The day that is a day of remembrance every year must disappear from the calendar. It must become a day that never existed, because there is no joy attached to that day, but deep misery. In addition to the day he was born, he also mentions

the night nine months before, when he was conceived. This will be worked out later in verses 6-9.

That day must be a dark place on the calendar (verse 4). No man should be able to discover it. And God, for Whom the darkness is light as the day, should not ask for it. Nor should He concern Himself with it from His exalted abode, as Job seems to suggest to Him. That day must disappear into the darkness as if it never existed. No ray of light must fall on it, for there is no ray of light connected with that day. We can also think of the darkness in Genesis 1 when God began the creation of light (Gen 1:3). With this, Job wants to ask God to reverse the act of creation of his birth.

That day may be claimed by the darkness and shadow of death (verse 5). This is where his day of birth belongs and not in the land of light and life. The sun must not shine over it; that is why Job wishes there to be clouds settle on that day. That day is presented as a person who is frightened by sudden eclipses.

Also the night must be taken away by darkness (verse 6) – the shadow of death (Job 10:21-22). The night must remain night and not see daylight. The joy of the daylight of his birth is undesirable and inappropriate. There is no reason to rejoice about his birth. That night must remain barren and not be united with the daylight of life; that day must disappear from the days of the month.

The night of his conception must be barren (verse 7). The joyful chanting of his birth, “a boy is conceived” (cf. verse 3) – to which greater expressions of joy were attached than to the birth of a girl – is completely out of place. The expressions of joy must be silent, for there is no reason to be cheerful about the birth of someone who has been struck by such terrible disasters without any cause.

The day of his birth is so terrible for him, that he not only pronounces the curse on it himself, but also calls upon all those who can curse that day, who have made it their profession, such as a Balaam (verse 8; Num 22:5-6). A believer should not seek the help of a conjurer. But we must imagine here that Job’s need is so great that he would, so to speak, accept the help of conjurers.

These conjurers are described as those who are able to rouse Leviathan. This Leviathan, a destructive sea monster (Isa 27:1), could then disrupt creation in such a way that the night of Job's conception and the day of Job's birth would be nullified.

Not even the twilight of the stars should be seen, for all that is fitting for that day is utter darkness (verse 9). Therefore the twilight of the stars, which does not make it completely dark after all, must be eclipsed. The night may wait for the light, but it will not come. In beautiful language Job speaks of the dawning of a new day as the opening of "the eyelids of dawn", as it is literally. By this he can also mean the newborn life that opens its eyes to a new world.

Job was born because the womb did not remain closed, because the doors of the womb in which he was, opened (verse 10). That is why it has come so far that the troubles in which he now finds himself have not remained hidden from his eyes, but must now be seen by him. He no longer sees life as a gift from God and in relation to Him, but now measures the value of his life according to the misery in which he finds himself.

Job 3:11-19 | If Only I Had Died as a Baby!

11 *"Why did I not die at birth,
Come forth from the womb and expire?*
12 *"Why did the knees receive me,
And why the breasts, that I should suck?*
13 *"For now I would have lain down and been quiet;
I would have slept then, I would have been at rest,*
14 *With kings and [with] counselors of the earth,
Who rebuilt ruins for themselves;*
15 *Or with princes who had gold,
Who were filling their houses [with] silver.*
16 *"Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be,
As infants that never saw light.*
17 *"There the wicked cease from raging,
And there the weary are at rest.*
18 *"The prisoners are at ease together;
They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.*

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

In verse 11 Job asks God the first "why" question. More 'why' questions follow (Job 3:12,20; 7:20,21; 10:18; 13:14,24; 21:7; 24:1). To none of them does God answer Job, for He is God. But He doesn't blame Job for it either.

God already sees the time as present that all 'why' questions have turned into praise. Then Job, and we, will see that every day, the happy and the sad, was there because He wanted it. And His will is good. Then we will praise Him retrospectively, as it were, for every day that has been given to us on earth.

In verses 1-10 Job has cursed his day of birth. However, he could not prevent his birth. 'But', he exclaims, 'why did I not die immediately at my birth instead of giving me the spirit when I came out of the womb?' (cf. Gen 49:33). Any love service after his birth, the care given to the infant Job, he sees as a cruel act.

Job abhors the lovely sight of a mother who lovingly takes a newborn child to her knees and breastfeeds the baby (verse 12). Those knees or the womb on which he was laid and pampered and by which he was carried (Gen 50:23; Isa 66:12) and the breasts that fed him have caused him so much misery now. Had they not done so, he would at least have died.

Job prefers death to life. Compared to his present existence, death is an enviable fate for him. To describe the benefit of this situation he uses four expressions (verse 13). He would

"lay down"

"be quiet

"sleep"

"be at rest."

"Laying down" gives the thought of beneficent rest. "Be quiet" means not to be in trouble or to be afraid of them coming. "Sleep" is not only silence, but also not being aware that there might be danger somewhere. He would then "be at rest" instead of experiencing the present misery.

He sees the realm of the dead as a dwelling place where he is together with kings and counselors who were so powerful that they rebuilt cities to keep

their names alive (verse 14). He also sees himself together with princes, people who had succeeded in life and who had gold and abundance of silver (verse 15).

Another option is that in case he was a miscarriage he would not be there, like a little child who never saw the light of day (verse 16; Ecc 6:3-5; Psa 58:8). In any case, there is rest in the realm of the dead, both for the wicked and for those who are exhausted (verse 17). There is also rest for the prisoners there (verse 18). They no longer have to do forced labor. They don't hear the voice of the slavedriver there. In the realm of the dead there is no distinction between large and small, old and young, considerable and despised (verse 19). Also the slave is free.

For Job the realm of the dead is the liberation from all misery, unrest and bondage. But Job seeks in death what only God can give. What Job says of the realm of the dead in these verses, is only so externally. The Lord Jesus shows how it really is and that there is a distinction between believers and unbelievers in the realm of the dead (cf. Lk 16:22-23).

Job 3:20-26 | What Is the Sense of an Existence Like Mine?

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

Job cannot erase the day of his birth (verses 1-10) or undo his birth (verses 11-19). Then the question remains as to what further sense his life has, now

that he is in such misery. He wonders why God leaves people alive who prefer to die. This is what verses 20-26 are about. Such a question probably didn't occur to him when he was in prosperity. He measures the value of his life according to his circumstances, not to God's purpose. Don't we do this often?

Job is a wretched man and counts himself among those who are "bitter of soul" (verse 20). He speaks in plural. It is a category of people longing for death (verse 21). To them death is the end of all their bodily suffering and all the bitterness of their soul. But death does not show itself.

Then they will look for death, searching for it, that is to say, searching for it with the greatest possible effort, for they are eager to find it. They will search for it with even more zeal than they would search for hidden treasures. Even if they were to find so many hidden treasures, they know that the greatest treasure cannot deliver them from their suffering and bitterness. According to them, only death can do that. That's why they "rejoice greatly and exult when they find the grave" (verse 22). Then they finally have peace.

Job does not see how his path will have to continue (verse 23). Despairingly, he asks why God gives the light of life to someone who doesn't know how to go on, what path to take. With all his struggles, there is nothing to suggest that he wants to take his life into his own hands and does want to commit suicide. That was not an option to Job. Suicide means that all hope and sight of God is lost. That is not the case with Job. On the contrary, he is engaged in a passionate conversation with God, that is to say, he expresses everything that is in his heart of incomprehension about what God has allowed to happen to him.

Job even blames God for obstructing him in every way (cf. Lam 3:9). For Job it is as if God, Who first protected him and his possessions from all sides and thus shielded him from all evil (Job 1:10), now places him in the midst of all evil and hedged him in in such a way that he cannot escape, that God gives him no way out (cf. Lam 3:2-7). If we find ourselves in such a situation and do not see a way out, God wants to focus our gaze on the only way out that always remains: the way upward (2Cor 4:8b).

To Job, God is the causer of the evil that has afflicted him, not satan. No-where does Job speak of satan as the author of his disasters. He has not, like us, looked behind the scenes and does not know about the actions of satan. He doesn't think about the possibility of that. He only thinks of God, also in his further struggle. This is a hallmark of true godliness.

He knows that God has first given him food (verse 24). There is nothing left of that. Everything has been taken away from him. The only thing that gives him any relief is groaning. Nor does he have water. His lamentation has come instead. It also indicates that the pains go over him like a never-ending stream.

In verse 25 we see that Job, during all the prosperity he enjoyed, was also plagued by the fear that his prosperity would one day be taken away. He was afraid of disaster. A great number of catastrophes have come upon him in all their ferocity. In his prosperity Job already had no peace and security. And now he has none at all (verse 26). The silence has disappeared. Already he was not at all calm, but now the inner turmoil has come to pass to the full, and has taken on such great proportions that it has driven him to despair.

Job 4

Introduction

Job's outburst in Job 3 gives rise to the following three rounds of discussions between Job and his friends. The friends always speak in the same order, possibly according to age: first Eliphaz, then Bildad and finally Zophar. It is always word and response:

1. first an assessment and *condemnation* on the part of the friends,
 2. upon which a *self-justification* on the part of Job follows,
- and all of this in increasingly vehement terms.

There's something really human in all of this. We need to learn how much wisdom and caution we need if we are to speak to people about something we perceive. The friends do not have what the Lord Jesus does have – and what Job also had, according to the testimony of Eliphaz (Job 4:3-4) – and that is the ability to “how to sustain the weary one with a word” (Isa 50:4). On the contrary, they only increase the grief of Job. They do not know “how delightful ... a timely word” is (Pro 15:23b).

It is also clear that the friends do not look at Job the way God looks at him. After all, God has repeatedly spoken of the blamelessness of Job. The friends look at Job as people who only see what is before them and connect that with their knowledge of God, i.e. with their own ‘theology’ of how God is. They do not judge the situation on the basis of their relationship with God.

Their assessment shows that they do not know Job and that they do not know God. They look for the cause of suffering without knowledge of God nor of Job. Behind the suffering they only see the punishing hand of God. They do not know God's educating hand. It also shows that they do not know themselves. Through all their ignorance, they add grief to Job's suffering, instead of comforting him in his suffering.

What is always at stake in the disputes is the question of the three friends whether Job really is an upright man or whether he is a hypocrite after all.

It is in fact the same question that satan asks God in Job 1 and Job 2 (Job 1:9; 2:4-5).

Broadly speaking, the following can be said of the rounds of discussion:

1. In the first round of conversation (Job 4-14) the friends teach Job about the punitive character of suffering; Job responds to this in despair.

--a. Eliphaz describes his own experience of the greatness and righteousness of God.

--b. Bildad tells Job the tradition that suffering is retribution.

--c. Zophar adheres to the dogma that suffering is the consequence of sins committed.

Although the friends start from the same principle, they each have their own characteristic:

I. Eliphaz is characterized by dignity, his appeal to God, and a penetrating request to listen to him.

II. Bildad appeals to the sober mind and the lessons of history.

III. Zophar is characterized by dogmatic severity and impetuosity with which he denounces Job's (alleged) sins and the explanation of the certain judgment that comes upon them.

2. In the second round of conversation (Job 15-21) the friends express suspicions and accusations; Job goes from despair to hope.

3. In the third round of conversation (Job 22-26) Job silences his friends. But the mystery of suffering remains.

An important cause of the difference between the speeches of the friends and those of Job is the difference in their relationship with God. Job is determined to be absolutely honest with God. He tells God everything, every tear, every despair. What matters to him is to maintain his relationship with God. The friends, on the other hand, do not tell God anything. They only speak *about* Him, never *to* Him. They don't speak out of a relationship with God, but rather express their theories about God, theories they cling to as a rigid dogma. Job doesn't ask for restoration of his prosperity anywhere either. What matters to him is his relationship to God and God's relationship to him.

In the arguments that the three friends have with Job, we see that they are based on the same principle and that is that all suffering is always punitive and never educational and that suffering has to do with the righteousness of God. There is no place in their thoughts for the love of God in relation to suffering. They do not see that these two – righteousness and love – always go together in His ways. When suffering is viewed as they do, there is no regard for the difference between the suffering that the righteous undergoes and that which is the part of the ungodly.

Subdivision of the first speech of Eliphaz (Job 4-5)

1. Blaming Job's despair (Job 4:1-5)
2. God's favor for the righteous (Job 4:6-11)
3. Vision of God's greatness and holiness (Job 4:12-21)
4. Experience of God's ways (Job 5:1-5)
5. Exhortation for Job to seek God (Job 5:6-11)
6. God's triumph over evil (Job 5:12-16)
7. The use of chastening (Job 5:17-27)

Job 4:1-5 | Eliphaz Blames Job for His Despair

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered,
2 "If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient?
But who can refrain from speaking?
3 "Behold you have admonished many,
And you have strengthened weak hands.
4 "Your words have helped the tottering to stand,
And you have strengthened feeble knees.
5 "But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
It touches you, and you are dismayed.

Eliphaz the Temanite thinks, after what Job has said, that he can no longer remain silent, and is obliged to speak (verse 1). He feels compelled to speak and to reply to Job, astonished as he is by his violent reaction to his suffering. He is the main spokesman of the three friends. At each round of conversation, he is the first to take the initiative to speak. We see at the end

of the book that the LORD speaks to him as the chief spokesman and His wrath kindles against him (Job 42:7).

With Eliphaz's answer, a number of dialogues begin, in which the wounds that have been struck inside Job are pressed more and more painfully. The friends always feel that they have to respond to Job's complaints, and this in turn triggers a reaction in Job.

Eliphaz believes that he must stand up for God's honor, because in his eyes that honor is violated by what Job says. Unfortunately, his speaking does not impress Job about God. Why is that? Eliphaz has too narrow a view of God's honor, as if it can only be maintained by exercising utter justice against evil, in which he also believes that cause and effect can be verified by humans after the fact.

The first words Eliphaz speaks imply that he is aware that his words and those of his two friends will hurt Job, so much so that he supposes that Job can become impatient (verse 2). It is a curious beginning for someone who has come to comfort after all (Job 2:11). But, as he justifies himself, he cannot do otherwise. He must speak.

He immediately takes a stand and points out to Job that he used to admonish others who suffered misfortune how to deal with them (verse 3). Through these admonitions, he has given strength to the suffering, he has strengthened their "weak hands". His words have "strengthened feeble knees" (verse 4). Job – unlike his friends, as will be shown – knew how to speak a word to the weary at the right time. As a result, those weary ones were able to move on.

But now look at Job, now that he himself is in misery (verse 5). Now there is nothing left of all this advice to others. He succumbs to the disasters that have befallen him. Now fate has struck him, he is in despair. Where are his uplifting words that he had for others? Eliphaz claims that one might expect that Job, who used to be able to encourage others who were in trial, would now address the words spoken earlier to himself (cf. Lk 4:23).

What Eliphaz says is partly true, but the reason lies not only in the disasters that have struck Job. The cause lies deeper, namely that Job presupposes that God is his adversary (Job 3:20,23). There is also a reproach in

what Eliphaz says. This reproach is that Job, who has taught another, does not teach himself (Rom 2:21).

We miss a word of comfort in the words of this friend. Grace teaches us to weep with those who weep and to empathize with the afflicted (Rom 12:15). Job has, as the case may be (verse 4), called to the same thing the writer of the letter to the Hebrews calls upon the Hebrew believers to do (Heb 12:12-13). In this we may follow Job. He has taken his time for it, although he must have been a busy man.

Job 4:6-11 | God's Favor for the Righteous

6 *"Is not your fear [of God] your confidence,
And the integrity of your ways your hope?*
7 *"Remember now, who [ever] perished being innocent?
Or where were the upright destroyed?*
8 *"According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity
And those who sow trouble harvest it.*
9 *"By the breath of God they perish,
And by the blast of His anger they come to an end.*
10 *"The roaring of the lion and the voice of the [fierce] lion,
And the teeth of the young lions are broken.*
11 *"The lion perishes for lack of prey,
And the whelps of the lioness are scattered.*

Eliphaz addresses Job about his fear of God (verse 6). Was this not his "confidence"? But where is this confidence now? With this he suggests that apparently there is something wrong with this confidence in God, because otherwise Job wouldn't be in sackcloth and ashes. He knows that Job feared God, but in his response to the disasters that have struck him, he judges, nothing of this has been revealed. In fact, Eliphaz says the same as satan who also suggested that Job only feared God because of the prosperity he had (Job 1:9).

And then the integrity of Job's ways. Wasn't his hope that nothing bad would happen to him? Here too we see a veiled accusation that Job is not quite right after all. He feared God and was honest in his dealings with men, yet all this evil befalls him.

Without immediately accusing Job of a lack of fear of God, Eliphaz gives Job something to think of, which is a suggestion in that direction. Eliphaz speaks in each of his speeches about the God-fearing of Job (Job 4:6; 15:4; 22:4), which he covers up and calls into question. But Job does not wrestle with the question: "Am I God-fearing and upright?" The question he's wrestling with is this one: "Why is God acting this way with a man as God-fearing and upright as I am?"

However, Eliphaz doesn't see that. To him, things are much simpler. Job has to check whether an innocent person has ever perished and whether any of them have ever been destroyed (verse 7). He teaches Job that God does not let disaster come to the righteous, and that evil affects only the evildoer, no matter how powerful he is. But Eliphaz forgets, for example, Abel. Abel was murdered precisely because he was better than his brother because of the sacrifice he offered (Gen 4:3-8; cf. Isa 57:1; Ecc 9:2; Mt 23:35; Heb 11:36-38). Eliphaz also contradicts God's judgment about Job (Job 1:8; 2:3).

The yardstick Eliphaz uses in his assessment of the situation of Job is that of his own experience and perception and not that of Divine revelation, of what God shows. Nor can God reveal Himself to him, for he has his own concept of Who God is. This measure – the own concept of Who God is – is also laid down by modern man. For man, even so-called Christian man, what God reveals in His Word is not a measure and normative, but what he 'feels' and 'sees'. Here we see an example of religion rather than a relation with God, of theology or 'knowledge of God' instead of 'being taught by God' (Isa 54:13).

The basis of Eliphaz's reasoning is the law of sowing and reaping (verse 8; Gal 6:8; Pro 22:8a; Hos 8:7a). That he can observe and judge. His judgment is not based on Scripture, but on his own experience. The law that he observes exists, but does not always work in a way that can be explained logically to us. This is how Eliphaz deals with it, however. He makes it a rigid, absolute law without exception. He bases this on what he has observed.

He sees that people suffer because they sin. What they reap is determined by what they sow. Job reaps suffering, then he must have sown sin. In fact, the starting point of the argument of the three friends is: Who ever died

innocently? We see this reinforced in the further accusation of Eliphaz in the third round of conversation in which he elaborates this starting point with an iron logic (Job 22:1-11).

He observes that Job perishes “by the breath of God” and “by the blast of His anger” (verse 9). With “the breath of God” is meant His judgment. The breath can be compared to a hot, scorching wind that passes over a cornfield, through which the harvest dries up and is lost (cf. 2Thes 2:8). “The blast of His anger” refers to God’s anger and wrath at sin (cf. 2Sam 22:16; Acts 9:1).

In verses 10-11 Eliphaz gives an illustration of an unrighteous one. He compares him to a roaring lion and his voice to that of a fierce lion. But the impression made has no effect when it comes to averting disaster. When disaster has come, there is nothing left of his impressive roaring and growling. Nothing is left of the previously so impressive and unjust person.

In Hebrew, eight different names are used for lions. They’re all used to indicate the mightiness of this animal. Here it is described that even the devastating and tearing power they possess is taken from them at some point, so that they lose any threat. Even for the future, no threat remains, because the lion perishes and the cubs are scattered. In this way, the unjust perishes and so do his children. According to Eliphaz, this is an important lesson for Job.

Job 4:12-21 | Vision About God’s Greatness and Holiness

12 *“Now a word was brought to me stealthily,
And my ear received a whisper of it.*
13 *“Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night,
When deep sleep falls on men,
14 Dread came upon me, and trembling,
And made all my bones shake.*
15 *“Then a spirit passed by my face;
The hair of my flesh bristled up.*
16 *“It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance;
A form [was] before my eyes;
[There was] silence, then I heard a voice:*

17 *'Can mankind be just before God?
 Can a man be pure before his Maker?
 18 'He puts no trust even in His servants;
 And against His angels He charges error.
 19 'How much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
 Whose foundation is in the dust,
 Who are crushed before the moth!
 20 'Between morning and evening they are broken in pieces;
 Unobserved, they perish forever.
 21 'Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them?
 They die, yet without wisdom.'*

In order to further substantiate his claims in verse 6 – that blessing follows fear of God and uprightness – Eliphaz comes to him with a word that has been brought to him in a vision (verse 12). It is again an appeal to his own experience and perception. In verse 8 he speaks about the eye, what he has seen, now he speaks about “my ear”, what he has heard. The way he does this has something mysterious or even mystical. It is a little reminiscent of the way false prophets and false teachers act and of the method of satan, who pretends to be “an angel of light” (2Cor 11:14). It has been “stealthily” brought to him and his ear “received a whisper of it”. It is vague and uncontrollable to others.

Eliphaz wants to impress Job even more with what he has heard, by telling how much he himself has been impressed by the word that has been brought to him (verse 13). It is a remark that resembles manipulation. If someone wants to pass on something from the Word of God, it is not necessary that he first points out what it has all done to him. If the speaker does so with great emphasis, there is a good chance that he and his experience will become the center of attention. Then the attention is subtly shifted from God’s Word to the speaker.

Such vague messages are also heard in professing Christianity. In some circles the saying ‘so says the Lord’ is regularly heard, and then something follows that the hearers should not question. Or something is passed on which the Lord would have made clear to someone and which everyone else should accept in good faith in the speaker – and not in the Word of

God! We have the whole Word of God as our touchstone, and on the basis of it the truth of a statement must be confirmed, and if not, rejected.

Eliphaz uses expressions that testify to great eloquence, but which do not provide any proof of the veracity of his assertions. He speaks of “disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night”. It is the time when “deep sleep falls on men”. The expression “deep sleep” is associated with supernatural experiences (Gen 15:12; Job 33:15).

He also speaks of “trembling” that came over him and that shocked all his bones (verse 14). This also suggests a supernatural experience. With it he seems to say: ‘Job, that which has evoked awe in me, must do the same to you. You can’t just ignore this.’

When Eliphaz thus painted his experience and emotions, he tells what he saw: “A spirit passed by my face” (verse 15). Again he tells about the feelings this caused him: “The hair of my flesh bristled up”, that is, he got goose bumps because of great fear or because of the supernatural character of the vision. Then the spirit stood still (verse 16). Eliphaz saw nothing familiar in the form of the spirit. He only saw the outline of it before his eyes. At first it was silent for some time, as if the right spiritual climate must first be there to hear and understand the message. We may pray to God to receive the gift of discernment of spirits in such cases (1Cor 12:10; 1Jn 4:1). This is something Eliphaz did not have.

The spirit asks the question whether mankind, a mortal human being – and Eliphaz will apply this to Job in his thoughts – would be just before God (verse 17). He then asks whether a man – and Eliphaz will again apply this to Job in his thoughts – can be pure before his Maker. Both questions are so-called rhetorical questions, i.e. questions to which the answer is contained in the question. Of course mankind is not just before God, and of course a man is not pure before his Maker.

Eliphaz here speaks truths that cannot be refuted, but what is the use of it for Job? In any case, it does not meet the needs of the suffering Job. There is no consolation for Job. By the way, if it is true that all men are unclean before God, and no one is righteous before Him – and this is true! – then Eliphaz should sit beside Job before God. But he won’t get that far.

By the way, this question is answered in the New Testament. In the letter to the Romans we read the basis on which a human being can be just or righteous before God and be pure before his Maker. That letter teaches us that this foundation lies in faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross.

In the vision, man – and he means Job – is then compared with God’s “servants” and “His angels” (verse 18). His servants are people who know and serve Him and pass on His word to others. His angels are holy beings who are always in God’s presence. None of them, however, are perfect. His servants have at times sinned, and God has also found error with the most exalted angel (Eze 28:15) and judged him and his followers for it. Nothing that is iniquity in those who dwell in heaven escapes Him.

The same is true even more so for those who are bound to the earth (verse 19). Pictorially, Eliphaz says that the mortal lives in a tar, easily breakable house of clay, the foundation of which is in the completely powerless dust. With the clay house he means the body of man (Gen 2:7). Paul calls the body “an earthen vessel” (2Cor 4:7).

Its tenderness and fragility are eloquently illustrated by the comparison with the crushing of a moth. Just as moths are crushed, people “are broken in pieces” “between morning and evening” (verse 20). It indicates the brevity of human life. He is, so to speak, born in the morning and is no longer there in the evening. It is all so commonplace that it goes unnoticed by the masses when a person dies.

When a man dies, the “tent-cord” or the thread of life with which he was connected to the earth is “plucked up within them” (verse 21; cf. Ecc 12:6-7a). Here again we hear a beautiful metaphor, that of breaking up a tent attached to the ground with tent cords (cf. Isa 38:12). Paul compares bodily death with the “breaking down” of “our earthly tent in which we live” (2Cor 5:1).

Thus a man dies “yet without wisdom”, by which Eliphaz means that he dies like a wicked man before his time. If a life is suddenly cut off, it is proof to him that it must have been a wicked life. Such a person is one who has not acquired wisdom in his brief and perishable life. Here too we hear a reproach toward Job that he lacks wisdom about God.

Job 5

Job 5:1-5 | Experience of God's Ways

1 "Call now, is there anyone who will answer you?

And to which of the holy ones will you turn?

2 "For anger slays the foolish man,

And jealousy kills the simple.

3 "I have seen the foolish taking root,

And I cursed his abode immediately.

4 "His sons are far from safety,

They are even oppressed in the gate,

And there is no deliverer.

5 "His harvest the hungry devour

And take it to a [place of] thorns,

And the schemer is eager for their wealth.

Eliphaz is sure of his view on 'the Job case'. He challenges Job to summon as a witness someone who proves he (Job) is right (verse 1). In Job 3, Job has made a complaint against God. Eliphaz wants to refute this complaint in this chapter. The call here is not a call for help, but a call for justice. Is there anyone "of the holy ones" to whom Job can turn who has had to endure suffering similar to his? But, as Eliphaz's challenge sounds, there is no such holy one, for God does not do this to God-fearing people (cf. *Psa* 9:10b; 37:25). So Job must ascribe this suffering to himself. All that crying out of Job in Job 3 has been meaningless. It also sounds that all holy people have the same opinion about this as Eliphaz and that Job stands alone in his vision of his suffering.

The anger of Job (verse 2) against the law of God – that he who sows sin reaps punishment – is more than useless in the eyes of Eliphaz, it is harmful. Eliphaz puts it this way: the foolish and simple – that is Job, for he does not agree with the logic of Eliphaz – is provoked, angry, jealous. He resists judgment, but this reaction will eventually kill and destroy him.

Yes, none of this is a fabrication of Eliphaz, he has seen it with his own eyes (verse 3). He has seen a fool take root, that is to say that such a person had prosperity. Again Eliphaz reasons from his own rich experience what he has seen and heard (Job 4:8,12), but not from what God has shown him, because he is not open to it. The curse he pronounces on the fool's dwelling-place immediately after his observation, he pronounces because he supposes that a fool's prosperity was obtained by deceit. It is again such a veiled allusion to the prosperity of Job which he must have obtained in an unfair way given the misery in which he now finds himself.

Following his observations, Eliphaz alludes in verse 4, in a veiled way, to what happened to Job's children. The fool does not serve God and therefore his children will suffer too. They are far from safety because of the foolishness of their father, who does not take God into account. Deliverance from a situation of need can only be found with God. But what do you do if you do not take Him into account? Even "in the gate", the place where justice is done, there is no one to deliver them, no one to stand up for them. Instead of deliverance there is oppression, literally "crushing", for them.

Eliphaz could hardly have said anything more insensitive than this allusion to the children of Job. He is sitting opposite a man who has lost all his possessions, all his health, and, moreover, all his children, and he knows nothing better to say than that the children of a fool have been crushed by the accident. Let us be wary that we do not make such unsophisticated, insensitive allusions to someone who is in the deepest misery.

Then Eliphaz speaks of the possession of the fool (verse 5). The fool will not be able to enjoy his property either, for that too is taken away from him. Hungry people come to plunder him and to eat what he intended for himself and his family. Even if something edible has come up between the thorns, it is not for the fool, but for the hungry. The fool is left to himself, without children and without possessions and food.

Eliphaz's argument is very transparent. Without mentioning the name of Job, it is clear to the listener that with the fool here he means Job.

Job 5:6-11 | Exhortation for Job to Seek God

6 *"For affliction does not come from the dust,
Nor does trouble sprout from the ground,
7 For man is born for trouble,
As sparks fly upward.
8 "But as for me, I would seek God,
And I would place my cause before God;
9 Who does great and unsearchable things,
Wonders without number.
10 "He gives rain on the earth
And sends water on the fields,
11 So that He sets on high those who are lowly,
And those who mourn are lifted to safety.*

Eliphaz returns to his theme of the general principle of sowing and reaping (verse 6; Job 4:8). What appears above the ground is the result of what has been sown. Grief and trouble are not isolated events. It is not a coincidence when a human being is affected by them. As soon as a human being is born, trouble is his part. His troubles do not come out of nowhere. According to the theology of Eliphaz, Job should not attribute his suffering to coincidence or bad luck or something like that. Job has to look for a negative cause of his negative experience. According to Eliphaz's reasoning, there must be sin underlying Job's suffering.

However, Eliphaz also sees that suffering is part of our earthly existence. "Man is born for trouble" (verse 7). This observation is correct. As born under sin, nothing but trouble can be his part. We sin because we are sinners and we must bear the consequences (Gen 3:17-19). Those consequences are far from pleasant. But we may know that the Lord Jesus said: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). We may also take to heart the admonition that the Lord disciplines whom He loves (Heb 12:5-11; Rev 3:19).

Eliphaz's advice to Job is to seek God and present his situation to Him (verse 8). It is good to point out to people that they should submit their affairs to God in confidence that He knows best what is right (Psa 62:8; 1Pet 5:7). But in this case, where Job is accused of causing his suffering through

hidden sins, such advice only arouses resistance. It also has to do with Eliphaz saying what he himself would do if he were Job. If he were Job, he would not expect assistance from anyone (verse 1) and would address his words directly to God and certainly not accuse Him.

But Eliphaz is not Job, and certainly he is not in Job's circumstances. What does he know about the enormous loss and the deep sorrow of Job and his great questions as to why? It is always dangerous to say what you would do if you were in the other person's shoes, because you don't know how you yourself would react if really happened to you what happened to the other person.

To reinforce his argument, Eliphaz describes the greatness of God through the words of verse 9. God "does great and unsearchable things". That's why it takes an eternity to see more and more of that and to admire Him more and more. Eliphaz says this to show Job that he can't check out God in His actions after all. It is best for him to take his rightful place toward Him, the Almighty and Unfathomable, by acknowledging his guilt and confessing his rebellion against Him.

If Eliphaz himself had believed in the true words he says about God, he would have remained silent and sought God himself. God is "the God Who works wonders" (Psa 77:14). Eliphaz places the greatness of God before Job, so that Job may understand how great God is and how small he himself is. But Eliphaz does not see that God is also working wonders in the life of Job. He is blind to God's wonders in His reign, wonders at which we can only marvel. Eliphaz says to Job, as it were, that he, Job, does not understand God's dealings with him, but that he, Eliphaz, does understand God's dealings with Job.

In verses 10-11 Eliphaz mentions some of those unsearchable things and wonders from which God's reign and power are evident. He points to the rain that God gives (verse 10). God sends rain and water as blessing. We often see rain as something very ordinary, but if we look closely at how it originates and what it does, we see that it is a great work of God's power and goodness (Mt 5:45; Acts 14:17). It is a work of nature for the benefit of the earth and the fields.

This is also how God works in the world of man. He is concerned with the lowly and the mourning (verse 11). He gives the lowly a high place (Lk 1:52b). He also has a special place for the mourners. He lifts them “to safety”. If Job takes this attitude toward God, he will experience what Eliphaz tells him.

Job 5:12-16 | God’s Triumph Over Evil

*12 “He frustrates the plotting of the shrewd,
So that their hands cannot attain success.
13 “He captures the wise by their own shrewdness,
And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted.
14 “By day they meet with darkness,
And grope at noon as in the night.
15 “But He saves from the sword of their mouth,
And the poor from the hand of the mighty.
16 “So the helpless has hope,
And unrighteousness must shut its mouth.*

The truth of verses 12-13 is emphasized by Paul. He quotes these verses in the first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 3:19). The apostle wants to deprive the Corinthians of their carnal trust in human wisdom. What Eliphaz says is certainly true, although God certainly does not always frustrate all the plans of all shrewd people. It is in any case wrong to apply this truth to Job and his circumstances. Job had no shrewd plans; therefore they cannot have been frustrated by God (verse 12; cf. Neh 4:15; Est 7:3-10). God does indeed capture the wise in their own shrewdness, but Job is not a devious man whose counsel God has made fail (verse 13).

It is not the mind of Eliphaz with his human conclusions that knows how to use the truth correctly, but a heart that loves the truth and lives in fellowship with God. The latter is lacking in Eliphaz. Job may be in darkness in broad daylight (verse 14), but not for the reasons Eliphaz supposes. Job gropes around in the night and sees no path in front of his foot, but that is not because he has cursed God.

Contrary to the shrewd – the word “but” indicates that there is a contradiction with the foregoing – God helps the poor. If only Job would take

the place of the poor, God would deliver him from those who with their words hurt him with their false accusations, and exercise power over him (verse 15). Eliphaz is also unaware that he himself is such a person. Whoever takes God's side, so Eliphaz continues, has hope, for to him belongs victory over evil (verse 16). What Eliphaz does not suspect here is that Job will indeed experience this when he turns to God at the end of the book.

Job 5:17-27 | The Use of Discipline

17 *"Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves,
So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.*
18 *"For He inflicts pain, and gives relief;
He wounds, and His hands [also] heal.*
19 *"From six troubles He will deliver you,
Even in seven evil will not touch you.*
20 *"In famine He will redeem you from death,
And in war from the power of the sword.*
21 *"You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue,
And you will not be afraid of violence when it comes.*
22 *"You will laugh at violence and famine,
And you will not be afraid of wild beasts.*
23 *"For you will be in league with the stones of the field,
And the beasts of the field will be at peace with you.*
24 *"You will know that your tent is secure,
For you will visit your abode and fear no loss.*
25 *"You will know also that your descendants will be many,
And your offspring as the grass of the earth.*
26 *"You will come to the grave in full vigor,
Like the stacking of grain in its season.*
27 *"Behold this; we have investigated it, [and] so it is.
Hear it, and know for yourself."*

In the closing part of this first speech by Eliphaz, we again receive wonderful instruction in wonderful language about God and His dealings with man. Only Eliphaz applies it in the wrong way because he applies it to the wrong person.

Eliphaz speaks about God Who chastises and punishes mortal man with whom he means Job. Yet he calls that mortal “happy” (verse 17; Psa 94:12). Here he means to say that discipline or punishment has such important advantages that we should submit to it without complaining about it. What eludes Eliphaz is that God can discipline someone, without this necessarily being an expression of His displeasure with such a person. Discipline indicates the existence of a relationship. God wants to improve that relationship through discipline (Heb 12:5-6,10; Pro 3:11-12).

Eliphaz sees the discipline of God as proof that there is something sinful in the life of Job. He calls upon Job to listen to this discipline and not to despise it, but to obey it. Job must know that the sorrow and wounds that are his share have been inflicted on him by the Almighty (verse 18). They come from Him. But Job must also know that the same Almighty is able to give relief and that His hands heal. Salvation will come from the same hand that strikes (cf. Hos 6:1).

For the first time, Eliphaz does not speak to Job in veiled terms, but speaks directly to him with ‘you’. We can apply the “six troubles” (verse 19) that struck Job as follows: three in his possessions, the fourth in his children, the fifth in his health, the sixth in his wife. There is a seventh trouble. We recognize it in his friends. As with the six previous plagues, we must also acknowledge that the coming of the friends has been arranged by God. Their contribution to Job’s suffering must be seen as coming from God. Also with their actions God has His purpose in His education of Job. He wants to use them to discover Job to himself through them.

Perhaps we can also say the following of these numbers. Six is the number of man’s toil, seven is the number of perfection. This leads to the thought that after the toil of man, rest with God follows.

Eliphaz presents Job with further blessings that will be his share if he accepts the discipline of the Almighty. Thus God will not let him die of starvation, but deliver him from it (verse 20). Nor will he be killed if war is waged against him. If he trusts in God, God will protect him in times of hunger and war.

God will also ensure that his reputation is not tarnished by slanderous tongues (verse 21). He does so by ensuring that the truth exposes the lie

and slander. Nor will he have to fear imminent destruction, as he has now experienced. If such devastation comes to pass, he will be safe and happy. He will even laugh at them (verse 22), which means that he does not take them seriously because they are not a threat to him.

The same goes for wild beasts, which must always be taken into account. He doesn't have to be afraid that these animals will attack him. Nor will they cause any damage to his harvest.

There will be no stones on his land that make his way impassable or prevent the corn from rising (verse 23; 2Kgs 3:19; Isa 5:2; 62:10). He will live in peace with the wild beasts. Such harmony between man and beast will be a reality in the realm of peace (Isa 11:6-9; Hos 2:18). All elements of nature that can be against man will then work together with the righteous.

There will also be peace in his home (verse 24). When he is on the road, he does not have to worry about what happens at home. He has flawlessly arranged the care for his home, for everything that happens. God will take care of it for someone who trusts in Him. The same goes for his offspring (verse 25). It will be many and prosperous (Psa 128:1,3).

Finally, Eliphaz points to the long life that is the part of those who trust in God (verse 26). He will grow old and not be torn from life prematurely due to sickness or accident as a result of sin. He will not be taken away from life until he is fully satisfied with life and the fruit of righteousness has ripened in his life. Eliphaz compares it to a "stacking of grain" which, when the corn is ripe, is brought in "in its season". Grain is not cut off when it is still green, but only when it is golden yellow.

Of the whole picture sketched by Eliphaz, nothing can be recognized in Job. So there must be something wrong with him. That is why Eliphaz concludes his first speech to Job by emphasizing once more the research he and his friends have done into the cause and effect of sins (verse 27). Again we hear that he is basing himself on his observation: they have "investigated" it. The results of his investigation and those of his friends are not open to discussion, for "so it is". It is the certainty of someone who says: "I have the truth, and I alone."

Eliphaz here resembles someone who was called to account for a very unhealthy interpretation of Scripture once. The answer this person gave was:

'We spent a lot of time in that explanation and certainly didn't go over night.' An answer like that silences any criticism. It means that you have to be impressed by their research and that you have to accept the result, the explanation, on that basis. Such an approach is of course reprehensible. Someone who adopts such an attitude disqualifies himself as a trustworthy interpreter of Scripture.

Eliphaz says something similar to Job. Now, let Job be sensible enough to resign himself to the results of their investigation and make use of them. To oppose this is, of course, very stupid. Then you just put their 'thorough' investigation aside. That would be very stubborn. It's the soothing: 'Listen to us, and everything will be fine.' Responding in such a way to the need in which someone is, we nowadays call 'manipulating'. But Job does not let himself be manipulated as the following two chapters show.

The attitude of Eliphaz and his friends in the beginning can be an example for us. They first start by observing a silence of seven days, a full week. But as they begin to speak, we see that Job's personal struggle encounters a high wall of incomprehension. Eliphaz comes with strong criticism (Job 4:1-11), with watertight theological arguments (Job 4:17; 5:7), with personal experience – a vision he wrongly attributes to God (Job 4:12-21). He speaks with such conviction of his own right that he challenges Job to turn to God himself; then he will hear from God the same thing he has heard from him (Job 5:8). Finally, to top it all off, Eliphaz in his pride declares his own right as an omniscient – as if he were God himself – by saying "so it is" (Job 5:27).

Job 6

Introduction

Job always responds to the previous speaker, but it is clear that he recognizes a common trait in the attitude of each of them. He always answers the friends together – he speaks of “you” (plural) – and not individually.

The similarity between Job’s first answer here and his complaint in Job 3 is remarkable. However, in his reply to Eliphaz, he is more controlled. He also elaborates on more things. But the burden is the same and also here he expresses his longing for death. There is no trace of hope.

This first answer, which includes Job 6-7, is divided into two parts. In Job 6 he addresses his friends, first making a general complaint (verses 1-13), without addressing the three friends directly. In Job 7 he speaks to God. The answer can be divided as follows:

1. The heaviness and reality of his suffering (Job 6:1-7).
2. The desire to be killed by God (Job 6:8-13).
3. The uselessness of his friends (Job 6:14-23).
4. He challenges his friends to test him (Job 6:24-30).
5. The brevity of life (Job 7:1-11).
6. God is his enemy (Job 7:12-19).
7. His appeal in view of sin (Job 7:20-21).

Job 6:1-7 | The Heaviness of His Suffering

1 *Then Job answered,*
2 *“Oh that my grief were actually weighed*
And laid in the balances together with my calamity!
3 *“For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas;*
Therefore my words have been rash.
4 *“For the arrows of the Almighty are within me,*
Their poison my spirit drinks;

The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

*5 "Does the wild donkey bray over [his] grass,
Or does the ox low over his fodder?*

*6 "Can something tasteless be eaten without salt,
Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?*

*7 "My soul refuses to touch [them];
They are like loathsome food to me.*

Despite all the falsehood hidden behind Eliphaz's right words, Job has allowed him to finish speaking, and has not interrupted him. When Eliphaz has come to the end of his speech, assured that nothing can be said against it, it turns out that Job is far from convinced. Job's reaction is introduced with the words "then Job answered" (verse 1). These words are the introduction of Job's reply to the speech of one of the friends each time. Job answers, although he does not address Eliphaz directly in his reaction here.

Eliphaz has reproached Job for succumbing to his suffering (Job 4:5). In response, Job asks that his grief should be actually weighed, i.e. taken seriously (verse 2). Eliphaz says it so easily, but he is not affected by what was done to Job. A great amount of misery has come upon him that cannot be expressed in weight. He has been buried under it. One after the other misery has fallen upon him. It should be put together in the balances. The picture here is of a balance with two scales. On one of them, the misery and suffering of Job are piled up. Job shows its great collective weight.

All his accumulated misery is heavier than the sand of the seas (verse 3). Is it any wonder, then, that the heaviness of his suffering has led him to ill-considered statements? It sounds like an apology, because he did not make incorrect or rash statements.

But is it not the case that this can happen to anyone who suffers great suffering? We will have to learn to understand such ill-considered statements and not give our cold judgment about them. At the same time, we may think of a man who has also suffered enormously, but speaks of this as "momentary, light affliction". He was able to do so because he saw "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2Cor 4:17). Paul, for he says this, saw the glorified Lord above the circumstances. Job does not

know this. For the Lord Jesus it is even more true that He was looking at the joy set before Him (Heb 12:2).

There is something even more important to Job than physical suffering, and that is the awareness of the arrows of God, “the Almighty”, that hit him (verse 4; cf. Job 16:12-13). Arrows cause intense, burning pain. He feels he is the target of the Almighty, against Whom no one can stand. This is the first time that Job blames God for his suffering (Job 7:11-21; 9:13-35; 13:15-28).

There is no other option for him than to drink “their poison” with his spirit. This is how he experiences what God is doing to him. God is his enemy Who arrays the misery that has come upon him as an ordered army against him. What can he do about it? God is so powerful, so capable of arraying His horrors. No resistance is possible against that.

We know that Job’s view of God is wrong, but Job does not know what we may know and can know (Jam 1:2; 2Cor 4:16-18). He does not know God as his loving Father. But even though we know this, we sometimes forget it. When our circumstances fill our field of vision, we don’t rise above them. Only if we can focus our eye on the glorified Christ and the loving Father heart it is possible to glory in tribulation (Rom 5:3).

In pictorial language, Job points out what some animals let hear when they eat, or better what they don’t let hear when they eat. An animal – a “wild donkey”, or an “ox” – that gets good food is satisfied, you don’t hear it (verse 5). Job, however, is served disasters on the dinner table of his life, and this in a very varied composition. How could he be satisfied with that and be quiet! After all, you don’t eat disgusting food without grumbling. Job cannot see his suffering or the words of his friends as pleasant food. If it were tasty food, he would not complain.

But what is placed before him is an extraordinarily tasteless menu (verse 6). “The white of an egg” can also be translated as “a disgusting tasting slime of a certain plant”. It’s not attractive in any way. It lacks ingredients that would make it tasty and edible. He refuses to touch that menu, let alone eat it (verse 7). Just the sight of it makes him sick. Job just refuses to live such a life.

Here, Job does not speak the language of faith, that is to say of confidence, as we see, for example, in Paul. Paul was well pleased with what happened to him in insults and suffering for Christ (2Cor 12:10). Job needs light and must learn to trust God, even where he cannot understand Him. We, at least most of us, have to learn that as well.

Job 6:8-13 | The Desire to Be Killed by God

8 *"Oh that my request might come to pass,
And that God would grant my longing!*
9 *"Would that God were willing to crush me,
That He would loose His hand and cut me off!*
10 *"But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.*
11 *"What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should endure?*
12 *"Is my strength the strength of stones,
Or is my flesh bronze?*
13 *"Is it that my help is not within me,
And that deliverance is driven from me?*

Job has but one thing to ask of God. He has only one desire which he would like God to fulfill, and only one hope which he would like God to give (verse 8). It is not his desire and hope that God will give him back everything he has lost, but that God will take him out of life. For him, life has no meaning anymore. God can show His goodness to him by not letting him live on, but by crushing him (verse 9). If God would just let him go by loosing His hand from him, it would mean the end of his life for him. He would greatly appreciate this action of God. We see through everything that suicide was never an option for this God-fearing man.

How he would feel consoled (verse 10). Yes, if God did not spare him, but took away his life, it would give him so much strength in all his sorrow, that he would spring up with joy. He also has no fear of death, for he has "not denied the words of the Holy One". Job has heard the words of God. For he lived in fellowship with Him. He also lived according to what God told him. He has always taken account of what He has said and is unaware

of a violation of any of His commandments. Yet he undergoes this fate. Thus he justifies himself, while in veiled terms questioning God's righteousness.

Job says nothing too much when he says that he has not denied the words of God. But it seems that he sees it as an achievement of his own and not as something he can say by grace. Paul also says that he is not aware of anything, but he does not boast of it. He also says that this does not justify him (1Cor 4:4).

Job notices that God is not fulfilling his desire to die. This makes him powerless, and it makes him so powerless that he has no hope, no prospect (verse 11). Indirectly, this is an answer to the admonition of Eliphaz, who told him to keep hope after all (Job 5:16). But life is of no use to him at all. He no longer has any purpose in his life that gives him any perspective to look forward to living a little longer.

God does not give Job what he desires so much, because He has other thoughts about Job's life. We also see this with Elijah, who once expressed the wish to die (1Kgs 19:4). God did not fulfill the wish of Elijah because He had other, higher thoughts about the end of his life (2Kgs 2:1,11). In the same way, God has other, higher thoughts about the end of Job.

If God has other thoughts, these are always better and more blessed thoughts. We too can thank God that He does not always give or has not always given us what we want or wanted. We do this when we see that God's love is greater and goes beyond the short-sightedness with which we look at the things that happen to us.

Job cannot understand that God gives him such a heavy burden to bear. He doesn't have "the strength of stones" (verse 12), does he? His spirit is broken. And his flesh is not "bronze", is it? His festering wounds show it. He's just an ordinary man of flesh and blood. Only God can give the strength to bear this misery. However, he does not see God as a Helper in his suffering, but as its causative Agent. We, Christians, may know that God wants to strengthen us with power in the inner man. Following Paul, we may pray for this, for ourselves and for each other (Eph 3:16).

Job no longer sees help in himself (verse 13). The inner, spiritual strength he once had has left him. All hope of deliverance has disappeared. He can-

not go to God, for He is against him, at least that is how he experiences it. Then he is thrown back on himself. But also in himself there is nothing that he can hold on to, something that would give him courage to continue living. Then his friends remain. However, they also severely disappoint him, as we hear in the following verses.

Job 6:14-23 | The Uselessness of His Friends

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

*15 "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi,
Like the torrents of wadis which vanish,*

*16 Which are turbid because of ice
[And] into which the snow melts.*

*17 "When they become waterless, they are silent,
When it is hot, they vanish from their place.*

*18 "The paths of their course wind along,
They go up into nothing and perish.*

*19 "The caravans of Tema looked,
The travelers of Sheba hoped for them.*

*20 "They were disappointed for they had trusted,
They came there and were confounded.*

*21 "Indeed, you have now become such,
You see a terror and are afraid.*

*22 "Have I said, 'Give me [something],'
Or, 'Offer a bribe for me from your wealth,'*

*23 Or, 'Deliver me from the hand of the adversary,'
Or, 'Redeem me from the hand of the tyrants'?*

Job is in distress and has lost all courage. This is a situation in which he desperately needs the help of his friends. Compassion is an obligation to all those in need. He tells his friends that he is desperate and therefore expects mercy (*chased*, faithfulness, loyalty) from them (verse 14). If they do not, they "forsake the fear of the Almighty". He who does not help a brother in need actually despises him and sins (cf. Pro 14:21a). There is no brotherly love in him, but also no reverence for God Almighty. You cannot even speak of a relationship with God (cf. 1Jn 3:17).

In verse 14 Job speaks of a “friend” and in verse 15 of “my brothers” (cf. 2Sam 1:26). In Proverbs 17 these two names are also linked: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Pro 17:17). Unfortunately, this does not apply to Job’s friends. Job finds himself at a time in his life when he can use cordial friendship more than ever. There is a bond of trust with a friend. You can share with a friend the deepest feelings of your heart, because he will understand you or at least not blame you for the things you share with him.

Job is in great distress, but the friends show no sign of warm kinship with Job that is characteristic of brotherly love. They did make the effort to visit him (Job 2:11), and for a week they remained silent, impressed by the great suffering of Job. And yet Eliphaz shows little understanding for the suffering of Job in his speech. On the contrary, the three friends overload Job with heavy reproaches. This is because they attribute his suffering to sins he must have committed. They do not stand beside him, but opposite him. They leave him out in the cold in every way and add to his coldness by their cold-blooded assessment of his situation and their insensitive assumptions about his sins.

The Lord Jesus has shown Himself the true Friend of His disciples. His love was always there. He loved them to the end (Jn 13:1). He proved His great love for His friends by laying down His life for them (Jn 15:13). He called them *friends* because He revealed to them everything He had heard from the Father (Jn 15:15).

He also calls His disciples His *brethren* (Jn 20:17). We do not call Him ‘Brother’ – He is not mentioned like this anywhere in Scripture – but He is the true Brother Who was “made like His brethren in all things” in order to help them in their distress (Heb 2:17). He has not acted as the friends of Job, but has participated in the affliction of His own (Isa 63:9).

Job speaks in the plural, “brothers”, although only Eliphaz has spoken, and he responds to what he has said. That Job speaks to the friends together will be because what Eliphaz said certainly happened in the name of the other friends as well (Job 5:27). Perhaps they have been nodding in agreement with their friend’s words, or they have made consensual noises.

Job is deeply disappointed in his friends. He has expected some refreshment from them, as a weary and thirsty traveler expects from wadis in the desert, the running streams of rainwater or molten snow water (verse 16). But when he falls down exhausted to take that refreshment, they turn out to be dried out (verse 17). They have taken a different course and have gone all sides and perished there in the heat of the sun without leaving anything for the thirsty (verse 18). The caravans of Tema and the travelers of Sheba have had this disappointing experience (verses 19-20). With hope they went to the brooks, but how ashamed their trust has become. How disappointing is their finding when they come to the brook, that there is no water.

The comparison with what he expected from his friends, his brothers, is clear. Their friendship in the days of his prosperity seemed promising, but now that he is in the heat of the affliction, they abandon him. He outbursts against his friends, saying that they have become to him like the dried-out brooks for the travelers (verse 21). He leaves no doubt as to how he sees them: "Indeed, you have now become such." He tells them that they see his terror, but that they are afraid and don't know what to do with it.

We can certainly learn from this that we shouldn't put even our best friend between ourselves and God. We may know that the Lord Jesus, as the High Priest, gives help at the right time (Heb 4:16). Still, it is easy to talk when you yourself are not in need. Surely, the Lord has also given others around us just for the time when we cannot manage things by ourselves, hasn't He? Is it always wrong to call on someone else's help? No, it is not. What will disappoint us is that we expect the other person to help in a way only God is able to do. Nor is it right to demand help from others, to claim that help.

Job hasn't demanded help. He has not told them to give him anything, anything at all, to compensate for his loss, even if only minimally (verse 22). He makes no claim to a gift of their wealth. Nor has he asked for their help to escape from the hand of the adversary and the tyrant (verse 23). Here he seems to be referring to God. The only thing he expected was pity, and that did not come. This is very disappointing indeed. Ashamed of justified expectations causes much pain.

Job 6:24-30 | Job Challenges to Test Him

24 *"Teach me, and I will be silent;
 And show me how I have erred.*
 25 *"How painful are honest words!
 But what does your argument prove?*
 26 *"Do you intend to reprove [my] words,
 When the words of one in despair belong to the wind?*
 27 *"You would even cast [lots] for the orphans
 And barter over your friend.*
 28 *"Now please look at me,
 And [see] if I lie to your face.*
 29 *"Desist now, let there be no injustice;
 Even desist, my righteousness is yet in it.*
 30 *"Is there injustice on my tongue?
 Cannot my palate discern calamities?*

If only they could convince him of a sin he had committed (verse 24)! The only thing he wants to know from them is if he has committed an injustice in any way, and therefore, as they say, this mischief has come upon him. Job's plea is that he has a clean conscience and therefore defends himself against the false accusations of his friends.

He asks them to make him understand where he has gone astray, for this is what they accuse him of. Job takes an open, transparent and vulnerable attitude here. In New Testament language, Job is open to a washing of his feet by the three friends. Eliphaz – and through him the other two friends – have made a number of accusations, but without proving anything. Let them do their best to substantiate their accusations.

Genuine friendship is also evidenced by the naming of sin, through which sin can be confessed and the way is free again for contact with God and with one another. Vaguely alluding to sin is a trick of the devil with which he creates much dissatisfaction. We should not accuse anyone of sin unless we can provide clear proof of guilt.

With some sarcasm Job says that the friends speak "honest words", which he also calls "painful" (verse 25). That they are meant to be sarcastic is clear from the following line. There he says that their punitive words prove

nothing at all. They just imagine things, without really realizing what they are saying (verse 26). Their words have no content and no basis, while they themselves feel that they are honest words. On the other hand, they consider the words of the plagued Job as wind, as futile, without substance, though they are spoken out of great despair. They have not really listened to Job's agonizing words, have ignored his suffering, have not taken his heart's cry seriously.

Paul writes that he has also been desperate, that he and others "despaired even of life" (2Cor 1:8). The circumstances were different from those in which Job found himself. The big difference between Job and Paul, however, is that Job despaired of both life and God, whereas Paul did not. Paul did not despair of God, but trusted in Him "who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a [peril] of death, and will deliver [us]" (2Cor 1:9-10).

Once again Job outbursts against his friends. He now calls them the most ruthless people he can think of. He considers them capable of throwing a dice for a defenseless orphan to make money (verse 27). Also, according to him, they wouldn't shun to sell their friend. Job is so disappointed in them that he accuses them of things that are not true. But for his feeling it is like this. He is totally ruined by their mercilessness and lack of sympathy. His outburst is inexcusable, but can be understood by what the friends say to him.

Then he regains some self-control and asks them if they still want to come his way, that is to say if they will be able to have some sympathy for him (verse 28). He doesn't lie to them in the face, does he? He is really desperate, and he cannot think of a reason for this. He calls them to desist and come to their senses, that they will reconsider their opinion of him and the cause of his distress (verse 29). With their view of him and the cause of his distress they commit injustice. He is truly in his right. His "righteousness is yet in it". So let them desist.

Job argues that it was not he who made a mistake, but that they made a mistake. There is no injustice on his tongue (verse 30). He has not uttered a single false word. He even suggests that he is a taster, that he really would know it if he had fallen into these "calamities" through his own fault. Job

emphasizes that he is honest and sincere. He claims that he is still righteous and sincere, that he is perfectly capable of judging his own situation, and that his conscience is perfectly clean and not burdened by some unconfessed sin.

Job wrongly boasts here that he is impeccable in his words. He forgets that he is not perfect. There is only One Who could say: "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (Jn 8:46a).

Job 7

Job 7:1-10 | The Briefness of Life

1 *"Is not man forced to labor on earth,
And [are not] his days like the days of a hired man?*
2 *"As a slave who pants for the shade,
And as a hired man who eagerly waits for his wages,*
3 *So am I allotted months of vanity,
And nights of trouble are appointed me.*
4 *"When I lie down I say,
'When shall I arise?'*
*But the night continues,
And I am continually tossing until dawn.*
5 *"My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt,
My skin hardens and runs.*
6 *"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
And come to an end without hope.*
7 *"Remember that my life is [but] breath;
My eye will not again see good.*
8 *"The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer;
Your eyes [will be] on me, but I will not be.*
9 *"When a cloud vanishes, it is gone,
So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.*
10 *"He will not return again to his house,
Nor will his place know him anymore.*

Job here continues his answer to Eliphaz. He continues with the justification of his vehement expressions of despair. The words in this chapter are of a general nature, but are spoken in the presence of the three friends. Later he addresses his complaint to God. That is why Job's argument increases in vehemence. Job knows like no other mortal man that he is forced to labor on earth (verse 1). Life means forced labor for every human being. The Hebrew word for forced labor, *tsava*, originally meant heavy military service; later it took on the meaning of heavy labor in general. For one per-

son the forced labor is heavier than for another, but forced labor is there. For the Christian it is always true because he is in military service and as a soldier of Jesus Christ has to suffer hardship (2Tim 2:3). In the case of Job, the forced labor is so hard that he longs for its end. For him, every day is a day of hard work, as is the case for a hired man.

Job feels like a slave who has to work in the burning sun and yearns for the shadow of evening (verse 2). He wants to escape the heat of the trial. As a hired man for whom the day cannot pass quickly enough, because he is paid his wages at the end of it, Job longs for the day of misery to be over.

That day of misery has been going on for months (verse 3). They are “months of vanity”. The days of Job’s illness are not only days of misery, but also days in which, with all your toil, you perform nothing and achieve nothing. That gives the feeling of vanity, meaninglessness and emptiness. For God it is not so. We have to learn to accept that God does have a purpose in our lives, even if in our own opinion we spend our days in vanity.

Even during the nights Job does not come loose from misery, because they are “nights of trouble”. He feels the trouble all the time. Those nights are “appointed” to him, similar to the months of vanity he is “allotted”. What is appointed to you, you get. You also get what is allotted. For both, Job didn’t have to do anything. It seems that he uses these words to indicate that he did not deserve the vanity and the trouble.

Normally you get rest by sleeping. A good sleep is refreshing and gives new strength. Sleep can also have a healing effect (Jn 11:12), but even this effect is not given to Job (verse 4). If he wants to go to sleep, he knows that it will be another long night of trouble. That is why he longs to arise right away. But when he is risen, he thinks about how long the day will be again before God makes it evening. Until dawn he will be saturated with restlessness all day long (cf. Deu 28:67). What agony! Nowhere rest and never rest!

The unrest that torments his spirit is accompanied by terrible physical suffering (verse 5). In addition, he looks hideous. There are worms everywhere on his skin. On his wounds there is not an ordinary crust associated with a healing process, but a crust of dirt, which only makes the wound

dirtier and the pain more severe. His skin is cleft, cracked open, and the pus is everywhere.

The days that have passed have always gone faster than we were aware, whether they are days of prosperity or days of adversity (verse 6). The days behind us have flown at the speed of “a weaver’s shuttle” (cf. Jam 4:14b; 1Pet 1:24). The days we experience and the days ahead of us always last longer than we wish when they are days of hopeless pain and sorrow.

Job appeals to God in verse 7 to remember that his life is but a “breath” (cf. Psa 78:39). He says this without hope that God will do it. He does not expect his eye to ever see the good again. Nor will anyone ever see him again from those who see him now (verse 8). They will no longer perceive him, for he will not be there. He has no hope that God will once again turn His eyes away from him for good.

Job feels like a cloud, also to be translated as ‘fog’ or ‘mist’, which you see for a moment and then dissolves or disappears out of sight (verse 9). That is how it is, he says, with someone who goes down to Sheol, the realm of the dead. He disappears from sight and nothing is left of him. Never will he return to live on earth. It does not mean that Job does not believe in the resurrection, but that life on earth has ended for him, and that others will not see him there once he has disappeared from the earth.

What torments him most at this thought is that he will never return to the familiar place of his home and that his familiar place of living will not see him again (verse 10). The familiar streetscape has disappeared for him and he has disappeared from the familiar streetscape. They will no longer see his appearance, hear his footstep and his voice. Thus is death. It puts an end to all that is familiar and valued on earth. Whoever is left behind, must go on without him. The old familiar never returns.

Such are the thoughts of someone who is tormented by questions about the why of what happens to him. However, the believer may know that he is going to a better place, where countless believers have already gone before him. Above all, he may know that death brings him to the Lord Jesus, in paradise, where it is very much better (Lk 23:43; Phil 1:23).

Job 7:11-19 | God Is His Enemy

11 *"Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
 I will speak in the anguish of my spirit,
 I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.*
 12 *"Am I the sea, or the sea monster,
 That You set a guard over me?*
 13 *"If I say, 'My bed will comfort me,
 My couch will ease my complaint,'*
 14 *Then You frighten me with dreams
 And terrify me by visions;*
 15 *So that my soul would choose suffocation,
 Death rather than my pains.*
 16 *"I waste away; I will not live forever.
 Leave me alone, for my days are [but] a breath.*
 17 *"What is man that You magnify him,
 And that You are concerned about him,*
 18 *That You examine him every morning
 And try him every moment?*
 19 *"Will You never turn Your gaze away from me,
 Nor let me alone until I swallow my spittle?*

From verse 11, there is, as it were, a sudden revival with Job. After his words in verses 1-10 about the brevity and vanity of life, his resistance to the fate that God has bestowed on him flares up and he challenges God for it as it were. He calls Him to account.

He cannot keep silent about what God has done to him, he will not keep his mouth shut about it (verse 11). The anguish of his spirit seeks a way out. He finds it by complaining, by expressing the bitterness of his soul. He cannot bear the thought of his rush to the grave and thus the loss of all that is dear to him.

He calls out to God whether he is the sea, or the sea monster to Him (verse 12). Is this how God sees him? For God sets a guard over him as if he were a fierce sea or a sea monster devouring everything. He feels as if God is doing everything He can to restrain him so that he does not harm others.

He tells God that he is trying to find comfort on his bed (verse 13), by which he says that he is not a destructive sea or a sea monster. He also goes to his couch to ease his complaint. He is someone who needs comfort and support, he only yearns for peace and security. How, then, does God come to think that he must be restrained like the sea or the sea monster? In addition, God frightens him with dreams and terrifies him with visions when he tries to find peace (verse 14). Eliphaz has also had visions (Job 4:14-21) and seen the greatness of God in them. But Job only experiences nightmares and sees in his dream only the horrors of God.

Through all his torments, Job experiences God as an enemy, even though he has a strong need for a Friend. But Job accuses God of making life so unbearable for him that he chooses to die by suffocation (verse 15). After all, life no longer makes any sense at all. It consists of a chain of misery that is felt uninterrupted every day and every night. Surely then it is clear that he would rather be dead than alive, isn't it?

He despises life as it is now (verse 16). It has become a heavy burden and has nothing attractive anymore. It is a comforting thought for him that he will not live forever, not always, in this misery on earth. In itself this is a thought that also gives the Christian peace and comfort when he is in trouble. Many Christians live on earth as if they will live here forever. With them there is no desire to leave the earth in exchange for heaven because they are having a great time here.

What for Job is a flee is a desire for the dedicated Christian. Job wants to be free of misery. The Christian looks forward to the joy. Job looks to the here and now, the Christian looks to the future.

Job begs God to leave him alone. His days are a sigh, they are over just like that, but God does not give him a moment's rest in the little time he has. And he has just such a need for rest. Here Job does not know what he is asking for, and fortunately God does not answer his supplication. If God really would leave him alone, He would take His hands off him. That would really mean endless unrest. If God leaves a man to himself, he is lost without salvation.

Once again Job asks God his desperate question as to why He considers the mortal human, that puny man, of such great value, that He concerns

Himself with him (verse 17). Why does the great God of eternity take the time and the effort to visit him every morning and to try him with plagues and pain (verse 18)? Surely it is a waste of time and effort, for it does not benefit Him at all. Job undoubtedly means himself. He impatiently asks why God enjoys tormenting and painning a mortal human like him every day.

The answer to the desperate question of verses 17-18 is magnificently given in Psalm 8 by presenting Christ, the Son of Man, the last Adam (Psa 8:5-8). The value of man to God we see in the Man Christ Jesus. Every trial with which He visits one of His own is meant to make him more conformed to that unique Man.

Job asks God how long He thinks He will continue His trials before He stops paying attention to him and focuses His gaze on something else (verse 19). How long must he be the target of all God's arrows? It feels to Job as if God is constantly pointing His gaze at him in order to hit him. God gives him so little rest that he does not even come to swallow his spittle. Swallowing spittle doesn't take much time, it's done in no time. But even this short time of rest is not given to him by God, as Job experiences.

Job 7:20-21 | Appeal in View of Sin

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

Here Job speaks of his sin, that is, in form of a questioning (verse 20). It is not a confession. Job has a long way to go before he comes to the confession he makes at the end of the book (Job 40:3-5; 42:6). Suppose he had sinned, what should he do? It is not a question of a convinced conscience, but of calling God to account. Who can resist Him? If He seeks sin in man, He will always find it.

“Watcher of men” is a name that indicates that God cares for men and watches over them or protects them from evil (Isa 27:3; Psa 31:23). However, Job does not use this name in that sense, but in a disapproving sense. He sees in God Someone Who always looks after him and never leaves him alone. He is God’s target and how does God hit him! No arrow is amiss, every arrow hits its aim. God is aiming at him. He pours out all His displeasure on him.

It feels to Job that he has become a burden to himself. This is the heaviest burden a man can bear. We can carry another man’s burden, but there’s no one who can take over our own self as a burden. Everyone knows in depth only their own need. There is no greater deliverance than the deliverance of ourselves, of our own self.

In verse 20 Job speaks about his (possible) sin. In verse 21 he asks why God does not forgive him his transgression if indeed he should have sinned. He also asks why God does not take away his iniquity. The reason he gives is that he will lie in the dust after all. Then he is no longer there.

Job is desperate. Why can’t God forgive him instead of continuing with His punishing hand? There is a need for Job to be redeemed. If God is able to forgive and redeem, why does He keep punishing him? After all, God does not gain anything by continuing to punish him, for he is going to die anyway and will lie in the dust (Job 3:13). Then God will no longer see him at all, even if He were still looking so earnestly for him.

Although Job here speaks too humanly of God, we still hear his longing for God. He does not want to abandon God and also expects God not to abandon him, but to seek for him.

Job 8

Introduction

Bildad's first speech contains some important (negative) lessons about human nature in general and about the qualities of counselors in particular. Bildad hears Job's words with his ears, but he does not listen with his heart. Bildad's attitude should be seen in the light of Job's begging for pity in Job 6. All people need pity in most everyday situations, how much more Job in his exceptional suffering. Repeatedly Job calls himself helpless (Job 6:13) and desperate (Job 6:14,26), a man who needs the pity of his friends.

Anyone who curses his birthday and prefers death to life needs help. His three friends have come to that end, but it does not come to anything. Job, by their attitude, sees them more as part of his problem than as those who offer a solution.

It is almost unbelievable that his friend Bildad answers him so insensitive. There is not only indifference to Job's condition, but also a certain arrogance. For example, he suggests that Job's children have received what they deserved (verse 4) and that Job is on his way to suffer the same fate (verse 5). The lesson to be learned is that there are such people in the world. They do their 'non-service' to people under the guise that they are special friends of God. And we are no better by nature. If the Lord does not keep us, we, like Bildad, can be businesslike, sharp and arrogant toward those who are in great need.

The lessons we learn from Job's friends about help are negative, but the three friends are not equal. There is a difference between them. The book proposes three helpers instead of one, because each of them has their own approach of and message for Job. Eliphaz does start with some sense of Job's need, but later he also loses his patience (Job 22). The other two are more distant and are above him. None of them is able to accept Job unconditionally.

Certainly, Job is a persistent 'patient', but they are incapable of being involved with him. Their advice will be well-intentioned, but has the effect

of making Job even more persistent toward them and offering them more and more resistance. Undoubtedly much of the problem is their academic insistence on the point of view – which they refuse to change – that sin causes suffering, and vice versa that suffering proves that there is sin.

An important lesson to be learned from this book is that counselors, those who provide pastoral care, should not sit in an ivory tower. They should be able to listen, get involved and respect the sincerity of the personality of the person they are trying to help. They should also always keep in mind that they may not have a full understanding of the nature of the problem. Again, our understanding is limited and our knowing is in part and therefore imperfect (1Cor 13:9).

Job 8:1-2 | Bildad Blames Job

1 *Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,*
2 *“How long will you say these things,*
And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind?”

Bildad, the Shuhite – probably a descendant of Shuah, a son of Abraham (Gen 25:1-2) – takes the floor to answer Job (verse 1). He assumes the same basic idea as Eliphaz, but his tone is harsher and sharper. Eliphaz begins questioning (Job 4:2), but Bildad immediately takes a condemning attitude (verse 2). He refutes in harsh words what Job has answered Eliphaz and wants to silence him immediately. Job experiences God as an adversary and Bildad wants to defend the righteousness of God. Maybe that is the reason for his fierceness and sharp tone.

How long does Job intend to keep proclaiming such nonsense? Let him stop that right now. His words are nothing at all. He has complained that the three friends regard his words as wind, i.e. as meaning nothing (Job 6:26). Bildad reinforces this assessment and now calls Job’s words “a mighty wind”. With this he says that Job’s words are not only nothing, “wind”, but that they are also blown-up, “great” (cf. Job 15:2). Bildad judges Job’s cry of distress as, what we would say, “much ado about nothing”.

Job 8:3-7 | Is God Unrighteous?

3 *“Does God pervert justice?*

Or does the Almighty pervert what is right?

*4 "If your sons sinned against Him,
Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression.*

*5 "If you would seek God
And implore the compassion of the Almighty,*

*6 If you are pure and upright,
Surely now He would rouse Himself for you
And restore your righteous estate.*

*7 "Though your beginning was insignificant,
Yet your end will increase greatly.*

Job should listen carefully, Bildad seems to say. To awaken Job, Bildad opens his argument in questioning form with a theological truth that stands as a house (verse 3). It seems as if he is quoting his ancestor Abraham (Gen 18:25). Of course, God does not pervert justice and the Almighty does not pervert what is right. So, Job, what happens to you is nothing but that God's justice has its course and that the Almighty exercises His righteousness, and that is because you have sinned.

In verse 4, Bildad even suggests that Job's children are to blame for their own sins (cf. Ps 55:23). This reproach must be heartbreaking for the feelings of a father who has found no evidence of such wickedness in his children and who has carefully guarded their spiritual well-being (Job 1:5). It is as if Bildad says to him: 'Your prayers have been useless. God was not willing to save your children.'

'By the way', Bildad continues, 'you yourself will do well to seek God seriously and implore the Almighty for compassion' (verse 5). This is what Eliphaz has already advised Job to do (Job 5:8). Seeking God is a good advice. Who will deny it? But in this case the clear assumption in this advice is that Job himself has also sinned. The Lord Jesus speaks differently about cause and effect in response to disasters that affect people than Bildad does and perhaps we do too (Lk 13:1-5).

Apart from the fact that Job must seek God and implore the Almighty for compassion, according to Bildad Job must also become "pure and upright" (verse 6). Here too we hear the undertone of the accusation that Job is not. Bildad reasons from the situation of Job. Job has always pretended to be

pure and upright, but that has all been hypocrisy. This can clearly be deduced from the disasters God has brought upon him. With his assessment, but above all condemnation of Job, Bildad goes against the testimony God has given of Job (Job 1:1,8; 2:3). Man who judges only by what he perceives with his eyes (1Sam 16:7) always comes into conflict with God's judgment.

Bildad continues to reason and promises Job that God will certainly "rouse Himself" for his sake when he 'repents'. By this he means that God will again become active for his benefit and will commit Himself for his good. Now it is as if God has taken His hands off Job and is not paying attention to him. But if Job shows that he has learned his lesson – but the lesson that Bildad teaches him, of course – that will change.

According to Bildad's logic, God will "restore your righteous estate". This implies the assumption that Job's house had become a house of wickedness. The former prosperity will return there when Job repents. His children and servants will live in peace and he will once again be rich in cattle. In fact, what he had – and Job was one of the richest people in the East (Job 1:3) – will seem small and insignificant compared to what he will receive (verse 7).

What Bildad says will indeed be fulfilled (Job 42:12), but in a very different way than he indicates. The reasoning of Bildad is based on the idea of achievement and quid pro quo. Job will not be blessed for his integrity, nor will he be blessed for a confession of supposed evil. He will be blessed, not because he has deserved it, but because God gives it to him in grace.

Job 8:8-10 | The Light of the Past

8 *"Please inquire of past generations,
And consider the things searched out by their fathers.*
9 *"For we are [only] of yesterday and know nothing,
Because our days on earth are as a shadow.*
10 *"Will they not teach you [and] tell you,
And bring forth words from their minds?*

While Eliphaz appeals to his own experience, Bildad relies on tradition. His claims come from wisdom of the past, from the traditions of the fathers (verse 8). You can read about this in their stories and sayings. Then Job

will see that his arguments are correct because that is how it worked in the past. A man lives too short to acquire wisdom, and so he must rely on the wisdom of the ancestors.

At least, that is Bildad's interpretation. His thesis is that the collected and handed down insights of the ancestors teaches what he claims. Only a fool will argue against that. Then you get all previous generations against you. Surely you don't want to think you know any better than all those people who have gone before you, do you? They all say that the righteous in this life will be rewarded and the wicked will have disasters over them.

Let us not imagine anything, Bildad says, because "we are [only] of yesterday and know nothing, because our days on earth are as a shadow" (verse 9). We just showed up and from the beginning we are a diminishing matter (cf. 1Chr 29:15). Before we know it, we have disappeared from the world stage again. What will we be able to observe in that short period of time in order to come to a well-founded conclusion? We shouldn't think that in our short human life we can take a different view of history, let alone rewrite it.

No, just listen to what the generations before us have been through. If you take their teaching to heart and let it speak to you, you will receive wisdom and speak as they did (verse 10). You will not be stubbornly holding on to your own views about the disasters that have struck you, but will join their findings.

With his appeal to tradition Bildad completely misses the point. Life is indeed too short to come to an understanding in your own strength. The ancestors may indeed have acquired certain wisdom. Nevertheless, in order to get to know God's thoughts, we must not turn to the past, but to God and His Word (1Cor 2:9-10). History teaches that a one-sided and exaggerated admiration for what 'the ancestors' have thought and learned has always hindered God's work. No matter how much blessing there is in a spiritual inheritance, we learn to understand the truth only from the Word of God and through practicing fellowship with Him ourselves.

God sometimes wants to bring old, forgotten truths back to the attention of His own at a given time. He wants to put in the right light other truths that are known, but applied one-sidedly and pushed forward too much.

But when human statements, however beautiful and true they may be, are placed between God's living and powerful Word and the believer, they only create obstacles to the workings of the Spirit.

Job 8:11-19 | The Day of the Wicked

11 "Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh?

Can the rushes grow without water?

12 "While it is still green [and] not cut down,

Yet it withers before any [other] plant.

13 "So are the paths of all who forget God;

And the hope of the godless will perish,

14 Whose confidence is fragile,

And whose trust a spider's web.

15 "He trusts in his house, but it does not stand;

He holds fast to it, but it does not endure.

16 "He thrives before the sun,

And his shoots spread out over his garden.

17 "His roots wrap around a rock pile,

He grasps a house of stones.

18 "If he is removed from his place,

Then it will deny him, [saying], 'I never saw you.'

19 "Behold, this is the joy of His way;

And out of the dust others will spring.

Bildad supports his account of cause and effect with an example from nature. He also connects to his reference to previous generations and the brevity of their existence. The wisdom of the past has already seen that no papyrus grow where there is no marsh and that rushes does not grow without water (verse 11). Job knows as well as he and previous generations that this is so.

It is also clear how short-lived rushes is when there is no water (verse 12). If it isn't cut down, it won't last long. Bildad then applies this to "the paths of all who forget God" and "the hope of the godless" (verse 13). He also seems to deepen this application from the wisdom of previous generations. He only wants to say that he is not saying anything new and that Job should take this into account.

In the past it has always been the case that he who is rooted in God has prosperity and that he who acts and walks without involving God has only a brief life. He who forgets God can also forget his hope of blessing, just as rushes does not have to count on growing if there is no water. The godless is he who thinks he is receiving God's blessing, while simply ignoring God in his activities. In veiled terms, Bildad says Job is godless. To him, the suffering of Job is proof that Job has forgotten God. This is a very low insinuation toward a sincere man immersed in misery.

He who forgets God and is punished by Him for it, has a confidence that turns out to be fragile (verse 14). Job, Bildad says again in veiled terms, put his confidence in his sincerity and believed that God would bless him. But this trust turns out to have the power of a spider's web, so no power at all. When a storm comes, the spider tries to hold all the threads of his cobwebs, his spun house, together, but the wind blows his house away. It is foolish to assume that cobwebs offer any protection against a storm (cf. Isa 59:6).

"Spider web" is in Hebrew 'house of a spider'. This leads Bildad to move on to the house of the one who forgets God (verse 15). Such a person may well think that his house is his strength, but he will be very much mistaken about it. His spider's house offers him no security; if he wants to hold fast to it, it collapses.

Surely Job must recognize this picture? Isn't that how it went with him and his house? With all his true words, Bildad completely misses the point by presenting everything he says to Job. He paints Job as someone who has forgotten God and therefore has nothing left of everything he used to rely on. According to Bildad Job is a hypocrite. All his uprightness he has always played. Such uprightness is like a cobweb and offers no protection when a storm rages over his life. Surely this is evident from his current situation.

Bildad still compares Job to a sap-rich plant which "thrives before the sun" (verse 16). This looks at the situation of prosperity in which Job used to live. "His shoots" represent Job's children. But because of the stony ground the plant does not shoot a root (verse 17; cf. Mt 13:5,20-21). A storm easily tears the plant away from its place (verse 18). There is nothing left of that

‘sap-rich plant’; it looks as if it has never been there (Psa 37:35-36). In Job’s present situation, nothing reminds one of his former prosperity.

In verse 19 Bildad says with some sarcasm what he meant by the preceding equations. The joy of someone who has known a great deal of prosperity and has become famous for it is only of short duration. That is the fate of all hypocrites. He has been there for a while and then he disappears from the earth and also from memory. In his place others will emerge from the dust and take his place. Nobody thinks about him anymore, everything revolves around these newcomers now.

Job 8:20-22 | Divine Retribution for the Righteous

20 *“Lo, God will not reject [a man of] integrity,
Nor will He support the evildoers.
21 “He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
And your lips with shouting.
22 “Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
And the tent of the wicked will be no longer.”*

Bildad returns to the direct attack on Job. With the call “lo” he asks Job’s attention (verse 20). He tells him that God does not reject a man of “integrity”. A man of integrity means someone with a clean conscience, someone who is ‘innocent’. Bildad says here that God does not reject an innocent person. The underlying accusation is again that Job is rejected by God and that Job is not upright or innocent. Bildad is again grossly mistaken. For he does not look at Job the way God looks at him, for God has said of him that he is upright (Job 1:1,8; 2:3).

Nor is Job an ‘evildoer’, as Bildad supposes. Indeed, God does not “support the evildoers” to help them, which He does to His own. Bildad does not know it, but God has also given the clear testimony of Job that he turns away from evil (Job 1:1,8; 2:3). If a man is unaware of God’s view of a person or a thing, he always comes to wrong conclusions. Whoever takes into account that only God has complete knowledge of a person or a thing, will be cautious and reluctant in his judgment of anyone else.

At the end of his first speech Bildad has another promise for Job (verse 21). It is a promise that follows everything he said before. It means that

God will make Job laugh again when he has converted from his wrong way. Job's enemies will then be finished and even gone (verse 22). Job may count on inner satisfaction and outer peace and security.

What Bildad says is nothing but a businesslike enumeration of cause and effect. This line of reasoning characterizes the three friends. There is not a trace of compassion and comfort for Job in it.

Job 9

Introduction

In the previous chapter Bildad argued, on the basis of the tradition of the fathers, that God's government is simply based on the law of cause and effect, of sowing and mowing, of sin and retribution. Job responds to this, in which he demonstrates his powerlessness opposite a God Whom, to his sorrow, he must experience as an adversary, when in fact he longs to serve Him.

Job 9:1-4 | No One Can Compete With God

*1 Then Job answered,
2 "In truth I know that this is so;
But how can a man be in the right before God?
3 "If one wished to dispute with Him,
He could not answer Him once in a thousand [times].
4 "Wise in heart and mighty in strength,
Who has defied Him without harm?*

Job's answer to Bildad is introduced by the sentence which also introduced the answer to Eliphaz: "Then Job answered" (verse 1; Job 6:1). Job is not convinced by what Bildad said. He is of a completely different opinion.

There is an intense bitterness in the first words of his answer. Apparently he agrees with Bildad when he says "in truth ..." (verse 2). But it is an agreement in which irony resounds. Job says, as it were: 'Of course, dear Bildad, you're forcing an open door'. Job also knows that there can be no "man ... in the right before God". He emphasizes that, as a man, i.e. a mortal human being, he has no chance to exist before God. He asks his question with the built-in certainty that it is impossible. The Divine answer to his question is only given, but then completely, in the New Testament. Paul's letter to the Romans is entirely devoted to that answer.

Job's words do not stem from a submissive will, from trust in the goodness of God. They conceal the harshness of despair. Power is right. God has

power on His side, and therefore He is always right. Who can resist Him? He can call anyone to account and no one will be able to answer for Him (verse 3). If God presents the human being with only one out of a thousand accusations against him, he knows nothing to answer for. Man has no defense whatsoever to the countless sins he has committed, in his words, in his deeds, and in his thoughts.

No one escapes His judgment. God is “wise in heart and mighty in strength” (verse 4). Wisdom and strength are a rare combination, which is found only in God, not in any human being. A man can be wise, but he lacks the strength to put his wisdom into action. A man can also have strength, but he lacks the wisdom to make good use of it. But no matter how wise or how strong you are, you cannot compete with God.

He who defies the only wise and almighty God does so to his own harm. Literally it says: “Stiffened his neck against God and remained safe [or has peace].” God is so wise and mighty that a successful rebellion against Him is impossible. Man’s true wisdom and also his duty is to surrender to God. Then he will have peace.

If a sinner confesses his sins and believes in the Lord Jesus, he will be declared righteous and have peace *with* God (Rom 5:1). If the believer entrusts himself to God, no matter how much trouble he is in, he will have the peace of God in his heart (Phil 4:6-7). The Lord Jesus knew this perfect peace because He trusted God completely (cf. Isa 26:3-4).

Job 9:5-9 | God’s Irresistible Strength

5 “[It is God] who removes the mountains, they know not [how],
When He overturns them in His anger;
6 Who shakes the earth out of its place,
And its pillars tremble;
7 Who commands the sun not to shine,
And sets a seal upon the stars;
8 Who alone stretches out the heavens
And tramples down the waves of the sea;
9 Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades,
And the chambers of the south;

In this section Job continues on the strength and greatness of God. The language he uses is of high quality, and his description is true. But the undertone is that of terrible doubt as to the goodness of God's great and mighty Person to him. He feels himself no match for that great and mighty God. Neither is he, nor any human being. However, it is not a question of strength, but of trust. And the latter is lacking in Job. He feels wrongfully humiliated by God. In his eyes God abuses His power. In verses 5-7 the might of God is therefore painted in its destructive strength.

What shall he, puny mortal, begin against a God Who removes mountains and does so in a way that no one notices (verse 5; Psa 46:2)? In the Bible, mountains are an example of firmness and stability. If He overturns mountains in His anger, with what ease does He overturn Job? If He touches the earth with a finger, it shakes out of its place (verse 6). Its pillars, which give stability to the earth, tremble. Surely, the life of Job is nothing in comparison, is it?

He can even change the laws of nature (verse 7). One word from Him is enough to prevent the sun from rising and the stars darken so that they no longer shine. Job seems to say that God did the same with the sun of life and the shining stars in his life. His days have become dark and the night of misery has no end.

God as the Creator of heaven and earth has power over the universe. When He created the heavens, no one was His helper: "He alone stretches out the heavens" (verse 8; cf. Isa 44:24; Psa 104:2). Even the wild, high waves of the sea are under His authority. For He created the sea (Gen 1:7). He walks on it, as we can see in the walking of the Lord Jesus on the sea (Mt 14:25-26). If the disciples see Him walking in this way, however, it does not bring peace to their hearts, but unrest. This is also the case with Job.

Furthermore, Job describes God's power of creation in the universe in the whole expanse above him (verse 9). He does this by listing the four most important and brightest constellations that were visible at the time. God created the Bear in the north, the Orion (Evening Star) in the west, the Pleiades (the Seven Stars) in the east, and the chambers of the south (a constellation that was brightly visible four thousand years ago, but now no longer is by shifting of constellations) in the south. Job mentions these

constellations not to admire them, as in Psalm 19, but as an explanation of God's absolute, irresistible strength.

Job 9:10-24 | God's Inaccessibility and Judicial Acts

10 *Who does great things, unfathomable,
And wondrous works without number.*
11 *"Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him;
Were He to move past [me], I would not perceive Him.*
12 *"Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?
Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?'"*
13 *"God will not turn back His anger;
Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab.*
14 *"How then can I answer Him,
[And] choose my words before Him?*
15 *"For though I were right, I could not answer;
I would have to implore the mercy of my judge.*
16 *"If I called and He answered me,
I could not believe that He was listening to my voice.*
17 *"For He bruises me with a tempest
And multiplies my wounds without cause.*
18 *"He will not allow me to get my breath,
But saturates me with bitterness.*
19 *"If [it is a matter] of power, behold, [He is] the strong one!
And if [it is a matter] of justice, who can summon Him?*
20 *"Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me;
Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.*
21 *"I am guiltless;
I do not take notice of myself;
I despise my life.*
22 *"It is [all] one; therefore I say,
'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.'*
23 *"If the scourge kills suddenly,
He mocks the despair of the innocent.*
24 *"The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
He covers the faces of its judges.
If [it is] not [He], then who is it?*

Here Job describes in wonderful poetic language that he has no access to this great and almighty God, Who hides Himself and gives no account of His ways to anyone. There is no one who can fathom Him and therefore understand what He is doing (verse 10). God is not only unfathomable in His motives, He is also inimitable in His wondrous works. His wonders are incomparable and uncountable.

Job here says the same as Eliphaz (Job 5:9). Only he applies these words in a completely different, opposite way. Eliphaz wants to show how God by His strength does what is right and proper, that He brings those who grieve to safety and frees the poor from the grip of powers that are stronger than them. But Job sees God's strength as that of a sovereign majesty who is answerable to no one.

God is uncontrollable and imperceptible. Job experiences that God passes by him, but he does not see Him (verse 11). He feels that God is passing by him, but he does not perceive Him. God is a force that works mysteriously to do whatever He wants, without anyone being able to stop Him. In short, God cannot be reached or approached because of His greatness.

He is so sovereign that He can snatch away everything He wants (verse 12). There is no one who can command Him with any authority to give back what He has taken. There is not even one who can ask Him: "What are You doing?" (cf. Dan 4:35). There is no one above Him. Between the lines we read the background of the personal tragedy of Job himself: everything has been taken away from him by Someone Who cannot be called to account by him.

What Job says here, he said before: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21b). That was in surrender, but it was immediately after everything has been taken away from him. Then the full weight of what had happened to him had not yet penetrated him. Now he is a few months and many thoughts about God further. He has been reflecting on God's actions in connection with what has happened to him. What he said earlier in surrender now has an undertone of reproach.

All that Job knows and has spoken of God are impressive truths about God. They are not mere theological truths, but deeply felt truths. But this knowledge of God offers him no consolation. It gives him an ever-deeper

sense of total powerlessness opposite that so great and powerful God. We can sometimes feel this way, for example when He takes health away from us or possessions, our friends, the life of a loved one. Then He wants us to find peace in the awareness that whatever is disappearing from our lives, it is He Who has taken it away.

Job goes on to speak of God Who does not turn back His anger (verse 13). This is true for anyone who persists in his sins. On such a person the wrath of God abides (Jn 3:36). God does turn back His anger from anyone who believes in His Son Jesus Christ. He can do so because He did not turn His wrath away from His Son when He took upon Himself the sins of everyone who believes in Him.

God's anger strikes "the helpers of Rahab". They cannot stand, but "crouch" beneath Him. Rahab means "arrogant" and is a sea monster (Job 26:12). Rahab is used as the poetic name for Egypt (Isa 30:7; 51:9), the people who do not care about God. All their pride and denial of God will be judged by Him.

If the greatest powers in the world are to bow down before God, what can Job do against God (verse 14)? What shall he say to God to justify himself (verse 15)? He cannot but "implore the mercy" from Him, Whom he calls here "my judge". Job does not say this because he is convinced of his sins, for he speaks of himself as righteous. But he sees himself opposite Someone Who always has the right at His side and always knows how to find something that is not right. No matter how carefully he would choose his words, there will always be something that his Judge would consider wrong. So it makes no sense to defend yourself against that great God.

Job sees himself as completely insignificant opposite that exalted, sovereign, and unreachable God (verse 16). If he would call out to God and God would answer, he could not believe that God has heard his voice. We hear again that struggle of Job in his dealings with God. He wants to call out to the God in Whom he believes, but Whom he does not understand in His dealings with him.

He expresses this incomprehension in verses 17-18. God bruised him with a tempest and made his wounds numerous. But Job cries out, He has no reason to do so. Job cannot understand why God has done so with him,

while he has served Him so faithfully. And there is no end to this misery. He gets no chance from God to get his breath (cf. Job 7:19). On the contrary, God satiates him with bitterness. While talking, Job's portrayal of God becomes more and more negative.

Once again Job points out that God is strong when it comes to a trial of strength (verse 19). He no longer even talks about his weakness in comparison. God is strong, that's all. Only He is strong. But is God also righteous? That's what Job questions, or even more so, he strongly doubts. The doubt of God's righteousness stems from the conviction of his own righteousness. He wouldn't know who could summon him for some transgression. After all, he has done nothing for which he could be accused.

Job considers himself righteous (verse 20). But yes, he realizes, God will find something in the words he speaks to his defense that will make Him declare him guilty. Job realizes that all his outward righteousness is no excuse for the wrong words that come out of his mouth. His words prove that he has no good thoughts about God in his heart. So, despite his sincerity, God will have to declare him guilty. You always lose a lawsuit against God.

It seems that Job is bowing to God's condemnation, although he emphasizes that he is guiltless (verse 21). If God condemns him, he surrenders. He does not take notice of himself, he despises his life. Surely life has no meaning any more. Let judgment come.

It does not matter at all. It doesn't matter if you are guiltless, like him, or if you are wicked (verse 22). God kills both one and the other (cf. Ecc 9:2). Surely this is clear from the way God acts with him, a sincere one, isn't it? He does the same with him as with the wicked. Here again it is clear that Job doubts the government of God, not to say that he accuses God of indifference. In any case, he cannot understand God's way of acting.

Let us not be too hard on Job for his failure and let us not forget that these are the words of a desperate one. God lets Job speak, He lets him speak without interrupting him. We should not want to silence him with our well-intentioned advice on how he should see the matter. What we can do is pray in humility whether the Lord will keep our hearts in fellowship with Him to learn the lessons this book contains for us.

The scourge of death can suddenly enter a person's life without any reason, without any prior warning (verse 23). Job has experienced that scourge. Time after time he has been scourged in rapid succession with messages of death. According to Job, God even "mocks the despair of the innocent". As if God has a certain pleasure in making those who are innocent and therefore desperate even more desperate. This is how it can be experienced by believers who suffer long and hopeless suffering. Each day added to this suffering increases despair. When God is also experienced as a cruel adversary, the desperate is hopeless.

Job has nowhere on earth to turn (verse 24). The wicked is in charge. Certainly, it is true that satan, the great wicked one, is "the ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31). But that does not mean that God no longer has control over the world. Job himself says that "the earth is given over into the hand of the wicked" (cf. Lk 4:6; Jn 19:11). 'Given' means that God is behind it. God has complete control over everything, including the evil that takes place.

We can know this, just like Job, but we can forget it when we are completely consumed by our misery and nothing seems like God is doing anything for our benefit. In fact, according to Job, God does not allow justice to take its course. He prevents the good judges who are still there from fulfilling their task, because He covers their faces, that is, He takes away their understanding of the law.

In the last part of this verse we hear again how Job holds on to God as the cause of his misery. He proclaims it as a question: "If [it is] not [He], then who is it?" It sounds like a reproach. At the same time there is also the element of hope. He has nothing to do with satan, nor with earthly judges, but with God. Each time he speaks about or to God. There is no alternative to Job. And that is precisely what makes his struggle so fierce. He doesn't understand God, Whom he experiences as cruel, but he can't live without Him either.

Job 9:25-28 | Job's Complaint

25 *"Now my days are swifter than a runner;*

They flee away, they see no good.

26 *"They slip by like reed boats,*

*Like an eagle that swoops on its prey.
27 "Though I say, 'I will forget my complaint,
I will leave off my [sad] countenance and be cheerful,'
28 I am afraid of all my pains,
I know that You will not acquit me.*

In this section Job applies his argument about God's arbitrariness and alleged cruelty to his own situation. Again he speaks of the speed with which his days have passed without seeing the good (verses 25-26; Job 7:6). The days in which he was prosperous are long past, yea, in oblivion. In itself, it is important that we too are aware that life is quickly over. The question is how we give substance to our life. Do we live for the world or for God? What happens for the world is lost together with life; what happens for God remains forever.

Job can no longer remember the good of the former days; those days passed so quickly. He makes comparisons with what goes fast on earth: "a runner", on the water: "reed boats", and in the sky: "an eagle". The speed of an eagle also has to do with the food it flies toward.

The days of prosperity are over and forgotten. His complaint, which he cannot forget, has come instead, (verse 27). He is not able to take in anything pleasant. It is impossible for him to bring even a smile to his face. There is not a glimpse of joy in him. There is only the unending physical and spiritual suffering that he cannot possibly forget, which also makes his face scarred and marred.

He can say that he wants to forget his complaint, that he wants to put on another, a happy face and wants to refresh himself, but then he fears that all this suffering will start again (verse 28). He can't get away from that. That reality is "all my pains". The greatest pain, however, is that God will not acquit him, that He does not hold him innocent anyway. That is also what he keeps hearing from his friends.

Job 9:29-35 | Job's Longing for an Umpire

*29 "I am accounted wicked,
Why then should I toil in vain?
30 "If I should wash myself with snow*

*And cleanse my hands with lye,
 31 Yet You would plunge me into the pit,
 And my own clothes would abhor me.
 32 "For [He is] not a man as I am that I may answer Him,
 That we may go to court together.
 33 "There is no umpire between us,
 Who may lay his hand upon us both.
 34 "Let Him remove His rod from me,
 And let not dread of Him terrify me.
 35 "[Then] I would speak and not fear Him;
 But I am not like that in myself.*

Job says that whatever he does to convince God of his innocence will always be in vain (verse 29). So why should he do his best? Surely he can never compete with God. That is why it is best for him to submit to Him. He does this not because he agrees with God in His dealings with him, but because God is stronger than he is and therefore always right.

He addresses himself directly to God in verses 30-31. 'Imagine', he says to God, 'that I wash myself thoroughly with the purest snow and cleanse my hands with lye. It couldn't be any cleaner. But what are You doing then? Then You plunge me into a cesspool full of filth, where I come out so dirty and smelly that I can't put my clothes on anymore.' Job uses this extraordinarily strong language to express the feeling he has about how God treats him. Whatever he tries to prove his innocence, God does nothing with it. On the contrary, God increases his suffering. Surely in this way he cannot appear before God to go to court together.

We could say that Job has and gives a very wrong portrayal of God. Then we would be right because God is not like that as Job experiences Him. We know that from Scripture. At the same time we would be on the side of Job's friends. Therefore, it is not the intention to attack Job because of what he says. That's what the friends do. God wants to teach us to become a true friend of Job by listening carefully to him and being aware of who is speaking. It is the language of a totally desperate one.

Job sees himself confronted by Someone Who is not his equal. Against a man, a lawsuit would be a real possibility. But he is faced with Someone

Who is at infinite distance from him (verse 32). There is an unbridgeable gap between him and God. It is a completely unequal and therefore unfair relationship. If Job and God were to come together to court to plead their case, Job would be nowhere. How can he, smeared with dirt, appear before that holy God? How could he give Him an adequate answer, one that would satisfy Him with regard to his vision of his suffering?

Again, in verses 33-35, Job tries to propose a possible lawsuit where he still has some chance of being proved right. According to Job, there is no “umpire” (verse 33) between him and God. The umpire that Job desires is someone who can “lay his hand upon us both”. By this he means someone who stands above the parties and for whom both parties, that is to say he and God, are equal. This umpire could then, of course, understand the situation of Job and bring reconciliation between the two parties. But there is indeed no such person.

There is ‘an umpire’, a Mediator, the Lord Jesus, Who has met man’s needs toward God by satisfying all the holy demands of God (1Tim 2:5). This “Umpire” has not proven Job’s innocence, but has taken on Job’s guilt. Job will see this partly later (Job 16:20-21; 19:25-27).

Since there is no umpire, he himself takes up his case and calls upon God to take away “His rod” with which He disciplines Job (verse 34). He asks the same for the “dread of Him”. Let God take it away as well, so that the dread of God may be removed. Then there will be room for him to speak without fear of Him and to account for himself before Him (verse 35). Then he will face a lawsuit against Him with confidence. With his statement “but I am not like that in myself”, he indicates that there is no sin to be pointed out with him. So he will plead his innocence with good result.

Job presupposes that he can prove that he has not deserved the suffering that has been inflicted on him if he is given a fair chance in a trial. Because he doesn’t get that chance, he necessarily submits to his suffering, without acknowledging that God is righteous in what He brings over him.

God is often accused of injustice, severity, and harshness. This does not always happen out loud, but in the heart. We should not blame Job for his impatience and irreverent language when we have not yet come to know our own heart in times of trial similar to what has befallen Job.

Job 10

Introduction

In spite of his speech about the senselessness of an argument against God, Job is forced by his terrible suffering to go on with his complaint. The language that Job speaks against God in this section is not the result of his physical suffering, but of the wrestling of his faith in the goodness of God. He cannot but see the hand of God in all the suffering that befalls him.

At the same time, he cannot understand that God is inflicting this suffering on him. This leads him to make statements or better exclamations about God that are not true. God does not call him to account for this. His friends do. But even they don't speak about God as He is. The inner conflict that Job has with his situation is getting bigger and bigger as a result. We taste the bitterness of it in the following verses.

Job 10:1-17 | Again Job's Complaint Against God

1 *"I loathe my own life;
I will give full vent to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.*
2 *"I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me;
Let me know why You contend with me.*
3 *'Is it right for You indeed to oppress,
To reject the labor of Your hands,
And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?*
4 *'Have You eyes of flesh?
Or do You see as a man sees?*
5 *'Are Your days as the days of a mortal,
Or Your years as man's years,*
6 *That You should seek for my guilt
And search after my sin?*
7 *'According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty,
Yet there is no deliverance from Your hand.*

8 *'Your hands fashioned and made me altogether,
And would You destroy me?*
9 *'Remember now, that You have made me as clay;
And would You turn me into dust again?*
10 *'Did You not pour me out like milk
And curdle me like cheese;*
11 *Clothe me with skin and flesh,
And knit me together with bones and sinews?*
12 *'You have granted me life and lovingkindness;
And Your care has preserved my spirit.*
13 *'Yet these things You have concealed in Your heart;
I know that this is within You:*
14 *If I sin, then You would take note of me,
And would not acquit me of my guilt.*
15 *'If I am wicked, woe to me!
And if I am righteous, I dare not lift up my head.
[I am] sated with disgrace and conscious of my misery.*
16 *'Should [my head] be lifted up, You would hunt me like a lion;
And again You would show Your power against me.*
17 *'You renew Your witnesses against me
And increase Your anger toward me;
Hardship after hardship is with me.*

Job continues his answer to Bildad. He loathes his own life (verse 1). The burden is unbearable. He must express himself and let himself go. He gives free rein to his complaint and speaks from the bitterness of his soul. The expression of complaints is a way to draw attention for the situation a person is in. There are people who always complain out of dissatisfaction with their circumstances. They think they have suffered badly compared to others. This type of complainer about their fate, complains because they feel that they have been wronged and because their desires are not being met. Job is not that kind of complainer. He really has something to complain about.

His complaint is against God (verse 2). God should “not condemn” him or let him know why He is doing this to him. Job is not yet ready to resign himself to his fate and certainly not to surrender to God for his fate. Rather,

he should call God to account. Then, if God does not let him know why He is fighting him, he will ask God his questions.

It is, of course, inappropriate to call God to account. Unbelief does so in great moderation, because it denies there is a sovereign God. Paul says to such people: "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" (Rom 9:20). But Job is not such a person. He wrestles with God and, out of the greatest despair, slings his questions to heaven. God does not blame him for putting up a big mouth against Him. He knows Job and lets him rage until Job comes face to face with Him (Job 42:5-6).

Job does by no means and nowhere abandon God. It is precisely his great difficulty with God's actions that drives him toward God. In his struggle to understand God, he fires a number of questions at God. He wants to know from Him whether it is right for Him to oppress him (verse 3). What is His gain if He uses His power to oppress him? Faith answers: "For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men" (Lam 3:33). But Job is not that far yet.

He knows that God's hands have made him, that God did also "labor" for him. But what does God do with him, the labor of His hands? He rejects him. Surely, this is impossible to reconcile, isn't it? Doesn't God love His own work? But there is nothing of that in His treatment of Job. He treats Job, who has served Him so faithfully, as a masterpiece without value. And what is even stranger is that He looks favorably on the schemes of the wicked. They live happily in the light, while he is in darkness.

Would all this escape God? That is why Job asks God if He sometimes has the eyes of flesh and sees as a man sees, so that He has overlooked Job's suffering. A creature cannot look beyond its own horizon. A human being certainly cannot look into the hearts of others (verse 4). But God does, doesn't He? That is the desperate underlying thought of Job. But then he can no longer grasp God's ways, for him they are all murky and incomprehensible.

God is not bound to time either. This brings Job to the firing of his third question, why does He look so much like a mortal who counts the days, and like a man who sees his years pass by (verse 5)? Job knows that God sees much wider and much deeper than a man and that He is not bound to

time and space. For God there is no past or future. For Him, His past and future are always present.

But then why does He pretend that He, like a human being, is limited in understanding and in time and space? For Job this is apparent from the way God is occupied with him. He experiences it as if God thoroughly investigates his iniquity, as if He is unaware that He has served Him faithfully (verse 6). Why, then, does He search so much for his sin? Why doesn't God wait patiently until sin is clear to everyone? Why does He hasten, like a man, to torture Job in order to force a confession?

'Of course You know', Job says to God, "'that I am indeed not guilty" (verse 7). But it says nothing to You. You are continuing to destroy me. And I cannot resist it. Nor is there anyone who will stand up for me against You, to save me from Your hand. Who would that be? No one can stand up to You.'

Job can't understand that the Creator and the Destroyer are the same Person. At first God's hands skillfully "fashioned and made" him and protected him, but now these two hands are around him to destroy him (verse 8). Job is not an evolutionist; he firmly believes in God as his Fashioner and Maker. He just cannot understand what God does with what He has fashioned and made. God first created him with great wisdom, ability, effort, and care. And then, suddenly and without cause, He destroys His work, Job, with the same hands. Who makes a beautiful vase to smash it into pieces a little later?

He reminds God that He made him a fragile, vulnerable clay (verse 9). He knows that God formed man, Adam, "of dust from the ground" (Gen 2:7). He also knows that man "to dust ... shall return" (Gen 3:19). This presupposes that Job knows about the Fall and its consequences for man. He also acknowledges God's judgment of sin, that death has come into the world through it.

After the picture of the potter, Job now uses the picture of the cheesemaker (verse 10). A solid substance, cheese, comes out of the liquid milk after coagulation. This is a beautiful picture of man's creation and growth. This is also God's work.

He places skin and flesh through which a form is created (verse 11). He also places bones and sinews through which the body can move and walk. In this way He weaves man into a whole. David says that he is “woven” in his mother’s womb and that he is “skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth” (Psa 139:13,15). Man is a piece of art, the product of an Artist.

Job now speaks of the life he was given as a gift (verse 12). It was given to him by God, both in conception and in birth. He also acknowledges that God, by giving him life, has also given him lovingkindness. Life is a gift from the merciful God. His spirit, with which he can be connected to God, is also the object of God’s care, Job says here. God has preserved the spirit of Job in His care. That Job has not abandoned God is the result of God’s care for his spirit.

This wonderful description of his life as a product of God is a prelude to a new complaint about God’s dealings with him. God has so clearly cared for him. But His purpose is very different from Job’s expectations. ‘Now it appears’, Job says to God as it were, ‘that You had other, hidden plans with my birth’ (verse 13). In fact, Job says it so strongly, that he knows that God planned this with him from the beginning.

Job constantly feels God’s penetrating eye on him, but now not only to take care of him (verse 12), but to spy on him and catch him for sin (verse 14). Not the slightest sin escapes him. Certainly, if he is guilty, he has to fear God’s wrath (verse 15). Then the cry fits him: “Woe to me!” But even if he is righteous – and he thinks so of himself – he will not be able to raise his head proudly. After all, God is aiming at him. He is therefore satiated with disgrace and can only bow his head out of misery.

‘Can You face my misery and remain unmoved? It seems so because You don’t care about my misery. But if I myself try to put myself out of my misery, then “You would hunt me like a lion” (verse 16). If it seems that You leave me alone for a while, then I am mistaken, for You return to me to further maul me. You are acting very miraculously with me; I don’t understand a thing. First You have created me with care, and then You make every effort to humiliate and destroy me.’

Job complains that God is bringing new witnesses against him instead of asserting his right (verse 17). It may be that Job means his friends by this.

They set themselves up as lawyers of God. They defend His interests, at least that is the impression they give. They do so in a way that makes Job feel God's anger against him. Every new plea of the friends that they think they should keep in favor of God and in which they charge Job, is as it were a new army that positions itself against Job. It is an army that in turn constantly bombards him with words. It is therefore not strange that Job erupts in a new series of complaints.

Job 10:18-22 | Job's Longing for Death

18 'Why then have You brought me out of the womb?

Would that I had died and no eye had seen me!

*19 'I should have been as though I had not been,
Carried from womb to tomb.'*

20 "Would He not let my few days alone?

Withdraw from me that I may have a little cheer

21 Before I go—and I shall not return—

To the land of darkness and deep shadow,

22 The land of utter gloom as darkness [itself],

Of deep shadow without order,

And which shines as the darkness."

What Job says in verses 18-19 reinforces what he said in Job 3. Here he attributes his birth explicitly – and rightly so, of course – to God (verse 18; cf. Psa 22:9a). However, he is not thankful to God for this act, but complains to Him about it. He should never have allowed his birth to take place. If only he had died in the womb, no eye would ever have seen him in the wretched circumstances in which he now finds himself. Then it would be as if he had never been there (verse 19). He would have been brought from the womb to the tomb, nameless, and would be buried. Then he would never have known of the torments he now undergoes (cf. Ecc 4:2-3).

But he is still alive, and he experiences that life as a long path of suffering on which he has been consciously placed by God. He has only a few days left and then his life is over (verse 20; Psa 39:5). He wishes that God would stop tormenting him, that He would not continue to do so to the very last moment of his life. He would like to have some rest and joy in the few remaining days before he leaves this life forever (cf. Psa 39:13).

If he leaves this life, he will be in the tomb and will never return to earth (verse 21). The tomb is in “the land of darkness and deep shadow”. It is “the land of utter gloom as darkness [itself]” where darkness is lord and master and “the deep shadow” covers everything (verse 22).

In that darkness every order is lacking, just as it was before the days of creation (Gen 1:2). There is no order of day and night or summer and winter or heat and cold. There is also no order by age or gender or rank or status. The bones of the dead are gathered together without anyone knowing who they belong to except the omniscient God.

The darkness shines there as if it were light. If the light is darkness, how great is the darkness! The light reveals everything, but if the light is darkness, then the darkness itself is extremely dark. The darkness is impenetrable. Nothing is visible in it, there are not even vague contours perceptible so that there might be some recognition.

Job 11

Introduction

In his reply to Bildad, Job stated that he experiences God as an adversary, but that a lawsuit against Him is not feasible. This provokes a reaction from Zophar the Naamathite. Because Zophar speaks last, it is likely that he is the youngest of the friends. His speech is more general in character than that of the other friends, but also harsher. Not only does he discuss the content of Job's argument, but he also attacks Job himself and his integrity in a crude way.

With Zophar, we miss Eliphaz's dignity and Bildad's skillful arguments. He is impetuous and not sensitive in his speech. Like the other two, he fails to solve the enigma of Job's suffering. Through his theory that Job's suffering is the result of sins committed by him, he plunges the poor man even deeper into darkness.

Zophar paints Job as a foolish mocker, but still tries to lecture him. In his speech, he adopts the attitude of a great sage who possesses all wisdom. He tells Job at length about the greatness of the unfathomable God, and explains to him His actions as if he himself had fully understood this unfathomable God.

In his answer (Job 12-14) Job surpasses Zophar by far, both in length and in the fervor of expressions. This is not because Job has a greater ability, but because their gaze is not as wide as his.

Job 11:1-6 | Blaming Job's Flood of Words

- 1 *Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,*
- 2 *"Shall a multitude of words go unanswered,*
And a talkative man be acquitted?
- 3 *"Shall your boasts silence men?*
And shall you scoff and none rebuke?
- 4 *"For you have said, 'My teaching is pure,*
And I am innocent in your eyes.'

*5 "But would that God might speak,
 And open His lips against you,
 6 And show you the secrets of wisdom!
 For sound wisdom has two sides.
 Know then that God forgets a part of your iniquity.*

Zophar the Naamathite responds to Job's answer to Bildad (verse 1). He feels compelled to respond to Job's "multitude of words" (verse 2). He accuses Job of being "a talkative man", someone who talks a lot, just to get his right, as if someone is right because he uses a lot of words (c.f. Pro 10:19).

By the way, Job not only talks a lot and uses a lot of words, but all his words have no substance either (verse 3; cf. Ecc 5:2). It is much ado about nothing. Zophar calls Job's words "boasts". He clearly shows that he thinks Job is talking nonsense. Job shouldn't think that with such nonsense he silences "men" – i.e. the friends – because they no longer have a response.

Zophar adds another qualification. What Job said about God from the deepest misery, has, in his conviction, the character of "mocking". This must be dealt with. Job must be made aware of the scoff of his words, so that he will be ashamed of what he has said.

It indeed is very rude of Zophar to qualify Job's utterances in this way. How dare he accuse Job of lying and scoffing! Job spoke in despair and said inappropriate things of and about God. But he is far from being a scoffer. On the contrary, he is deeply convinced of God's high holiness. What he struggles with is how God acts with him. It is a warning for us not to call certain statements about God by people in great distress a defamation of God.

Zophar considers the words of Job as pure mockery because he draws false conclusions from what Job has said. According to him, Job has said that his teaching is pure and that he is innocent in God's eyes (verse 4). But Job did not say that. He has always maintained his innocence (Job 9:21; 10:7) and impeccability against their false accusations that he is a hypocrite, but never claimed to be perfect.

Zophar did not listen carefully. He listened selectively, and heard only that which suited his views of God. Not listening carefully to what some-

one else is saying has often been a source of miscommunication and misery. We need to listen carefully to what the other person is saying and also try to understand what he is saying. We can hear someone else's words, but sometimes we can't understand what he means to say.

Sometimes we only hear half of what someone is saying or we forget a part of it. Then words are taken out of context and wrong conclusions are drawn. Suppose I hear someone say: 'I don't like coffee with milk.' When I say to someone else: 'He said: I don't like coffee', I quote the other person verbatim and therefore correctly. But because I only *partly* quote what the other person has said, I tell a lie about him. A half-truth is a whole lie (Gen 20:2,12).

Zophar's persistent denial of Job that he has done something evil brings Zophar to the hard sigh that God should open His mouth against Job (verse 5). Then it would be over and done with Job talking about his uprightness. He says this in the full conviction that God will say to Job what he and both his friends keep saying to him.

If only God would reveal the wisdom of His actions to Job (verse 6). It is a wisdom hidden in Himself. No one will see any of it if He does not make it known. His wisdom is a double wisdom, which means that it is an unfathomable wisdom. If God were to show something of this to Job, he would see that God still treats him very gently with everything that has happened to him, and not charging him everything he deserves.

Without any proof, Zophar suggests that God does not even repay all of Job's sins. Indirectly, he claims that he is aware of God's wisdom. He sits on God's chair and states that God forgets much of Job's iniquity, that is, He does not take it into account. In His judgment of Job, according to Zophar, He allows a number of iniquities to go unpunished, for otherwise nothing would have been left of Job at all. Job should be thankful to God for this, for he got off lightly. Zophar is a hard, legal man. Of his friends he goes furthest in his accusations.

In this verse 6 we find the main point of Zophar's argument against Job, namely the certainty that God punishes sins, so that according to him, rightly so, Job can never escape his well-deserved punishment.

Job 11:7-9 | God's Greatness and Job's Nullity

7 *"Can you discover the depths of God?*

Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?

8 *"[They are] high as the heavens, what can you do?*

Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?

9 *"Its measure is longer than the earth*

And broader than the sea.

Zophar underlines what he said about the wisdom of God with a sublime description of God. He asks Job whether he can discover the depths of God (verse 7). The depths or the mysteries of God are untraceable for Job and for every human being. Never will a man be able to figure out God in His wisdom and judge His deeds. The perfection of the Almighty is unfathomable for Job and for every human being.

In what Zophar says here about God, he connects Divine wisdom with God as the Almighty. The perfect wisdom and omnipotence of God surpasses every measure of creation with which man as a creature is associated (verses 8-9). Zophar describes of God's perfect wisdom and omnipotence the measure of height, depth, length, and width.

He does so in pictures that we can understand because we know that God is like this, but that we cannot grasp according to their magnitude. Job cannot rise above heaven, so that he could do something there. He cannot look deeper than Sheol, the realm of the dead, so that he would know something about what lies even deeper. In the length he can only see the earth and in the breadth only the sea. God's perfect wisdom and omnipotence go far beyond what a human being can comprehend and is therefore unattainable to him. Man is His creature, above whom God as Creator is infinitely exalted.

In the New Testament we also encounter these four dimensions. There they are made accessible to the believers of the church, who together form the new man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Through the Spirit we, with all the saints, are able to understand "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:18-19). "For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (1Cor 2:10).

Job 11:10-12 | All Things Are Open to Him

*10 "If He passes by or shuts up,
Or calls an assembly, who can restrain Him?*

*11 "For He knows false men,
And He sees iniquity without investigating.*

*12 "An idiot will become intelligent
When the foal of a wild donkey is born a man.*

The infinite exaltation of God above all things and everyone is also evident in His dealings with man. If He passes by a man examining and finds sin, He has such a person confined to pre-trial detention, awaiting trial and sentencing (verse 10). He can also call someone to Himself to account before Him without anyone holding Him back. God can act in this way because He knows man through and through.

Again, these are powerful, impressive truths about God. God is indeed sovereign and nothing is hidden to Him. Scripture says to us: "All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13). However, this is not said as a threat, but as comfort and encouragement. It should encourage us to ask Him to search and try us to see if there be any hurtful way in us, so that He may lead us in the everlasting way (Psa 139:23-24).

This is precisely not the way Zophar speaks about God. He does not apply the truth of God's knowledge of man to himself, but to Job. He suggests that Job is a false man who does iniquity (verse 11). Does Job think that God does not pay attention to this? Zophar wants to make it clear to him that God is aware of him, the deceitful Job. Zophar believes that this can make Job bow down.

What Zophar says looks like shock therapy. He speaks to Job so harshly that it must bring him to his knees. He also suggests that Job is "an idiot", or an airhead, with even less chance of becoming wise than the chance that the foal of a wild donkey is born a sensible creature (verse 12). A wild donkey is the symbol of stubbornness, independency and willfulness, not bothering with any authority. Ishmael is compared to a wild donkey (Gen 16:12).

With Zophar there is not the slightest doubt about the relationship of Job to God and God's dealings with him. God is sovereign and just. He rules the world by rewarding good and punishing evil. He does so in the lives of men on earth. Job is punished, so Job has sinned. That may not be visible to everyone, but the facts don't lie. Job must be a traitor who secretly commits his sin, hidden from everyone, but not from God.

Job 11:13-14 | Call to Repentance

13 *"If you would direct your heart right*

And spread out your hand to Him,

14 *If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away,*

And do not let wickedness dwell in your tents;

Zophar encourages Job to pray to God (verse 13). To this end the other two friends have also called (Job 5:8; 8:5). The fact that Zophar addresses this call to Job makes his arrogance clear. For him it is certain that Job has sinned, that is his starting point. He also believes that you recover if you confess your sins. From the beginning of this book we know that Job's suffering was not caused by sin.

What Zophar says is true in itself. First Job has to direct his heart right, that means that he acknowledges God in His government over him. One can only draw near to God if one's heart is in the right mind. Then one can come to Him with 'hands spread out', that is in prayer, as a supplicant. This means that there must first be a confession of iniquity and that he must break with it. Job first has to get rid of the evil things he is doing – "in your hand" – and put them far away from him (verse 14). Nor should he allow any wickedness in his dwellings.

Zophar's call expresses his legal view. He tells Job what he must do to come to terms with God. His call is good if it is made to someone who lives in sin. His call is wrong here because it is made to someone of whom God has testified that he serves Him.

Job 11:15-20 | The Peaceful Result

15 *"Then, indeed, you could lift up your face without [moral] defect,*

And you would be steadfast and not fear.

16 *"For you would forget [your] trouble,
As waters that have passed by, you would remember [it].*
17 *"Your life would be brighter than noonday;
Darkness would be like the morning.*
18 *"Then you would trust, because there is hope;
And you would look around and rest securely.*
19 *"You would lie down and none would disturb [you],
And many would entreat your favor.*
20 *"But the eyes of the wicked will fail,
And there will be no escape for them;
And their hope is to breathe their last."*

In this section Zophar tells Job what he will get if he listens to him. However, after his previous wrongful, harsh accusations, the portrayal of bliss that he paints is completely misplaced. What he says here sounds like singing songs to a troubled heart (Pro 25:20). He thereby increases the pain of Job.

If Job listens to Zophar, he will lift up his face and look God in the face, and misery will depart from him (verse 15). After all, Job first complained that he cannot lift up his head as long as God pushes him down, didn't he (Job 10:15-16)? Then he will stand firm as a house and no longer need to have any fear of God. He will forget all the trouble and will not think back to it (verse 16). In beautiful imagery Zophar compares this to "waters that have passed by". Just as water that has passed by never flows back, so the trials will never return in Job's life.

The life of Job will be in a light brighter than the noonday sun, as it is for the righteous (verse 17; Pro 4:18). Everything will be radiantly glorious. Nothing of the darkness in which he now finds himself will be present again. All darkness is gone. It is the opposite of the last words of Job in the previous chapter, where he says that light is like darkness (Job 10:22). Here is the darkness as the light of the morning (Isa 58:10; Zec 14:7), of the new day that will have dawned in Job's life.

Instead of fear of disasters, he will have faith or trust in God (verse 18). His confidence is based on the firm hope that God, in His goodness, will ensure that His prosperity is lasting. He will also be able to convince him-

self of this when he starts to look around. This means that in the evening he inspects everything around and in the house. He will discover nothing disturbing and will be able to sleep peacefully.

He will be able to lie down in complete peace (verse 19). He need not fear that someone, now that he is under the blessing of God, will be able to disturb him. Instead of expecting threats, he may expect that many will come to him to entreat his favor (cf. Zec 8:23). Zophar does not suspect that he himself is one of those who will compete for Job's favor (Job 42:9).

Zophar concludes his answer to Job with a veiled warning to his address (verse 20). Again the assumption is made that Job is a wicked man. The eyes of a wicked man will succumb as he looks for good, for it will never come. Nor will he ever have the opportunity to escape his misery. Any hope of that is lost. The only hope left to him is to breathe his last. Then he will be rid of all misery, that is to say, of his earthly circumstances.

But Job is not a wicked man who looks forward to the end of his life as his only hope. On the contrary, he clings more and more to God. In spite of all his doubts and despair about God's dealings with him, he cannot do without God. He continues to look to God, and therefore his eyes will not succumb, but he will see God (Job 42:5). This will happen in a different way than he imagines and also very different from the way his friends present him to that end.

Thus Zophar's argument ends, which is as clear as glass, and at the same time as cold as ice. It is clear: the sinner and the wicked shall perish, you'll always get what you deserve. It is also bitterly cold: there is a total lack of tact and compassion. The other friends have shown some sympathy, but Zophar is rock-hard. He says to Job: Job, you are a wicked man, you have deserved the suffering; just acknowledge that and repent!

Job 12

Introduction

All three friends have spoken. They all gave their views from different angles. Job sees a pattern in this. The three friends all agree that Job's suffering is the result of sins committed by him. They are also determined to convince him of his sins, despite the fact that they have no other proof than what they see as proof: his suffering. Job is very indignant about this.

Earlier, Job reacted especially to the way the friends approached him, to their lack of understanding and empathy (Job 6:14-27). But his words did not come across. Zophar has just added a bit more, and spoken to Job in an even louder and more insensitive way. In his reaction to this, Job does not so much deal with his style, but rather with the content. He refutes his so-called wisdom.

Job's answer to Zophar in Job 12-14 can be divided into two parts:

1. His answer to his friends (Job 12:1-25; 13:1-19).
2. His questions to God (Job 13:20-28; 14:1-22).

Job 12:1-6 | Job Feels Accused by His Friends

1 *Then Job responded,*
2 *"Truly then you are the people,*
And with you wisdom will die!
3 *"But I have intelligence as well as you;*
I am not inferior to you.
And who does not know such things as these?
4 *"I am a joke to my friends,*
The one who called on God and He answered him;
The just [and] blameless [man] is a joke.
5 *"He who is at ease holds calamity in contempt,*
As prepared for those whose feet slip.
6 *"The tents of the destroyers prosper,*
And those who provoke God are secure,

| *Whom God brings into their power.*

When Zophar is finished, Job responds (verse 1). His answer is not an agreement with what Zophar has said, but a refutation of it. His response is addressed not only to Zophar, but to “you”, that is, to the other two friends as well (verse 2). This is also the case in Job 6, where Job makes it clear that he is very disappointed in his three friends. Sarcastically he says to them: ‘What wisdom have you expressed, unbelievable. Really, you are grossing up in wise words. If you die, that’s the end of wisdom.’

‘But’, Job goes on to say, ‘in no way I am inferior in wisdom to you’ (verse 3). He points out that like them, he also has a heart. By this he means that he also has intellect and thinks about things and has feelings. He is “not inferior” to them. They tell him nothing new. What they use as arguments against him in order to convince him of their correct ‘vision of God’, are the arguments known to everyone. He doesn’t feel that he is taken seriously by them. As if he lacked knowledge about God. Job was known for his wisdom and assisted many (Job 4:3-4). He does know how people talk about God and His actions by people who think they know Him. With what they tell him about God, they don’t get him down.

He accuses them of joking with him (verse 4; Job 17:2; 21:3; 30:1). In doing so, they act very differently from God, to Whom Job resorts. God does listen to him, he is convinced of that, even though he does not understand why God acts with him in this way. To God, Job states, he is a just and blameless man. That is why it is so unjust that his friends ridicule him and treat him so disrespectfully. They talk easily. They can ridicule him because they do not know the distress he is in. They prosper and grow and they put God at their will. More than anyone else, Christ has experienced this mockery.

Job compares them to someone “who is at ease”, the man without worries, who has no problems (verse 5). The man without worries looks at an oppressed man and despises him in his thoughts. He believes that he who is oppressed is to blame. What happens to him, he deserves, he has brought it upon himself through his behavior. You can see he’s on the verge of slipping. That’s because he’s not standing right before God.

That's how Job feels judged by his friends. It's like he's being kicked while he is down, instead of getting comforting pity. People who don't have problems often have a quick judgment about those who do. Parents whose children are doing well are in danger of making quick judgments about parents whose children are not doing well. In doing so, they sometimes also moderate themselves to know the causes. In general, public opinion is mercilessly cruel to those who are already having such a hard time.

In verse 6 Job points out the injustice he observes on earth. This is also what Asaph observes (Psa 73:2-3). Jeremiah also struggled with this (Jer 12:1-2). With this, Job contradicts the vision of his friends that God always rewards good and punishes evil. Zophar has accused Job of wickedness in his tent (Job 11:14) and thus, according to him, has demonstrated the cause of Job's misery. Job now replies that the tents of the destroyers have rest and that those who provoke God are perfectly secure. God's hand protects them from evil and He is good to them. This is how God often treats people in goodness while they defy Him. This means that God does not always immediately punish evil and reward good. That Job is suffering so much misery is not proof that he has sinned.

Job 12:7-13 | Job Refers to Witnesses

7 *"But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you;
And the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you.*

8 *"Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you;
And let the fish of the sea declare to you.*

9 *"Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the LORD has done this,
10 In whose hand is the life of every living thing,
And the breath of all mankind?*

11 *"Does not the ear test words,
As the palate tastes its food?*

12 *"Wisdom is with aged men,
[With] long life is understanding.*

13 *"With Him are wisdom and might;
To Him belong counsel and understanding.*

After an interlude (verses 4-6) Job returns to his main argument (verses 2-3), calling heaven and earth to witness that God is everywhere and does everything (verses 7-13). He points out to his friends the lower creation, that of beasts and birds (verse 7). They should be taught by those animals. Then they will be taught about God's actions. Their ignorance will then disappear, for it will be revealed to them how God acts. If they go to the earth and the fish of the sea, they will receive the same teaching, for they will tell the same (verse 8). They will discover that everywhere in nature there is the same injustice that he also experiences. Nature makes it clear that the strong wins from the weak and that those who are cruel prevail.

God does the same everywhere. What they see in nature confirms what is happening in the human world. There, too, it is the brutal and cruel who are dominating the meek. Isn't it something everyone observes (verse 9)? Is there anyone who doesn't see it? Such a person is either very short-sighted or completely blind. Behind this is "the hand of the LORD". This is the only time the name "LORD" appears in the conversations with the friends.

Because of what Job says, someone might think that God would be the causer of evil. But we must remember that what Job describes is the consequence of the sin that has come into the world. God is not the causer of evil, but He has attached consequences to the evil that is there. One of those consequences is that evil rules over good, which can make it seem as if He is rewarding the doing of evil.

God holds all that lives in His mighty hand (verse 10; cf. Mt 10:29). With this, Job emphasizes God's sovereignty. Everything is under His control. This concerns the life of every living thing – men and animals – and above that also the breath or spirit that He has given of all living things only to all mankind (Ecc 3:21; Gen 2:7; Dan 5:23). He gives man life, health and happiness without being obliged to do so (Acts 14:17), and has the right to take all that away without giving any account. With the expression "all mankind" Job indicates that man is subject to the same laws as the rest of creation.

When words are spoken – here alternating by the friends and Job – the listener – here alternating the friends and Job – judges their content (verse 11). The question is whether they are true or false, right or wrong, whether

they should be accepted or rejected, whether they are words of God or words of men. Judging words is like tasting food by the palate. The friends have tasted the words of Job, but rejected them as distasteful. Conversely, Job has tasted their words and spits them out. He rejects them, for they are untrue, wrong words. They are not words of God, but words of men.

After his reference to animals and the earth, Job points to the aged men (verse 12). They have gained wisdom and insight in their long lives. Their perceptions and experiences have shaped them. Job does not doubt that they will agree with him. Let them examine his case, and see what is true of the accusations of his friends.

Finally, Job points out to his friends a wisdom that far surpasses the wisdom of the aged men, and that is the complete wisdom that he knows to be present with God (verse 13). God has not only wisdom, but also might. In His wisdom He designed the world and by His might He created the world. "To Him belong counsel and understanding", which means that He knows exactly what to do with what He has designed and created. That's where the understanding of mankind stops. It is therefore not a testimony to the wisdom of friends when they think they are able to explain why God acts as He did with Job. Rather, it is a posturing, an interference in things that God has reserved for Himself.

Job 12:14-25 | Job Describes the Power of God

- 14 "Behold, He tears down, and it cannot be rebuilt;
He imprisons a man, and there can be no release.*
- 15 "Behold, He restrains the waters, and they dry up;
And He sends them out, and they inundate the earth.*
- 16 "With Him are strength and sound wisdom,
The misled and the misleader belong to Him.*
- 17 "He makes counselors walk barefoot
And makes fools of judges.*
- 18 "He loosens the bond of kings
And binds their loins with a girdle.*
- 19 "He makes priests walk barefoot
And overthrows the secure ones.*
- 20 "He deprives the trusted ones of speech*

And takes away the discernment of the elders.

21 *"He pours contempt on nobles*

And loosens the belt of the strong.

22 *"He reveals mysteries from the darkness*

And brings the deep darkness into light.

23 *"He makes the nations great, then destroys them;*

He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.

24 *"He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people*

And makes them wander in a pathless waste.

25 *"They grope in darkness with no light,*

And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.

Job's a remark about God's wisdom and might in verse 13 is reason to give examples of how God uses His wisdom and omnipotence in practice. Job does this to show his friends that he knows Who God is. They don't have to tell him that. In his misery Job sheds a one-sided light on God's omnipotence and wisdom. He presents it in such a way that God overthrows everything man might rely on when it comes to justice, protection and consolation.

There may also be an undertone of an accusation against God. It has been said that in these verses he accuses God, as it were, of 'mismanagement', of abuse of His might. Remarkable in this respect is that Job mainly describes the might of God to exterminate. This fits in with everything we have heard about God from Job's mouth so far. He does not understand God. How can God act like this with someone like him, who has served Him so faithfully? God has broken off his life and there is no prospect of rebuilding it (verse 14). He feels locked up, imprisoned in his misery, without an opening to escape it.

What he experiences of God, he sees all around him. God acts as He wills, without anyone being able to stop Him in it, and without giving an account of His deeds. That behind all God's deeds there is a wise purpose, Job is still blind to. He measures God's actions by the circumstances in which he finds himself. He cannot rise above his own judgment of them. He is not yet ready for that. The struggles in his thoughts about God are still too intense for that.

What God can do with a man like Job, He can also do with the waters (verse 15). He can stop them and He can let them go. If He stops them, drought is the result. If He lets them go, floods will come and turn the earth upside down. Job only describes here the negative effect of what God does. He does not have an eye for the blessings that God also has in mind. For God speaks to men through natural disasters so that they may convert to Him.

To Job God is now Someone with Whom strength takes precedence over wisdom (verse 16; cf. verse 13). He is first and foremost concerned with God's strength, which he experiences, but in its devastating form. Surely he knows that God also possesses wisdom. Only it is a mystery to him from which that wisdom is evident, for he does not understand why God treats him this way. He who is misled and misleader are both in the power of God. That is how powerful He is. But why He allows them both to coexist, Job does not understand.

Then Job speaks of counselors who are carried away destitute by God (verse 17). With all their wise counsel – see for example Ahithophel (2Sam 16:20-23; 17:1-5,14) – these people have not been able to prevent God from giving them into the hands of enemies who have made them walk barefoot (cf. Isa 20:4). The judges who are supposed to have insight into the right and to judge in disputes are made fools by God, deprived of their understanding. God is sovereign and also controls the minds of the wisest people on earth.

Kings are also subject to His dominion (verse 18). They may say something and decide, but God undoes it in His omnipotence. He even "binds their loins with a girdle" which means that He takes their royal girdle (dignity) away from them, binds an ordinary girdle around them, and takes them away as captives. What applies to the kings as political leaders also applies to the priests, the religious leaders (verse 19). He can also make them walk barefoot. The secure ones are also under His authority. They may think that they can exercise their power undisturbed, but He is throwing them into ruin. How He deals with them makes it clear that He has the circumstances of life in His hand and can change them as He sees fit.

He has the last word, not they. Counselors, judges, kings, priests, all of them are under His authority and He deals with them as He pleases. Job

is right in this if they deserve it, but he leaves that side aside. He only sees how God deals with him. He is one of the “trusted ones” (verse 20). He knows this of himself. But God seems to think otherwise, for He gags him. All discernment of old people fails to explain this.

“Nobles” do not count with Him (verse 21). He pours “contempt” on them. The principle is general (Psa 107:40), but here too Job may mean himself. “Loosen the belt of the strong” means that God makes their walking impossible or severely restricts their freedom of movement. The belt serves to keep the clothing up so that it does not hinder someone when he is walking. Job experiences that God makes it impossible for him to walk.

God is so omniscient that He reveals what is most hidden from man (verse 22; cf. 1Cor 4:5a). What is “deep darkness” for man, what is completely hidden from his perception and what he also shudders from, is not hidden from God either. “All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). God has control over the most hidden things.

What applies to persons also applies to nations (verses 23-25). He also has total control over the nations (verse 23). All the sources from which they draw and through which they grow great come from Him. He can also take away those sources, making them disappear from the earthly stage. Their habitat over which they are scattered is determined by Him. The nations do not determine their own course, He does.

This seems to contradict what Paul says: “In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways” (Acts 14:16). But that contradiction is only appearance. Both statements are true. The nations are responsible for their own choice. They have chosen to go their way apart from God. God has allowed them to do so. But that does not mean that God has given up control. If the nations go their own way, God directs them in such a way that they will suffer the consequences of their choice.

Here we see what we find again and again in Scripture, on the one hand the responsibility of man and on the other hand God’s plan. God fulfills His purposes and in so doing includes man’s actions without reducing man’s responsibility. We cannot bring these two sides together, but God can. That’s because He is God.

In order to achieve His purpose with the nations, He causes disorientation among the leaders of the nations (verse 24). They wander around the world “in a pathless waste”. They do not see any passable way. All their planning is futile. They grope around “in darkness with no light” (verse 25). If a man goes his way without God, it means that he is in darkness, where there is no light. Such a man staggers like a drunkard. He looks for something to hold on to, but does not find it.

In summary, Job has explained to the three friends the power and wisdom of God. Between the lines we feel his struggle with the goodness and righteousness of God. This struggle is further explained in Job 13.

Job 13

Job 13:1-5 | The Friends Are False Witnesses of God

1 *"Behold, my eye has seen all [this],
My ear has heard and understood it.*
2 *"What you know I also know;
I am not inferior to you.*
3 *"But I would speak to the Almighty,
And I desire to argue with God.*
4 *"But you smear with lies;
You are all worthless physicians.*
5 *"O that you would be completely silent,
And that it would become your wisdom!*

The answer of Job to Zophar continues. In the verses 1-2 Job responds to his friends. His eye sees as that of Eliphaz (Job 4:8), his ear hears as that of Bildad (Job 8:8), he knows or has a heart as Zophar (Job 12:3). He makes it clear that he is not inferior to them in the knowledge of God (Job 12:14-25). And surely he will not give in to them, that is to say, be convinced by them of their rightness in their judgment of him. The friends have spoken of things which they have observed, and which have been observed by wise men. Well, Job can speak in the same way. His wisdom and observations are as good as theirs.

Here's a lesson for us. If we want to convince people on a religious level on the basis of wisdom, experience and perception, they have the right to respond with their own wisdom, experience and perception. Even if we teach the truth, they may reject it if we give the impression that we are just a little bit smarter than they are. But when we quote God's Word, the weight of Divine proof stands behind our words. People can still reject it, but when they do, they reject God and not us.

We can deduce from Job's reply that his friends say what he too would have said before he was in this misery. He saw his life in prosperity as a reward from God for his faithfulness, because according to him it was

also that God rewards faithfulness and punishes evil. But now that evil has come upon him, that view on God is broken. The friends stick to their theology, without a relationship with God. Job has lost his 'theology' and struggles from his relationship with God with the question why God is acting so with him. How should he see God then?

That is why Job turns to God, about Whom he speaks as "the Almighty" (verse 3). His friends assumed sins on him. From them he does not have to expect understanding. They wrong him greatly with their unfounded accusations. They know neither his feelings nor his motives, yet they judge him harshly and treat him as a hypocrite. This is because of their limited view of God. They also do wrong to God by presenting Him in this way to Job.

All that remains for Job is to speak to the Almighty and present his case to Him, as he did in Job 9-10. In Job 9 he sees no benefit in a trial with God, because he always loses it. But now he wants a trial anyway, because he still expects a righteous judgment by God.

The friends are instruments in God's hand to teach Job and to draw him to Himself. God wants to use everything that happens to us to cause us to go to Him. For this He also uses the incomprehension that we meet with people. Not that Job is already where God wants him to be. But what we hear here from Job is his deep longing for contact with God. God will interrogate Job in a special way when He has finished His work on him. At this moment Job is still too convinced that he is in his right.

Job flatly accuses his friends of being false witnesses of God (verse 4). What kind of helpers are they that they treat a case like his this way? This does not mean that they deliberately tell lies, but they do not speak the truth and have no eye for Job's struggle. What they express as 'theological truth' is not truth because it is applied to the wrong person at the wrong time.

They are "all worthless physicians". They are quacks. The reason for this is that they think wrongly and at the same time assume they have all the wisdom, while they reason away the trouble of Job. They say that Job has sinned and that he will be healthy again if he confesses his sins. Job says that he has not sinned, and that they are therefore worthless physicians. They do not make him healthy; on the contrary, they make him sicker.

What they say in no way alleviates his misery. On the contrary, it aggravates his suffering.

He prefers them to remain silent (verse 5). This is what they did for the first seven days, when they sat tacitly with him. If only they had never broken their silence, for nothing came out of their mouth, which gave him some consolation. It only pushed him deeper into misery. If they would take that attitude again, it would be to their wisdom. “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent” (Pro 17:28).

Job 13:6-12 | The Friends Are Not Impartial

6 *“Please hear my argument
And listen to the contentions of my lips.*
7 *“Will you speak what is unjust for God,
And speak what is deceitful for Him?*
8 *“Will you show partiality for Him?
Will you contend for God?*
9 *“Will it be well when He examines you?
Or will you deceive Him as one deceives a man?*
10 *“He will surely reprove you
If you secretly show partiality.*
11 *“Will not His majesty terrify you,
And the dread of Him fall on you?*
12 *“Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes,
Your defenses are defenses of clay.*

Job calls on his friends to stop speaking and to listen to his defense (verse 6). He asks them to pay sincere attention to his defense. He is in great suffering, but has not lost his mind. He knows what he is saying and can defend himself with reasonable arguments against their accusations. Listening to someone requires a great deal of self-denial if you really think you have the answer already. Really listening and trying to understand the other is a task and an assignment. It prevents a hasty assessment and gives the other the feeling of acceptance. Job feels rejected by his friends and not taken seriously.

Job warns them of the injustice of their actions (verse 7). They act as if they are speaking right about God, or they are repeating after God in the right way. But in reality they speak injustice of God. They present Him as One Who punishes only evil men. Job is punished, so God sees Job as an evil man. They also speak what is deceitful for God by treating Job in His light as a hypocrite, a sneaky sinner. But Job is not.

He sees his friends as ‘accomplices of God’, because they take sides with God (verse 8). God is against him and so are his friends. God punishes him too heavily, he thinks. The misery in which God immerses him is disproportionate to his transgressions, he believes. His friends, he experiences, put themselves on God’s side and are deaf to his defense. They assume that he is wrong and that God is right to punish him. Their view of God is that God makes man suffer exactly to the measure of what he deserves. Whatever Job brings against that, it is as they see it. The pain they add to Job’s suffering is proof that they are not ‘defending’ God in the right way.

Speaking with respect, God is not waiting for anyone to take sides with Him and pursue His trial. In His Word, God forbids partiality (Deu 10:17). He doesn’t need or want anyone for His trial. Whoever thinks he should help God, has a high opinion of himself. To witness to Him is not the same as to bring Him in to prove us right. In the latter way the friends talk to Job about God. They believe that they know exactly how God looks at Job. If he agrees with them now, God can start blessing him again, they think. What they don’t realize is that they present God to Job in a completely wrong way. God’s judgment of their speaking is that they have not spoken correctly about Him (Job 42:8).

How important it is that we speak about God in the right way! Our knowledge of God should not prove itself in making theologically correct statements, but in a living relationship with Him. We may and must involve Him in all things of life. This can only happen in a sound, balanced way if we take Scripture as the norm and not our own opinion. We will therefore be correctable if it turns out that we have misunderstood something. The awareness that God really is God will keep us from forming an idea of God from theological knowledge and from that idea presenting God. That will help us to speak about God in the right way.

Job points out to his friends that God not only knows him, but also them (verse 9). He points out to them their own failures, for which they apparently have no eye. They surely do not think that God, if He examines them, will find in them nothing to condemn, do they? They cannot deceive Him, as they deceive human beings, their mortal fellows. We can hide our thoughts and motives from humans, but not from God. The friends have come to Job to place him in God's light. In doing so, they have forgotten that they themselves come into that light as well. They measure broadly what is lacking in Job, but ignore the "looking to yourself" (Gal 6:1).

According to Job, the friends can count on God to punish them for secretly showing partiality (verse 10). They do not say it in so many words, but their words show that they are taking sides with God. Partiality is always wrong, whatever party it may be. Partiality is always done for one's own sake. God is not a party you can prefer. Whoever takes sides for Him thinking it will benefit them in any way, does not have to count on His support, but can count on His punishment (cf. Job 42:7). God also sees it when it happens in secret or with hidden intentions. He always acts without regard for persons.

Job confronts his friends with the "majesty" or glory of God (verse 11). God is above all partiality, above everything and everyone. If the friends think of God in this way, doesn't it frighten them and make them fear Him? This thought of Him should make them reluctant to say false things about Him.

By the way, this is something every preacher of God's Word should think of. It is a great responsibility to pass on God's thoughts. Whoever passes something on, orally or in writing, as in this commentary, as God's thoughts or purpose, must pray that he is preserved from giving his own interpretation of it. We also do not appreciate it when someone misuses or misquotes our words or misinterprets them. But when it comes to God's words, we sometimes handle them with great 'flexibility'. That should not be the case. We may not understand something (cf. 2Pet 3:16). Then let's be honest about it.

The friends have given their opinions. They haven't said anything new. For Job they are memories of what he already knew (verse 12). It does not

appeal to him at all. All their sayings are proverbs with as much basis or grip and value as “ashes”, so none at all. Such words have no effect, they work nothing. Their response to what he himself has said is also of no value. It is just as easy to overthrow as something made of “clay”. Nor does it offer any firmness when struck, but it breaks to pieces.

Job 13:13-19 | Job Will Plead His Own Case With God

13 “Be silent before me so that I may speak;

Then let come on me what may.

14 “Why should I take my flesh in my teeth

And put my life in my hands?

15 “Though He slay me,

I will hope in Him.

Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

16 “This also will be my salvation,

For a godless man may not come before His presence.

17 “Listen carefully to my speech,

And let my declaration [fill] your ears.

18 “Behold now, I have prepared my case;

I know that I will be vindicated.

19 “Who will contend with me?

For then I would be silent and die.

If the friends keep their mouths shut, he will speak (verse 13). He will not hold back. He will speak out before God everything that bothers him. He doesn't care about the consequences. Let it come, what may. When he says “I take my flesh in my teeth” (verse 14), he means he is taking a risk, for you will not be able to keep it for long. He puts his life in his hands, that is, he puts it at risk (cf. Jdg 12:3; 1Sam 19:5; 28:21), to get his right with God. He will speak, though there is a great risk that he will be devoured by his own words and perish.

In verse 15 Job pronounces a brilliant paradox, an apparent contradiction, which can only be understood by faith. God smashes his life to pieces, yet he insists that God is good. It radiates hope and confidence in God. He does not understand why he must suffer so much. Let God tell him, even if it means killing him. But his death doesn't change his hope in God.

He will defend himself before God. God is his Prosecutor, that's how he feels, but also his Lawyer, Someone Who stands up for him. Job expects his redemption from Him (verse 16). He dares to come into the presence of God, something that is not possible for a hypocrite. Job is therefore not a hypocrite, as the friends say of him in a veiled way that he is.

In verse 17 he again urges his friends to listen to him (verses 6,13). He has clearly stated his case. If only they would listen to what he has said. Job imagines himself in a courtroom where he as the accused has set out his case (verse 18). He has no doubt whatsoever about the outcome: he "will be vindicated", that is to say, he sees himself as acquitted of any charge. There is no evidence that he has sinned. Everything the friends have said, of which they have accused him, is based on nothing more than suppositions. His defense is convincing, he himself judges.

Job's question as to whether there is anyone else who dares to contend with him sounds almost defiant (verse 19). Let them come, the accusers. He is certain that there is no objection against his defense. There is no fear whatsoever that God will prove his accusers right, so much he trusts in the right outcome. He has had to speak, he has been unable to restrain himself. If he had remained silent, it would have meant his death. He could not go on living without answering so many unjustified accusations. His defense made him worth his life.

Job 13:20-23 | Job Asks God to Change His Attitude

20 *"Only two things do not do to me,
Then I will not hide from Your face:
21 Remove Your hand from me,
And let not the dread of You terrify me.
22 "Then call, and I will answer;
Or let me speak, then reply to me.
23 "How many are my iniquities and sins?
Make known to me my rebellion and my sin.*

Job now addresses a question to God. All he wants is that God will not do two things to him (verse 20). If God does, Job will no longer deal with God in an attitude of fear. He will then no longer feel an obstacle to go to God

and can then speak to Him on an equal footing. Then he will no longer be overwhelmed by God's greatness and highness. He wishes to be free to plead his case with God without the obstacles resulting from a deeply weary and painful illness. He now feels weakened by sickness and unable to devote himself to defending his cause as he did in the days of his prosperity.

Job asks two things (verse 21). The first is that God removes his oppressive hand from him, and the second is that the dread of God no longer terrifies him. Job feels the misery and suffering as the oppressive hand of God – not of satan. If only God would remove that hand far away, he would be able to take an enlightened breath and prepare to speak to God as a worthy party. But Job also wants to free himself from the dread that emanates from God for him. He sees God as his unapproachable adversary, Who, if he does the slightest wrong, will plunge him back into misery. If God does not change this, he cannot yet calmly present his case to Him. Then the dread will remain in the background that he will always have to lose out to God, Who is so much greater and higher than he is. Elihu later elaborates on these arguments in his argument (Job 33:7).

In verse 22 he proposes God compellingly to call him to account so that he can answer. Now he does not see God as a Judge, but as a Party at issue. If God does not respond to his demand, let him speak, and then let God answer him. In Job's imagination, it is a lawsuit. But God will not participate in it. That is why Job resumes his complaint in verse 24. Job does not know it here yet, but God will certainly speak to him one day, but then Job will not know how to answer (Job 40:1-5). God speaks, but in His time and not in the time that Job determines.

In verse 23 Job opens the lawsuit. He challenges God to list his iniquities and sins. With this Job demands of God that He justifies Himself for the great disasters He has brought upon him. If these disasters are really the result of his iniquities and sins – as the friends claim – then God must be able to list a whole list. Let Him come forward with it. What Job is saying here is not the question of a conscience that wants to be convinced and come to confession. Job challenges God from an attitude that he can't be accused of anything.

Job 13:24-28 | Job Resumes His Complaint

24 *"Why do You hide Your face
And consider me Your enemy?
25 "Will You cause a driven leaf to tremble?
Or will You pursue the dry chaff?
26 "For You write bitter things against me
And make me to inherit the iniquities of my youth.
27 "You put my feet in the stocks
And watch all my paths;
You set a limit for the soles of my feet,
28 While I am decaying like a rotten thing,
Like a garment that is moth-eaten.*

Because there is no answer from God to his questions in the previous verses, Job resumes his complaint. There is no answer because he is not yet ready to be stripped of his own righteousness. He sees God as One Who does not look at him, but hides His face from him in wrath (Psa 104:29) and acts as the unapproachable God against him (verse 24). Job experiences God as his adversary. God has overloaded him with misery, although he has always served Him so faithfully.

Why does God persecute such a 'nobody' like him? He feels completely at the mercy of God, just as a dead leaf can do nothing against the wind and dry chaff is blown in all directions by the wind (verse 25). Why does He concern Himself with someone who is nothing more than a dead leaf?

Job may experience this negatively, but we can see in this the care of God for Job. To God, Job is not a 'nobody', but rather 'a someone' to whom all His interest is directed. In His dealings with Job, it is precisely His concern for him that is evident.

God's care still completely eludes Job. To him, God is Someone Who rages against him and writes bitter things against him (verse 26). It seems as if God has issued a warrant for the arrest of a villain who has a lot to answer. That is very bitter. His guilt is certain in advance. Then according to Job it must be youth sins (cf. Psa 25:7), because he is not aware of any sins lately. Isn't God digging up old skeletons that He is still accusing him of forgotten sins?

He feels like a prisoner of God, who has put his feet in the stocks, so that he is hindered in his movements (verse 27; Jer 20:2). In doing so, God also keeps a close eye on him and watches over all his paths, that he does not attempt to escape. God has also set a limit for the soles of his feet, literally, set a carve for his feet. If he should escape anyway, his footsteps are easy to recognize and he can be picked up again easily. Job describes how God makes it impossible for him to make any attempt to escape from his misery. He is in it and is condemned to remain in it.

How is it possible to God to do this to someone like him, Job wonders in despair. Surely God can see that his sickened body is decaying and rots, can't He (verse 28)? His body, which is covered with maggots (Job 7:5; 21:26), is like a garment that the moths eat (cf. Isa 50:9b). Moths do their destructive work slowly, but also thoroughly (cf. Hos 5:12). Thus, Job's body slowly crumbles and dies little by little. What is the point of God letting more misery come over it?

Job 14

Job 14:1-2 | The Brevity of Life

*1 "Man, who is born of woman,
Is short-lived and full of turmoil.
2 "Like a flower he comes forth and withers.
He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.*

Job continues his answer to Zophar. In verses 1-2 he describes the brevity and restlessness of man's life (Psa 90:10; 103:15; Gen 47:9; Jam 1:11). He is now going to apply the situation in which he finds himself to every human being. Just as God treats him, He treats every man, he believes (verse 1).

Just look at man. By speaking of man as "born of a woman" Job emphasizes his weakness and fragility. That is the woman par excellence, and so is what she produces. There are exceptions, but in general you observe that a human being only lives for a short time and that he is unstable in his life.

It has gone well for a moment, just like a flower that comes forth (verse 2). But how short-lived is its beauty. After a few days it has withered and its beauty has disappeared. The flee of a shadow shows it. At dusk, a shadow moves quickly and without making a sound until it has disappeared. That process cannot be stopped. The shadow is connected with night and death. There is no escape. This is how Job sees his life and life of man in general. There is no hope and no joy, only misery, now and tomorrow.

Job 14:3-6 | God Determines the Time of Life

*3 "You also open Your eyes on him
And bring him into judgment with Yourself.
4 "Who can make the clean out of the unclean?
No one!
5 "Since his days are determined,
The number of his months is with You;
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.
6 "Turn Your gaze from him that he may rest,*

| *Until he fulfills his day like a hired man.*

Job goes on complaining. While he is so insignificant, God perceives everything he does (verse 3). However, He does not do this to take care of him (cf. Jer 32:19), but to “bring him into judgment”. Is that fair: he the weak mortal, opposite the almighty God? Of course God will find something that is not right. Who can stand before Him when He judges (Rev 6:17)?

He is not only weak, but also unclean by his birth from a sinful man (verse 4). In this Job is right. He speaks here of what we call “original sin” (cf. Psa 51:5; Rom 5:12). However, Job seems to pronounce this more as an apology than an acknowledgment. Can he do anything about sinning? Surely, God can’t blame him, can He? Job indirectly blames God for his sin. In the same way many people speak about sin, both unbelievers and believers.

In Job’s weak existence God has also determined the number of days of his life (verse 5). Job also counts in months (Job 3:6; 7:3; 21:21; 29:2). It indicates the shortness of life. The times of a man’s life are in God’s hand (Psa 31:15). Man cannot change the boundaries of the various stages of life or the various periods of prosperity or adversity in which he finds himself.

If God has determined all this, so Job asks Him, let Him give him some rest to make his days on earth full (verse 6). Let God not look upon him for a moment and stop tormenting him. Then he will be able to enjoy life a little more, just as a hired man enjoys peace after a hard day’s work. He then is for a while not feeling the pressure of his boss. This is what Job misses.

Job 14:7-12 | Job Sees His Situation as Without Hope

7 *“For there is hope for a tree,
When it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
And its shoots will not fail.*

8 *“Though its roots grow old in the ground
And its stump dies in the dry soil,*

9 *At the scent of water it will flourish
And put forth sprigs like a plant.*

10 *“But man dies and lies prostrate.
Man expires, and where is he?*

11 *“[As] water evaporates from the sea,*

*And a river becomes parched and dried up,
 12 So man lies down and does not rise.
 Until the heavens are no longer,
 He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep.*

Job compares the hopelessness of his situation with a tree being cut down (verse 7). It seems to be over with that tree, but it turns out not to be so. The tree sprouts out again, life reappears. This can be seen in the young shoots that constantly reappear from the tree. It may be that its root in the earth is old and that its stump is dying (verse 8). Yet it will turn out that the root is not dead as soon as it ‘smells’ water, which means as soon as any water comes near it (verse 9). While it seems to be dying, from the force of life still within it, it makes another sprig, just as happens with a young plant.

With “man” – with whom he may well mean himself again – it is different, says Job (verse 10). When he dies, his life on earth is over and done with. There is no residue of strength left in him to come to new life. Although Job says so, he does not seem to be completely without hope, for he wonders where his spirit is when he has died. A man cannot live without hope. Without hope every suffering becomes unbearable. There must be a resurrection. That is exactly what nature makes clear when, after the death of winter, new life becomes visible again in spring. Today’s suffering makes the life of a believer a frightening life if there were no resurrection (cf. 1Cor 15:19).

Job compares life to water that evaporates from the sea or that is in a river that becomes parched and dries up (verse 11). Water that has disappeared cannot be gathered up again (2Sam 14:14a). Thus it is with a man lying in the tomb and does not rise again to live as a man on earth (verse 12). For Job this is just as certain as the existence of heaven above the earth has no end. Once someone has died, he will not wake up by himself, nor will he be raised from his death sleep by anyone else.

This is not about whether or not Job believes in a resurrection, for he does (Job 7:4; 19:25), although it is still vague to him how that will go. We see this in the following verses.

Job 14:13-17 | Still a Vague Hope?

13 *"Oh that You would hide me in Sheol,
That You would conceal me until Your wrath returns [to You],
That You would set a limit for me and remember me!*

14 *"If a man dies, will he live [again]?
All the days of my struggle I will wait
Until my change comes.*

15 *"You will call, and I will answer You;
You will long for the work of Your hands.*

16 *"For now You number my steps,
You do not observe my sin.*

17 *"My transgression is sealed up in a bag,
And You wrap up my iniquity.*

In these verses, we hear something of hope in Job's words, no matter how vague and distorted that hope may be by his wrong thoughts about God. He sighs to God that He would hide him in Sheol (verse 13). Then he would be hidden from His wrath. It would then no longer touch him. He longs to wait in the realm of the dead for God to change His attitude toward him and stop chasing His creature. This means he presupposes a possibility of change.

In the word "until" something of a vague hope sounds that God's wrath will not always abide on him. He wants God to set a limit to his suffering and think of him. However hopeless his suffering may be, the hope remains dormant in him that this suffering will one day come to an end. No matter how much Job experiences that God has turned His face away from him, the thought of God thinking of him will not leave him.

Job wonders whether a man, when he has died, will live again (verse 14). Previously, in verse 12, he clearly argued that a man who has died will not return to the living. Nevertheless, he presupposes the possibility of seeking temporary refuge in the realm of the dead until the wrath of God has subsided in his life.

And then, if that had happened, he would return to the land of the living. Then God would call Job (verse 15). This calling means that God would finally not be an adversary for him. Job would then be able to answer with

peace of mind, the relationship would be restored. It is no longer Job who has called God without God giving him an answer, because the opposite happens: God calls and Job answers.

In this new relationship, God would count Job's footsteps (verse 16), which means that God would closely follow Job's doings and dealings. But not anymore to condemn Job as an alleged criminal, because now God will not heed the (alleged) sins of Job. In any case, Job now presents God as a loving and merciful God.

This is underlined by the metaphor of the sealing up in a bag his transgression (verse 17). This metaphor implies that God will keep the iniquity of Job together and no longer remember it.

Unfortunately, all these beautiful thoughts turn out to be a *fata morgana* for Job, a mirage. Soon, and this happens in the following verses, he will wake up disillusioned and will have to face reality again.

Job 14:18-22 | The Strongest Man Loses Out to God

18 *"But the falling mountain crumbles away,
And the rock moves from its place;
19 Water wears away stones,
Its torrents wash away the dust of the earth;
So You destroy man's hope.
20 "You forever overpower him and he departs;
[You] change his appearance and send him away.
21 "His sons achieve honor, but he does not know [it];
Or they become insignificant, but he does not perceive it.
22 "But his body pains him,
And he mourns only for himself."*

A "mountain" (verse 18) is a pattern of stability. When a mountain falls, there is nothing left of its stability. The mountain has crumbled away. The same goes for "a rock" that "moves from its place". The most impressive certainties disappear like snow in summer when God acts with it. Job's life seemed as stable as a mountain and a rock. But his life perishes, it is taken away from its fixed place.

The water of trial has done its work thoroughly (verse 19). The stones of the rock of his house of life have been wearing away by the continuing trials. The stones have become like dust of the earth. His life has become dust that is washed away by the torrents that came over his life. Job's life and also his environment have been crushed under the heavy blows of the disasters that have come upon him. This is how God "destroy man's hope".

What can a powerless human do against almighty God (verse 20)? God is infinitely stronger. He overpowers him forever. Never will a human being have a chance to compete against God again. He disappears from God's presence to disappear into death. At first he had a kind face toward God. That was in his former days of prosperity. But God changed his face through His plagues, indicating that God is the cause of the change in his attitude toward Him. And then God sends him away to the tomb.

In the tomb he is gone from the presence of God and he is also gone from his family (verse 21). He doesn't know how his children are doing, whether they are regarded or despised. He no longer has an eye for it.

For the present Job has enough with just himself (verse 22). He lives with death as his only expectation. His body pains him tremendously. In addition, he has no joy whatsoever in his soul. He experiences nothing but mourning. All joy is gone. What's the use of life? We see that Job struggles enormously with the meaning of suffering, and that in the darkness and despair of this ambiguity he continues to search for a possible way out, for a possible explanation for his suffering.

Here the first round of discussions ends. It is clear that the book cannot be closed. There will be another round of discussions.

Job 15

Introduction

The three friends each gave their vision and Job answered after each speech. But they're not out of words. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar begin their second round of discussions in this chapter. They will stubbornly, and more fiercely than in the first round, hold on to their rigid view from the first round of discussions, and at the end add their clichés about the terrible fate that always afflicts the wicked. With this they rub salt into Job's wounds, for he knows that they see him as the paragon of the wicked being punished by the righteous God. As in the first round of conversation, Job responds to each of the friends.

Job 15:1-6 | Job Is Condemned by His Own Mouth

1 *Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,*
2 *"Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge*
And fill himself with the east wind?
3 *"Should he argue with useless talk,*
Or with words which are not profitable?
4 *"Indeed, you do away with reverence*
And hinder meditation before God.
5 *"For your guilt teaches your mouth,*
And you choose the language of the crafty.
6 *"Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;*
And your own lips testify against you.

In this second, shorter, round of discussions, the three friends speak in the same order. Eliphaz begins again. He has been the most cautious and dignified of the three so far. He answers Job's defense to the words of Zophar (verse 1). In his first speech to Job, he spoke in a relatively friendly tone. In this second speech his tone changes. He listened with growing indignation to Job's reactions to the visions of them, his friends. Out of the smoldering

fire of indignation, a flame of fire emerges in this chapter. In a sharp tone he reproves Job. Little of his original prudence and dignity can be found.

Job does not speak as a wise man (Job 12:3; 13:2), he puts somewhat sarcastically in a rhetorical question (verse 2). This is evident from his answers. The knowledge he expresses in it is nothing but a changeable, elusive wind that gives no hold whatsoever. It is just hot air. No, it's even worse, it's like an "east wind". The easterly wind is a dry and scorching wind that can destroy a harvest. That definitely doesn't fill his belly. He means there's no food in it, nothing that gives any ground to his claims of innocence. On the contrary, it is devastating and damaging to his own arguments.

Job may want to argue, but his words make absolutely no sense, they are "useless" (verse 3). His powerful 'statements' he thinks he is making, "are not profitable". Eliphaz uses the usual argument in discussions you cannot win. When you can't convince someone else because he has a good response, you simply call the other person's words daydreaming.

In the eyes of Eliphaz, Job messes up things even more. Job's words and statements are not only meaningless, they also have a devastating effect on a person's reverence or his fear of God and his prayer to God (verse 4). From what Job says, it appears that there is no longer any fear of God in him. He defies God by clinging to his innocence, yet he must realize that God is plunging him into misery because of his sins. With such an attitude, Job hinders his meditation before God, that is, he makes it powerless. He does not have to count on God to answer his prayer.

It is clear from everything Job has said that God cannot listen to him. His own words make everything clear (verse 5). Listen to what guilt comes out of his mouth. What unheard statements about God! On top of that Job has chosen "the language of the crafty". In his first speech Eliphaz spoke in general about "the crafty". Now he directly accuses Job of being one of them. This not so nice assessment implies the accusation of hypocrisy. Job speaks lies.

No one at all has to testify against Job, for everything that comes out of his own mouth proves that he is guilty (verse 6). Here we see a parallel with what is said of the Lord Jesus (Mt 26:65). If Job did not feel guilty, he would not speak such words, according to Eliphaz. Eliphaz forgets that truly in-

nocent people want to defend their innocence. He is blind to this because of his short-sighted view of God and His dealings with people. Together with his friends he constantly insists on the same anvil: Job suffers enormously, so he has sinned enormously; Job says he is innocent, so he is a hypocrite, because of course he is guilty (cf. Job 9:20). Nothing remains of his earlier attempts to comfort Job.

Job 15:7-13 | Is Job Wiser or Better Than Others?

7 *“Were you the first man to be born,
Or were you brought forth before the hills?
8 “Do you hear the secret counsel of God,
And limit wisdom to yourself?
9 “What do you know that we do not know?
[What] do you understand that we do not?
10 “Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,
Older than your father.
11 “Are the consolations of God too small for you,
Even the word [spoken] gently with you?
12 “Why does your heart carry you away?
And why do your eyes flash,
13 That you should turn your spirit against God
And allow [such] words to go out of your mouth?*

Eliphaz asks Job some questions. They are rhetorical questions. The questions contain accusations. They must make it clear to Job that he is arrogant. He has to realize that he thinks he is quite someone and knows quite a lot, but that there is no reason for this.

Eliphaz asks the rhetorical question whether Job is “the first man to be born” and whether he was “brought forth before the hills” (verse 7). With this Eliphaz underlines his thesis that old age is the source of wisdom. He also believes that he has refuted Job’s claim that he possesses wisdom. Eliphaz assumes that wisdom depends on old age: the older, the wiser. He blames Job for pretending to be many times older and thus wiser than Eliphaz.

Does Job think that he was born before the hills? Hills also refer to creation and represent stability (cf. Psa 90:2; Pro 8:25; Gen 49:26). Of course Job is not the first human being born and of course he was not born before the hills, but Job speaks as if he were, Eliphaz says. Eliphaz emphasizes 'you', underlining the fierceness of his speech. The caution of his first speech has completely disappeared.

Eliphaz then asks Job whether he sometimes attended a secret counsel of God that was hidden from mortals (verse 8). There he must have gained the wisdom that he now pretends to possess. He has drawn this wisdom to himself and possesses it alone, while it remains hidden from everyone else. This absurd representation of the way in which Job would have acquired his wisdom is also intended to relieve Job of his arrogance.

Job imagines a great deal, but he is terribly mistaken when he thinks he knows more than his friends. Does Job really think he knows something they don't (verse 9)? Job's posturing is completely unacceptable. It seems that Eliphaz is offended in his pride. We are hearing his complacency. Does Job really think he understands the situation better than they do? Don't let him think they lack understanding.

With them is "the gray-haired and the aged" (verse 10). Probably Eliphaz means himself. The elderly, in Eliphaz's view, have the wisdom by definition. Job may have the illusion that he has it, but with them there is even someone even older than Job's father. What does Job still want to say to that? He should stop pretending that he has the wisdom. Surely he can't hold on to that in the face of the heavyweights Eliphaz puts forward? What Eliphaz forgets is that he is bringing in human wisdom and not the wisdom of God. A man remains a man, no matter how old he is.

In verse 11, Eliphaz calls the ministry of the friends "consolations of God" for Job. They are not only consolations that come from God, but they are also great consolations. Those great consolations would then be the blessings they have pointed out, and Job would get them if he confessed his sins. Surely you have to have a lot of imagination to take comfort from such accusations as the friends make. Eliphaz also dares to call the sharp, accusing language they use against Job "the word [spoken] gently with you".

According to Eliphaz, Job's heart is not well at all (verse 12). In it there is a lot of anger toward God and rebellion against Him, which gets him carried away. His eyes show that. They flash with anger. Job does not submit to God, but his spirit turns against God (verse 13). This is evident from the words he speaks out of his mouth. With this Eliphaz says that Job deliberately speaks the words he says. That there is a severely tormented man speaking, who is not always able to control his emotions, is not an issue for Eliphaz.

Job 15:14-16 | The Holiness of God

*14 "What is man, that he should be pure,
Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?
15 "Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones,
And the heavens are not pure in His sight;
16 How much less one who is detestable and corrupt,
Man, who drinks iniquity like water!"*

In his first speech, Eliphaz already spoke about the holiness of God (Job 4:17-19). Here he does it again and thereby summarizes his first speech in a few words. He wants to convince Job that his appeal to his innocence is groundless. For there is no man who is pure before God (verse 14). No man who has ever been born of a woman is righteous. With this he tells Job nothing new. Job himself has already said so (Job 14:4). It seems that Eliphaz did not listen well to Job.

He only applies everything to Job and forgets that he himself is a human being. He judges, but forgets to judge himself (cf. Rom 2:1). He would do well to take his place beside Job, as Elihu does later (Job 33:6). Like Job, he is a man, born of a woman, and therefore just like Job, he is not pure and righteous before God.

According to Eliphaz, God does not even trust in "His holy ones", the angels (verse 15). 'Trusting on' here has the meaning of 'building on'. Not only the earth with men, but also heaven with the heavenly beings is not pure in God's eyes (cf. Job 25:4-5). They are all creatures of Him, and as Creator He does not need to build (trust) on His creatures. It sounds impressive, but what evidence does Eliphaz have for his claims? That God

does not trust in any creature belongs to His Being. He is the perfectly Independent One, Who finds everything in Himself. Everything outside of Him must trust in Him.

If God puts no trust in those who are so close to Him, and His dwelling place “heaven” is not even pure in His eyes, how should He see a man like Job? This cannot but be as “detestable and corrupt” (verse 16; cf. Job 25:6). Eliphaz depicts Job here as someone whom God disgusts, someone whom He sees as corrupt. The reason for God’s abhorrence, Eliphaz explains, is that Job is someone “who drinks iniquity like water” (c.f. Job 34:7; Pro 19:28). This has been so his whole life and it still is. Job’s life has been imbued with injustice from the beginning until now. That is why he came into this misery and why he is still in it.

Job 15:17-24 | The Experience of the Wicked

17 *“I will tell you, listen to me;
And what I have seen I will also declare;
18 What wise men have told,
And have not concealed from their fathers,
19 To whom alone the land was given,
And no alien passed among them.
20 “The wicked man writhes in pain all [his] days,
And numbered are the years stored up for the ruthless.
21 “Sounds of terror are in his ears;
While at peace the destroyer comes upon him.
22 “He does not believe that he will return from darkness,
And he is destined for the sword.
23 “He wanders about for food, saying, ‘Where is it?’
He knows that a day of darkness is at hand.
24 “Distress and anguish terrify him,
They overpower him like a king ready for the attack,*

Self-confidently Eliphaz points to his authority to teach Job (verse 17). Just as Job asked his friends to listen to him (Job 13:6,17), so now Eliphaz commands Job to listen to him. For Job cannot ignore the observations he, Eliphaz, has made with his own eyes. In his first speech he appealed to observation (Job 4:8,12-16). His observations are in keeping with tradition,

with what the wise men have revealed and handed down to the fathers (verse 18). He took note of this and embraced it as truth. The latter is at the heart of his second speech.

Eliphaz thus draws his wisdom from purely human sources. And with this he thinks he can convince Job. But with all his knowledge, obtained through observation and tradition, Eliphaz has no knowledge of God, nor of his own heart, and certainly not of the why of the suffering Job undergoes.

In verse 19 “the land” could be Teman, the land where Eliphaz came from, known for its wisdom (Jer 49:7; Oba 1:8-9). In any case, it is a land where wise men lived who were nowhere else to be found. That land was given to them. It did not make them humble, however, but they boasted of their wisdom. The fact that no alien passed among them could mean that no one could influence their wisdom with wrong ideas. It was an unmixed, pure wisdom. Eliphaz speaks high and mighty about the wisdom he observed in others and especially in himself.

After his extensive introduction Eliphaz starts in verse 20 with the contents of his second argument. In verses 20-24 he applies his acquired wisdom to an ungodly bully. An ungodly bully, Eliphaz says, writhes in pain all his days (verse 20). Job is in pain every day, but because of his wickedness he does this to himself. The ruthless lives only a small number of years. Job must take this into account if he persists in his resistance against God.

Eliphaz speaks in general terms, but the application of this to Job is very clear. He doesn’t pay attention to the fact that what he says doesn’t apply to all sinners. Thus we know of the wicked King Manasseh, who committed a great deal of violence, that he reigned for no less than fifty-five years (2Chr 33:1; cf. Psa 73:3).

Verse 21 is also a clear allusion to Job, for Job expressed himself in these terms in his first complaint (Job 3:25-26). He said this in the distress of his soul, sitting on the ruins of a destroyed life. That Eliphaz has been insensitive to these expressions of sorrow is shown here. He now uses these words against Job.

A wicked bully can indeed live in riches and abundance, while the slightest unknown sound he hears frightens him. One who has a guilty conscience

has no rest. He constantly lives in fear and never feels any certainty that he is safe. Even if he seems to be doing well, the destroyer comes upon him.

The hopeless situation in which he then finds himself is not reversible (verse 22). He also expects no change. He will not leave the darkness in which he finds himself. Fate has struck and he cannot but accept this, no matter how great the repugnance. He is constantly threatened by the danger of sudden violent death.

Because of all the disasters that have struck him, he has also fallen to begging (verse 23). He tries to prolong his life by searching everywhere for food. But he does not know where to find it. The situation is hopeless. What awaits him, he knows, is “a day of darkness”. That day of downfall is “at hand” for him like a day worked by him with his own hand. It’s really all his own fault.

Peace and prosperity have given way to “distress and anguish” (verse 24). They ambush him, without him being able to resist. He wants to, but he cannot. He is overwhelmed by it, according to a plan calculated in advance. The terrors by which he has been attacked and overwhelmed are like a king who, after good preparation, is ready for battle and goes to war. Job cannot stand and is defeated.

Job 15:25-35 | Their Retribution

*25 Because he has stretched out his hand against God
And conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty.*

*26 “He rushes headlong at Him
With his massive shield.*

*27 “For he has covered his face with his fat
And made his thighs heavy with flesh.*

*28 “He has lived in desolate cities,
In houses no one would inhabit,
Which are destined to become ruins.*

*29 “He will not become rich, nor will his wealth endure;
And his grain will not bend down to the ground.*

*30 “He will not escape from darkness;
The flame will wither his shoots,*

*And by the breath of His mouth he will go away.
 31 "Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself;
 For emptiness will be his reward.
 32 "It will be accomplished before his time,
 And his palm branch will not be green.
 33 "He will drop off his unripe grape like the vine,
 And will cast off his flower like the olive tree.
 34 "For the company of the godless is barren,
 And fire consumes the tents of the corrupt.
 35 "They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity,
 And their mind prepares deception."*

Eliphaz argues that the suffering he has described in the previous verses comes over the wicked because he stretches out his hand "against God" in rebellion and because he conducts himself arrogantly "against the Almighty" (verse 25). He is still speaking in generalities, but Job will know that he himself is being directly addressed. Who but Job raises his fist to God and rises up against Him in rebellion?

The whole description does injustice to who Job really is and what he is going through. It shows a lack of empathy to speak in this way about and to a righteous man like Job who suffers greatly. It must make clear to us how hard we can be in judging someone who is suffering. That judgment becomes harsher the more the suffering person does not recognize himself in our judgment and even resists it.

We then feel attacked in our 'theology'; and with it our identity falls or stands. Instead of admitting it, we go into the trenches and keep firing our arrows of truth in order for the suffering person to be touched by it only once. In our opinion, that will mean the end of his suffering and we will be proved right. This last point is the most important: we have not lost face.

Eliphaz tells Job that he sees God as his enemy and that he will run against Him to defeat Him (verse 26). "Headlong", i.e. in overconfidence, he clings to his opposition to God. He does not intend to bend his neck and submit to Him. On the contrary. He rushes headlong at God with "his massive shield" to defend himself against the arrows that God shoots at him.

He also thinks he has every right to defend himself against God in this way. The fat on his face and the flesh on his thighs indicate the prosperity of Job (verse 27). Fat is an expression of prosperity. Eliphaz says that Job's face and thighs were covered with it by his own actions. He supposes that Job attributed his prosperity to his own merit.

What Eliphaz says of Job recalls the reasoning of the later Nabal, who considered all his possessions his own, without any gratitude to David (1Sam 25:11). Eliphaz suggests that through his prosperity Job turned away from God (cf. Deu 32:15), so that God again took away from him everything He had first given him. What Eliphaz supposes goes against the testimony God Himself gave of Job (Job 1:1,8; 2:3).

With the description in verses 28-35, Eliphaz depicts the situation in which the wicked will end up. In fact, it is the situation in which Job finds himself and in which, according to Eliphaz, he has ended up because of his rebellion against God. From this he can see that Job is wicked man. Only someone who has sinned heavily is punished by God.

The facts prove it. Look at his habitations. They have been destroyed (verse 28). There is no longer a house to live in. He's in a mess. He should have no illusions about becoming rich, for he has lost everything and has nothing to start again with (verse 29). The wealth he possessed is gone. It did not stand when the disasters struck him. The expansion of his possessions has come to an end.

He cannot escape from the darkness of suffering that has come upon him (verse 30; cf. verses 22-23). He is in it and cannot get out. He is surrounded by it. "His shoots", by which are meant his children, does not come to life. The flame of God's judgment coming out of His mouth (cf. 2Thes 2:8a) has taken away their lives.

No, there is nothing he can trust to come out of misery (verse 31). Any trust will prove to be useless and misleading. If he relies on anything that is useless, he will receive uselessness as retribution. It underscores the worthlessness of such trust. It will hasten his death (verse 32). His life will come to an end sooner than was intended.

He will not see the green of new life. If anything resembles fruit, it will turn out to be unripe fruit (verse 33). Even the promise of fruit, which is

seen in the blossom, remains unfulfilled. This means that the offspring of the wicked will perish. This must be a slap in the face of Job, who recently lost all his children.

Eliphaz concludes his description with an explanation of what “the company of the godless (or: of the hypocrites)” yields (verse 34). It is clear that he includes Job in that company. The company of the hypocrites is a company made up of hypocrites. Their common part and purpose is hypocrisy. Whoever is part of that company “is barren”. A company of hypocrites is not a close-knit unit, but consists of individuals who live only for themselves. They will lose the family or friends they have. There is nothing present that God or others could enjoy as fruit.

Eliphaz adds that the homes of those who accept “a bribe” (as ‘the corrupt’ means literally), who therefore allow themselves to be bribed, are consumed by fire. Lives based on bribery practices have no basis, but are destroyed. In doing so, Eliphaz insinuates that Job has accepted gifts and that, therefore, his homes have been consumed. It all goes with someone who is a hypocrite.

By definition, hypocrites and corrupt people are unreliable people (verse 35). “They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.” The plans they make and carry out are deceptive. What they incubate in their minds and what comes out of them is a plague for others. They produce only mischief and deceit.

Eliphaz has finished describing the evil that, according to him, affects all wicked people. The fact that he tells Job these things means that he sees Job as such. With this, he completely misses the point. And not only that. He adds enormously to the already heavy suffering of Job. It’s a completely misplaced accusation of a sincere man.

Job 16

Introduction

Although Eliphaz has been much sharper and more rash in his second argument than in his first, nothing of what he said has touched Job's conscience. In Job's reaction it is striking that he is so absorbed in his relationship with God that everything else comes into the background. This proves the authenticity of his faith: he wants to understand God.

Job 16:1-5 | Job Blames His Friends for Their Hardness

*1 Then Job answered,
2 "I have heard many such things;
Sorry comforters are you all.
3 "Is there [no] limit to windy words?
Or what plagues you that you answer?
4 "I too could speak like you,
If I were in your place.
I could compose words against you
And shake my head at you.
5 "I could strengthen you with my mouth,
And the solace of my lips could lessen [your pain].*

When Eliphaz has finished his second speech to Job, Job answers (verse 1). He says that Eliphaz has told him nothing new (verse 2). What he has heard, he has heard so many times from his friends. It is nothing more than a repetition of moves. In Eliphaz's imagination, the words he and his friends have spoken to Job are "consolations from God" (Job 15:11). But Job does not have a good word for them and calls them "sorry comforters" (cf. Job 13:4).

Their words to him are "windy words", exactly the expression Eliphaz used to describe Job's words (Job 15:2). Is their supply of windy, hollow phrases not yet exhausted (verse 3)? They continue to make unfounded accusations. It is better for them to wrap up their words and keep their

mouths shut. In this way they only make his suffering heavier instead of lighter. Where do they get their firm answers anyway? Where the real problem lies with him, completely eludes them. Therefore, none of their words hit the mark.

The roles should have been reversed (verse 4). They should be in his position and he in theirs. Would he speak as they do? Would he make lengthy speeches to them in order to convince them of their sins which had brought them into this calamity, as they do with him now? Would he mockingly shake his head over them in their defense, as they do now over him when he defends himself?

Job has asked questions about how he would react if the roles were reversed. Those questions are justified. He's allowed to ask them. It shows that we can only help someone in need if we know something of that need from our own experience or if we first sense and empathize with someone's situation (cf. Heb 13:3; Mt 8:17; 2Cor 1:3-7).

The friends are blamed by Job for leaving out everything that has to do with true friendship. They treat Job like a stranger, even though they have known his former life. But now they question this and even express accusations about his present condition.

Job goes so far in his defense that he claims that he would certainly behave differently from his friends now if they were in his shoes (verse 5). He would treat them like a true comforter. This he says to indicate what he misses so much with his friends. He would encourage them with the right words. At the right time he would be able to remain silent to make them feel his pity.

Possibly Job reacts a little irritated here. In this sense the Lord Jesus is also esteemed by men "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isa 53:4). But He did not react like Job to the plagues that came upon Him. He "kept entrusting [Himself] to Him who judges righteously" (1Pet 2:23b).

Job 16:6-14 | God's Wrath and His Use of Man

6 *"If I speak, my pain is not lessened,
And if I hold back, what has left me?*
7 *"But now He has exhausted me;*

You have laid waste all my company.

8 "You have shriveled me up,

It has become a witness;

And my leanness rises up against me,

It testifies to my face.

9 "His anger has torn me and hunted me down,

He has gnashed at me with His teeth;

My adversary glares at me.

10 "They have gaped at me with their mouth,

They have slapped me on the cheek with contempt;

They have massed themselves against me.

11 "God hands me over to ruffians

And tosses me into the hands of the wicked.

12 "I was at ease, but He shattered me,

And He has grasped me by the neck and shaken me to pieces;

He has also set me up as His target.

13 "His arrows surround me.

Without mercy He splits my kidneys open;

He pours out my gall on the ground.

14 "He breaks through me with breach after breach;

He runs at me like a warrior.

Job has told his friends in no uncertain terms how wrongly they treat him, how he lacks compassion with them, and how he would be if the roles were reversed. He has vented his heart about them, but his suffering has not been softened by it (verse 6). Even when he ceases to speak, the misery does not depart from him. Nothing, neither speaking nor silencing, can change his grief. His suffering is unbearable and hopeless. Today these are the two conditions to end your life (or to let it end). With Job we notice nothing of such an attitude.

Certainly, he holds God responsible for his suffering. God has exhausted him (verse 7). In a direct appeal to God he throws before Him that He has destroyed his whole company. All those he valued have been taken away by force from him by God. God has destroyed his whole environment, including his friends, who also turn against him.

He feels grasped by God, not to support him, but to deprive him of all support (verse 8). God is like a witness who comes with incriminating statements. His leanness comes from hunger, and hunger is the consequence of his sins, so the friends claim. He cannot deny his lean body and poverty. Everyone sees it and it is like a public witness against him. He can argue all he wants about his innocence, but his situation is a denial of everything he argues in his defense.

He fights a hopeless battle. But what do you want if God's anger tears you to pieces, if He hates you (verse 9)? Job hears God grinding His teeth against him, so to speak. Yes, he experiences God as his Adversary. He feels God's eyes fixed on him, not lovingly, but critically, with a gaze that looks right through him.

Also from the side of the people – not only from the three friends, but from his whole environment – Job experiences only resistance and defamation (verse 10). He feels attacked by all of them together. It is one mighty hostile stronghold that opposes him. And who is behind it? God (verse 11)! But then God must be mistaken. He has handed Job over to the wrong one and delivered him into the hands of the wicked. He cannot have meant this, can He? Surely God knows he is innocent? But why is He acting like this with him?

Job remembers the time when he had peace. He was happy and safe, surrounded by everything a man could wish for (verse 12). But God has “shattered” everything, especially him. He is a broken man. God grasped him by the neck like a predator does with his prey. He who has someone by the neck has him completely under control and in his power. After God has so overwhelmed Job and made him powerless, He has “set me up as His target”, as a target for all His arrows.

God, Job says, uses “His arrows” (verse 13) to shoot at him. By this he means his friends, who constantly bombard him with their condemning words. He sees them as God's instruments. They act under His control.

God splits his kidneys open, not they. The kidneys are sensitive, vital organs, representing the deepest inner self of man. Job says that God doesn't spare him, that He doesn't keep him safe. His gall is poured out on the

earth by God. Gall is also connected with bitterness. The whole of Job's life is poured out on the earth as bitterness.

And so it goes on and on. It is "breach after breach" (verse 14). Job feels like the walls of a city besieged by God Himself. Everywhere He breaks the walls and breaks through them. Time and again Job is physically and mentally affected by disasters and illnesses that he suffers.

Job is completely overwhelmed by emotion. He speaks harsh words about God. Still, here too we must be careful not to form a harsh judgment about Job. God allows Job to rage without saying a single word of warning to Job that he is now going out of line.

We can compare Job's attitude and statements with those of the Lord Jesus when it comes to His response to the suffering that people are inflicting on Him. Then we see a big difference. From His mouth we never hear an accusation toward God. Yet no one has ever experienced God as a stronger adversary than He. We should think of what happened during the three hours of darkness on the cross. When God judges Him, not a single rebellious word comes out of His mouth to God. On the contrary, He says: "But you are holy" (Psa 22:3). He has always justified God.

Another difference is that the Lord Jesus distinguishes between what God does to Him and what people do to Him (Psa 22:11-18). To Job, God and people act together in their attacks on him. He sees them conspiring against him.

Job 16:15-22 | Job Appeals to God

*15 "I have sewed sackcloth over my skin
And thrust my horn in the dust.*

*16 "My face is flushed from weeping,
And deep darkness is on my eyelids,*

*17 Although there is no violence in my hands,
And my prayer is pure.*

*18 "O earth, do not cover my blood,
And let there be no [resting] place for my cry.*

*19 "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And my advocate is on high.*

20 *"My friends are my scoffers;
My eye weeps to God.
21 "O that a man might plead with God
As a man with his neighbor!
22 "For when a few years are past,
I shall go the way of no return.*

Job again describes his deep sorrow. It is so great, that he speaks of a goat-haired sackcloth that he has sewn over his skin (verse 15). With this he indicates that he does not wear a sackcloth temporarily, but that it is inseparably attached to him and that he will never be free of it. His "horn", a picture of strength, has not been raised, but he has "thrust in the dust", humiliated, indicating that there is nothing left of his strength.

Job has cried so long that his face is red and swollen (verse 16). His eyes resemble the hollow eyes of a dying man through sorrow and the many sleepless nights. He wonders to what he has deserved all this misery and destruction, all this violence that has come upon him. He knows of himself that he has obtained nothing of his possessions by violence (verse 17). His closest and dearest cannot accuse him of anything. Toward them he is free in his conscience. Even toward God there is nothing that burdens his conscience. His prayer is pure, without ulterior motives, and free from the hypocrisy of which his friends accuse him (Job 8:6). He can freely express himself toward God.

Job wants the injustice done to him not to be forgotten after his death. Therefore he proclaims to the earth that it should not cover his blood (verse 18). Like the blood of Abel, he wants it to continue to cry out to God (Gen 4:10; Eze 24:7-8), Who is in heaven. If during his suffering he cannot obtain a judgment that justifies him, and so he dies in the eyes of others as a guilty person, then may justice be done through blood vengeance after his death. He wants his cries to continue to sound without rest until he is justified.

Then all of a sudden there is this revival of faith and hope. No matter how much Job had a profound conflict with God, he still hoped for Him. No matter how, out of deep distress and carried away by his emotions, he rages against God, he does not let go of God. He always returns to Him.

Satan had claimed that Job would curse God to His face (Job 1:11; 2:5), but Job keeps clinging to God.

Job sees God as his Prosecutor, but at the same time as his Witness in heaven (verse 19; cf. *Psa* 89:37). He is certain that God is a Witness to his innocence and that therefore he is also his Advocate. This seems to be a contradiction, but it is not. It is a mystery in God that is recognized by the converted sinner and for which he worships God. God, Who must judge the sinner, has given His Son. He has not spared His Son so that He may spare the repentant sinner. In this way the believer can say: 'If God, Who was first against me, is now before me, who could be against me?' (*Rom* 8:31).

What to Job is more like a vague hope, we may be sure of. We know that we have an Advocate, Someone we know, our High Priest and Advocate, our Lord Jesus Christ. He lives as High Priest to always intercede for us and to help us in our weaknesses (*Heb* 7:25; 4:15). He lives as Advocate to restore us in the fellowship with the Father when we have sinned (1Jn 2:1).

Job does not need to expect help from his friends. They only scoff at him (verse 20). His tears do not arouse pity in them. They are not meant for them either, but for God (*Psa* 56:8). God will see them and will, as he believes for certain, examine his case once and then establish his innocence.

In verse 21 Job asks for a man to plead with God. By this Job asks God Himself to defend a man with God. Here we see again that wonderful identification of God the Advocate with God the Prosecutor. Job adds another comparison. He says that defending is something a man does with his neighbor. "A man" can also be translated as 'son of man'. The Lord Jesus often calls Himself "Son of Man" in the Gospels. We who know the Lord Jesus discover here in what Job says the true Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1Tim 2:5). He is the Umpire of Whom Job has spoken before (Job 9:33), Who lays His hand on both, on God and on man.

For himself Job sees only a few years of life left (verse 22). Then he will go the path on which no return is possible. It is the path to the grave. He will go that path, but it will be easier for him to go that path if he can trust that his right will be brought to light within a short time.

Job 17

Job 17:1-12 | The Experience of Bitter Trial

- 1 *"My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished,
The grave is [ready] for me.*
- 2 *"Surely mockers are with me,
And my eye gazes on their provocation.*
- 3 *"Lay down, now, a pledge for me with Yourself;
Who is there that will be my guarantor?*
- 4 *"For You have kept their heart from understanding,
Therefore You will not exalt [them].*
- 5 *"He who informs against friends for a share [of the spoil],
The eyes of his children also will languish.*
- 6 *"But He has made me a byword of the people,
And I am one at whom men spit.*
- 7 *"My eye has also grown dim because of grief,
And all my members are as a shadow.*
- 8 *"The upright will be appalled at this,
And the innocent will stir up himself against the godless.*
- 9 *"Nevertheless the righteous will hold to his way,
And he who has clean hands will grow stronger and stronger.*
- 10 *"But come again all of you now,
For I do not find a wise man among you.*
- 11 *"My days are past, my plans are torn apart,
[Even] the wishes of my heart.*
- 12 *"They make night into day, [saying],
'The light is near,' in the presence of darkness.*

Job continues his answer to Eliphaz. Verse 1 connects directly with the previous chapter. Job sees that his life is a decreasing matter (Job 16:22). His spiritual power is broken. The energy of earlier days is extinguished. The grave is waiting for him. He has nothing to look forward to except death and the grave. He sees no hope of righteousness or relief from his misery in this life. Even when he looks around him, there is nothing from which

he can draw any hope for change for the better. His friends surround him with mockery, so Job experiences (verse 2). He observes them also in the night, and in its darkness, he feels the bitterness of mockery all the more.

Nobody wants to assist Job. That is why Job addresses himself directly to God again with the question whether He wants to be a pledge for him with God Himself (verse 3). A pledge is one who takes on the case of another and represents him in court. He acts as guarantor and undertakes to pay if the other defaults. Though Job may feel himself treated by God as an enemy, he does not turn away from God. On the contrary, he appeals to the God Who is crushing him. Here we see again how Job miraculously identifies God the Prosecutor with God the Defender.

1. The only place of safety for Job is with the same God Who attacks him.
2. His only refuge is with the God Who destroys him.
3. He puts His trust in Him Who drives him to despair.
4. He calls to God to defend him against the God Who condemns him.
5. He asks God to deliver him from the God Who makes him His prisoner.

We can say that Job trusts in God in spite of God. He has proclaimed before that he continues to hope even if God kills him (Job 13:15). He knows that in the end he can't go to anyone but God for help. He is also deeply convinced that only God is faithful in what He promises, that He keeps His word. Job expresses this in the question who else is there that will be his guarantor and then actually keep his promise. Only God can do this, not a man (cf. Pro 17:18; 11:15; 22:26).

He cannot expect anything from his friends. They have no heart to understand his suffering (verse 4). Job attributes their lack of heart to God. God has closed their heart for understanding because they unleash their own theological ideas on Job. In it they show that they have a completely wrong view of God. They reason on the basis of their own views of God and not on the basis of fellowship with God.

It is impossible to have a good view of God without having a relationship with Him. It is not a matter of reason, but of the heart. That is why they do not deserve to be honored. In the dialogue with Job, God will not exalt them. We also see this at the end of the book, where we read that God's

wrath is kindled against the friends because they have not spoken of Him what is right (Job 42:7).

Job, following a saying, describes his friends in verse 5 as people who call themselves friends but do not behave like friends, because they behave without mercy. They pretend to be a benefactor who comes to distribute something. They have come to Job to give him comfort. But there is something unnatural in their performance. While the benefactor distributes, the eyes of his children languish, which means that he ignores his first responsibility. Through his performance, the children go to ruin.

The saying makes it clear how the friends deal with Job and what the consequences will be for them. What they sow – sue a friend – they will reap – harm their most precious possessions. They forget that he is their friend who needs pity and not the blows they inflict on him.

Then Job says that God humbles him and has made him a byword of the people (verse 6). The bystanders have made known the misery of Job far and wide. He feels he is being spat in the face by them. With this he indicates how deeply he feels despised by them. The fact that he has become a byword among the peoples is also literally true today. The saying ‘as poor as Job’s turkey’ is used for someone who has nothing left.

Behind the contempt of his friends, Job sees God’s actions. He takes everything from the hand of God and that also causes and doubles his inner struggles. In addition to the struggles caused by his suffering, there are also the struggles caused by the incomprehension and defamation of friends and acquaintances.

The Lord Jesus was literally spat in the face (Isa 50:6). He took this also from the hand of God. With Him, however, this did not cause a struggle with God, but identification with God. He could say to God: “The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (Psa 69:9b). Nor was there any rebellion with Him, but submission (1Pet 2:23).

Through all the grief that tore Job apart, his eye became dull (verse 7; cf. Job 16:16). Someone who weeps fiercely, so that the eyes are filled with tears, sees nothing anymore. His eyes are hollow and dark surrounded by the many tears, the many griefs, the sleepless nights, and his sickness. Job’s members, his head and chest and arms and legs, are just skin and bone.

He is so emaciated that his members are nothing more than a shadow. His body has become a skeleton. There's nothing substantial about him anymore.

What has happened to Job, and of which the friends accuse him, will fill sincere people with horror when they hear of it (verse 8). Innocent people, people who, like Job, have nothing evil on their conscience, will turn against the hypocrite just like him. Job is accused of hypocrisy by his friends, but he is not a hypocrite. He turns against a hypocrite, just like any innocent man does.

Job defends himself against the false accusations of his friends. He is a righteous one and will hold to his way (verse 9). The way he has gone is a way on which his hands have remained clean. He has not committed any dishonest acts. The hidden sins of which his friends accuse him, are not with him. Therefore, the strength of his defense will not weaken, but rather increase.

Then he makes an urgent appeal to the friends, to "all of you", that they will turn back anyway and come again (verse 10). He wants them to turn back to repent of the accusations they make against him. If they do, they may come to him again. All three of them have spoken, but none of them has revealed himself as a sage. Job has searched for such a person among them, but everything the friends have said has not revealed that any of them is a wise one. All three of them spoke from the same conviction: Job suffers heavily, God brings suffering as punishment for sin, so Job has sinned heavily.

Job resumes the complaint about his fate in verse 11. His suffering is indeed very heavy. Just as in verse 1 he summarizes it in three powerful sentences. His days are over; his plans are frustrated; his wishes are unfulfilled. The end station of his life, death, is fast approaching. He says strongly that his plans "are torn apart". They have not failed, but the possibility of seeing the desires of his heart fulfilled has been violently taken away from him. His hopes are gone to achieve the goals he had for his life someday.

For a human being, one of the most difficult things of death is that by dying, he can no longer realize any of his plans. The ambitions he cherished remain unfulfilled. The work he was doing remains unfinished. He can no

longer finish what he was doing and achieve nothing he was on his way to. His life feels unfinished. How many plans end up on the 'unfinished plans' pile every day due to death? That goes for both good and bad plans.

For the unconverted man, it is to be hoped that through this reality he will resort to Christ Who has accomplished a work that is truly completely finished. For the believer it is to wish that he makes his plans so that he can be called away by God at any moment. Making plans is good, as long as we know that they are plans that have God's approval. Then it is His plans with us. Then He also determines when our work on His plan is done. It is up to Him to continue His plan through others.

The friends have suggested to Job that the night of misery in which he finds himself may turn into day (verse 12). Thus Job summarizes the "wise" message of the three friends. All he has to do, according to them, is confess his sins. The light is so near, within reach, despite the darkness. As long as he listens to them. Haven't they told him time and again that God is punishing him and that God is doing so because he has sinned? Let him just see that. Then the day will come for him and the light will shine in his life, while the night and darkness will depart.

The friends may say so, but it is only their own assumptions that they base on their theology. Their assumptions do not match reality, that is to say, the way God sees it. This is because they have no relationship with God. That is why their theology is not correct. Without a relationship with God it is impossible to understand God's thoughts.

Job 17:13-16 | The Dark View of Sheol

13 *"If I look for Sheol as my home,
I make my bed in the darkness;
14 If I call to the pit, 'You are my father';
To the worm, 'my mother and my sister';
15 Where now is my hope?
And who regards my hope?
16 "Will it go down with me to Sheol?
Shall we together go down into the dust?"*

Contrary to the misrepresentation the friends give about a life in the light that Job could share (verse 12), Job speaks of what really awaits him (verse 13). He sees Sheol as his home and the darkness as the atmosphere where he spreads his bed to finally rest. He calls the pit “my father” (verse 14). He calls the worm, the maggot, who feed on dead bodies, “my mother and my sister”. He also sees them as blood relatives. Job sees himself in a family relationship with death and the pit and the maggots that are there; otherwise he has nothing left.

His view of Sheol and the darkness and the close connection with it completely shut him off to anything else. There is nothing on which he could pin his hopes (verse 15). His plans and desires (verse 11), all his perspectives, will “go down with me to Sheol” (verse 16). Then his body and his plans will have returned to the dust (Gen 3:19).

Job 18

Introduction

In this chapter Bildad's second speech follows. In it he too is sharper in his judgment of Job than in his first speech. He neither advises nor counsels Job, but merely charges against him accusation on accusation. His condemnation of Job is razor-sharp. His approach has not changed. He follows the pattern of his friends. This means that he continues to accuse Job of sins as the cause of his suffering according to the reasoning:

1. Evil people are punished by God.
2. Job is punished by God.
3. Job must be an evil man.

With his analysis of Job's situation, Bildad proves once again that he is totally incapable of understanding any of the questions that torment Job. Job has rightly spoken of "sorry comforters" (Job 16:2). Bildad is simply on a completely different wavelength. We hear from God's mouth at the end of this book that he is completely wrong with his judgment and condemnation.

From the certainty with which Bildad speaks, we have to learn that in our most established beliefs we may be completely wrong. We are just as responsible for our beliefs as we are for our words and actions. The only one who can give us the right thoughts and pure feelings is God. He alone can give wisdom and strength to properly deal with our beliefs toward others.

Job 18:1-3 | New Reproaches

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

When Job has finished his reaction to Eliphaz's second speech, Bildad takes the floor for the second time (verse 1). Again he has heard so much from Job's mouth, which is contrary to his theology, that he cannot keep his mouth shut and has to answer Job. He begins by accusing Job of continuing to oppose the arguments of his friends (verse 2). They have come to give him an insight into the cause of his suffering. If he now acknowledges this, they can continue to speak.

With this Bildad says that there is really no point in continuing to talk to Job if he sticks to his stubborn view of his situation. Nevertheless, he does not wait for Job's reaction and continues his sharp argument imperturbably. Bildad is blind to the fact that in reality it is exactly the other way around. He and his friends don't want to admit how stubborn they are. Their increasingly severe accusations are the result of not getting a grip on Job. The fact that he addresses Job in the plural ("you" is plural here) means that he sees in Job the representative of a certain class of people who question the position of the friends.

The reproach to Job that he considers the friends to be stupid, mindless beasts (verse 3) shows hurt pride. Job takes an attitude in their eyes that he does not even want to touch them, as if they were unclean. Bildad and his friends feel very offended by Job's reaction. He pays no attention at all to their vision. They came with all their wisdom and intellect to help Job understand his situation, and now Job dares to portray them as stupid "beasts". People who have a high opinion of themselves feel very hurt when others do not acknowledge this. They will not come to their senses and humiliate themselves, but humiliate the other.

Job 18:4-7 | The Certain Destiny of the Wicked

4 *"O you who tear yourself in your anger—
For your sake is the earth to be abandoned,
Or the rock to be moved from its place?
5 "Indeed, the light of the wicked goes out,
And the flame of his fire gives no light.
6 "The light in his tent is darkened,
And his lamp goes out above him.
7 "His vigorous stride is shortened,*

| *And his own scheme brings him down.*

With the remark that Job ‘tears himself in his anger’, Bildad blames him for being out of his mind, that he talks like a madman, like someone who does not know what he is saying (verse 4). Job has claimed that God is tearing him (Job 16:9). No, Bildad says, you do that yourself, God does not. Everyone and everything has to give way to the statements of Job. Everyone can disappear and what is a symbol of steadfastness can be moved, but the thinking of Job is stuck. We would say: even if everyone stands upside down, Job does not change his mind and holds on to it rigidly.

Bildad’s way of arguing proves nothing more than the weakness of his own arguments. What Bildad says has nothing to do with the content. Someone who cannot convince his opponent, but does not want to acknowledge his loss, will accuse the other of total immovability. He gets irritated by it and accuses the other person of being ‘inflexible’ in his opinions, that he is ‘stuck’ in his opinion, that he ‘doesn’t want to be open’ to other insights and so on.

Well Job, Bildad continues his speech and repeats his argument as a teacher to a student who is slow in understanding, you can be sure that “the light of the wicked goes out” (verse 5; Job 21:17). By this he means that Job may well think that he has the light, that he can judge his situation well, but that his light will go out because he is a wicked man. Even the flame of his fire will no longer give light, which means that his house will be uninhabited. For Bildad it is clear from God’s judgments about Job and his statements about them that Job is a hypocrite and a sinner.

The light that he had over his life, through which he could see everything in its proper meaning, has been darkened (verse 6). Job can no longer see how things really are, because his mind is darkened, Bildad judges. By “his lamp” can be meant the spirit of a human being (Pro 20:27). When a person dies, his spirit does not die, but he can no longer let his light shine over the things of this life. On the day his spirit leaves him, “in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psa 146:4).

As long as Job is still alive, he can no longer make the vigorous strides of the past (verse 7). He is hindered in this by his troubles and sicknesses that have come upon him because of his sins. What he has recommended to

others has become his trap. He perishes in his own counsel. His counsel was to sin for the purpose of prosperity. But that counsel has become his downfall.

Job 18:8-10 | Walked Into the Trap

8 *“For he is thrown into the net by his own feet,
And he steps on the webbing.*

9 *“A snare seizes [him] by the heel,
[And] a trap snaps shut on him.*

10 *“A noose for him is hidden in the ground,
And a trap for him on the path.*

Bildad expands on the retribution that is the part of the wicked. In verses 8-10 he uses the illustration of a trap to catch wild animals. He applies this to the entanglement of an evil person, with whom he means none other than Job. The idea is that whoever is out to do bad things will have to bear the consequences. It is the law that wherever a wicked person goes, he will eventually become entangled in death. “Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Gal 6:7b).

One who is hindered in his walk by his sins (verse 7) will not get far either. He is stopped because he is thrown into a net (verse 8). He does not realize that he is walking over a trap over which a webbing has been laid. When he walks over it, he sinks through the webbing and ends up in the trap. Here it is emphasized that he chooses this path himself, so he chooses his own downfall.

In verse 9 the emphasis is placed on the suddenness of his downfall. Suddenly he is stopped in his walk because a snare grabs him by the heel. He can no longer move a step. The situation overtakes and overwhelms him, without him being able to free himself from it. He didn’t foresee it, didn’t take it into account.

In verse 10 it is more about the inevitable. Someone who goes the way of sin inevitably faces a noose and a trap hidden from him. They lie there especially for him who goes a way of sin. He will be ensnared and captured by them. This fate afflicts everyone who goes the way of sin. Job must know that he is in misery like a trap because he has gone the way of sin.

Job 18:11-15 | Terror, Disease and Death

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

Bildad continues his description of the fate which, in his opinion, afflicts the villain whose description clearly points to Job. The villain is surrounded by horror, which constantly frightens him (verse 11). He is skittish and lets himself be chased away by it. This consumes his strength, without having food to strengthen him (verse 12). Hunger torments him. Right next to him, "at his side", "the calamity" is ready to charge him. The calamity is described as a person, as if it were a companion, someone who accompanies Job, but then as a kind of vulture, waiting for him to succumb in order to enjoy the meal.

"The firstborn of death" means the most powerful of death (verse 13; cf. Psa 78:51; Gen 49:3). With this, Bildad says that Job has been beaten with the most terrible and devastating diseases that death has ever used to make a man his prey. These diseases tear the skin of Job to pieces and devour his limbs. In his painting of the fate of the wicked, we see a word artist in Bildad. However, his choice of words also shows a cruelty that is hard to surpass, to say all this as a satirical weapon against the intensely and innocently suffering Job.

And he hasn't finished speaking yet. The sins he assumes with Job are the cause that his confidence in a happy home life has been torn away (verse 14). It was a false trust, for there were hidden sins. That is why he is now on his way to death, called by Bildad, again with great rhetoric, "the king of terrors". That may be so for Bildad, but for Job death does not mean terror, as we have seen before. For us, too, the fear of death has been taken

away, because the Lord Jesus has rendered “powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14).

Where Job dwelled, now something else dwells (verse 15). We can think of hunger, poverty and other things that did not belong to him when he lived there in prosperity and well-being. His dwelling will remain an uninhabitable place for people. Brimstone is scattered on his dwelling place. It is an eternal condemnation, just as it came upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Deu 29:23; Gen 19:24).

Job 18:16-20 | Root and Branch Perish

16 *“His roots are dried below,
And his branch is cut off above.*
17 *“Memory of him perishes from the earth,
And he has no name abroad.*
18 *“He is driven from light into darkness,
And chased from the inhabited world.*
19 *“He has no offspring or posterity among his people,
Nor any survivor where he sojourned.*
20 *“Those in the west are appalled at his fate,
And those in the east are seized with horror.*

In these verses Bildad describes the overthrow of the evildoer’s family. He compares him to a tree with roots and branches (verse 16; cf. Psa 37:35-36). Job is a tree that has no possibility of growth – its roots dry out – and from which is cut off what has come forth. The roots and branches point to the prosperity, happiness, and children of the wicked. All that will perish, from head to toe.

No one will think of the evildoer anymore (verse 17). Everyone is happy to be rid of him and wants to forget him as soon as possible. For people who have done much good for society, sometimes a memorial is erected. This will not be the case for Job. His name will never be mentioned again. How much Bildad was wrong about this, is clear to us. The name of Job lives on and is one of the most famous names from antiquity.

From verse 18 onward it is no longer about the family and attributes of the wicked, but about the wicked himself. Bildad predicts that the wicked, and

he clearly means Job, will be driven from the light into darkness (verse 18). No one wants to have anything to do with him. He is even chased from the inhabited world. No one grants him a place on it anymore. That is to say, they will chase him into the darkness of death.

Then there is the allusion of Bildad which he makes again to the death of Job's children (verse 19; Job 8:4). Job will be childless and therefore will have no heir or successor. His house will be empty, for everyone has died. We can hardly imagine how great the tragedy was for a man in those days not to have an heir. It probably escapes us that this remark must have penetrated Job through marrow and bone and cut him deep in his soul.

The day of Job's downfall will cause great turmoil among all those "who come after" (the literal translation of "those in the west") him, i.e. the coming generations, and also among those "who have gone before" (the literal translation of "those in the east"), the elderly, his contemporaries (verse 20). They will wonder horrified and terrified how such a prosperous and wealthy man could fall into such extreme poverty.

Job 18:21 | Bildad's Conclusion

21 *"Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked,
And this is the place of him who does not know God."*

Bildad ends in style, *his* style to be precise. His whole second speech is mercilessly harsh. In his first speech (Job 8) he hinted that Job may not have belonged to the wicked. But this second speech leaves no doubt about that. He is "sure" that all the mischief he has spoken about will strike the wicked (read: Job).

Then follows a further description of the wicked. The wicked, that is to say Job is that man. He is someone who "does not know God". The fact that his house has been wiped out is proof of this. What has happened to him only happens to someone who does not know God, who has no connection with Him.

This again shows the short-sightedness of Bildad and his two friends. They pretend that every wicked person will come across what Bildad has put forward in this chapter. But that is not true. Everybody sees that there

are wicked people who are prosperous and that there are righteous people who are suffering.

This short-sightedness is the result of a one-sided view on God. God is indeed righteous. But not every sin is already punished on earth, and not every good deed is already rewarded on earth. If we don't have an eye for that, we have and give the wrong impression of God. The friends are a cautionary example for us not to form a simplistic idea about God and then apply it to all kinds of situations. God is much greater than we can comprehend with our intellect.

Job 19

Introduction

In this chapter we hear Job's answer to Bildad. The contents of this chapter can be divided into four stanzas:

1. First, the despair of Job about the persistent attacks of the friends who overwhelm him (verses 2-5).
2. Then comes his despair about God, Who has left him and, according to his feelings, continues to attack him unjustly (verses 6-12).
3. Then comes his despair that God has alienated his loved ones and even his wife from him (verses 13-20).
4. But finally he turns in faith to Someone, his Redeemer, Who will redeem him at the end (verses 21-27), with the result that he makes a plea to his friends (verses 21) and gives a warning (verses 28-29) to stop with their false accusations.

Job 19:1-6 | How Long Will the Friends Continue?

1 *Then Job responded,*
2 *"How long will you torment me*
And crush me with words?
3 *"These ten times you have insulted me;*
You are not ashamed to wrong me.
4 *"Even if I have truly erred,*
My error lodges with me.
5 *"If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me*
And prove my disgrace to me,
6 *Know then that God has wronged me*
And has closed His net around me.

Just like the previous times Job answers to what has been said to him, this time by Bildad (verse 1). He asks Bildad and in him the other two friends how long they continue to accuse him (verse 2). They deeply sadden his

soul with it. His feelings are deeply hurt and crushed by the words of Bildad and his friends. They completely destroy him inwardly with what they say to him.

They have already disgraced him “ten times [an expression that means ‘many times’ (Gen 31:7; Num 14:22)]” with their unfounded accusations (verse 3). Each time he has pointed out to them their error and denied their accusations. They have not yet been able to substantiate any of their accusations with evidence. Their assumption is that he suffers because he has sinned. Despite their lack of evidence for their accusations, they are not ashamed to treat him so harshly.

Their actions against Job are downright shameless. After all, their coming was meant to sympathize with him and comfort him, wasn’t it (Job 2:11)?

Let alone, Job says, that I have truly erred. Then what have I done to you (verse 4)? After all, I only did it to myself, didn’t I? Then you don’t have to worry so much about that, do you? You have no right to treat me so harshly. But you are taking God’s place now. You exalt yourselves above me with your statements about the sins I am said to have committed (verse 5). You look down on me and speak to me from high above. You are making yourselves great at my expense. As evidence for your accusations you invoke “my disgrace”. This disgrace would have been brought upon me because of my sins.

But I do not have to do with you, I have to do with God (verse 6). God has pushed me down in defamation and disgrace. If you want to sue someone, do not sue me, but sue God! That is what they should do. Job sees God’s hand in everything. Only he has no explanation for why God’s hand weighs so heavily upon him, while the friends claim that this hand has come down upon him in discipline because of his sins.

Job thinks that God is against him for no reason. His friends think God has every reason to be against him. Neither of them are right, for God is *for* Job. The anger of God kindled against the Lord Jesus on the cross in full force, but not against Job.

Job feels surrounded by God’s net of trouble and calamity, from which he cannot free himself. This contrasts with Bildad’s assertions that Job ended up in that net through his own fault (Job 18:7-8). At the same time, there is

also the aspect that God draws Job to Himself with His net. Job is not yet ready to hand himself over to God, but he is constantly searching for Him.

Job 19:7-12 | Rejected and Abandoned by God

7 *"Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer;
I shout for help, but there is no justice.*

8 *"He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass,
And He has put darkness on my paths.*

9 *"He has stripped my honor from me
And removed the crown from my head.*

10 *"He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone;
And He has uprooted my hope like a tree.*

11 *"He has also kindled His anger against me
And considered me as His enemy.*

12 *"His troops come together,
And build up their way against me
And camp around my tent.*

Job cries that the law is violated in his case (verse 7). He says it is God Who does this. Yet Job turns to God for help. His cry for help, however, is not heard by Him. He does not get his right. There is no one who stands up for him, no one who says that the suffering he suffers is unjust and must be taken away from him.

From verse 8 onward he directly accuses God of making life impossible for him. His life path is blocked by God and is therefore impassable (verse 8). And the paths he has gone have been shrouded by God in darkness, so that he has lost all orientation. He cannot go in any direction. We would say: He sees no light at the end of the tunnel. There is nowhere to find a way out.

Job accuses God of robbing him of his honor and taking the crown from his head (verse 9). There is nothing left of the prestige he used to have and the wealth he possessed as a crown and gave him dignity (Pro 14:24). His good name and fame are gone.

Job describes the ruin of his life in pictures. Like a building, he is demolished by God, so that nothing but a mess remains (verse 10). He has per-

ished because God has broken him down on all sides: materially, in his family, in his health, in his social contacts and in his friendships. He also compares himself to a tree that has been “uprooted” by a hurricane. As a result, he is now without hope of life.

He considers himself to be the target of God’s anger that has been kindled against him in all fierceness (verse 11). This gives him the feeling that God is treating him as if he were His enemy. His desire is for God, yet God brings all this misery upon him. He doesn’t understand anything about this ‘war situation’, why God is so opposed to him. He hasn’t given God any reason to do so, has he?

Job sees the disasters that have come upon him as “His troops” (verse 12). It is as if in the disasters God is sending His armies against him. Those armies have built up their way against him, suggesting that they have been stopped by nothing. They have done their utmost to reach the tent, the abode, of Job in order to lay siege to it. It is as if his small, tiny tent is a mighty and hostile fortress with thick walls. What is God doing? It is not a question for Job *that* God has done this. The question of *why* God has done this remains a tormenting one for him.

In fact, Job is reasoning exactly like his friends. He also believes that God brings calamity to a man when he sins. The friends conclude from the calamity that struck him that he must have sinned. Job knows that this is not so. This brings him into great conflict with his thinking about God. He knows that he has done nothing to justify this suffering, yet God punishes him. The problem isn’t with him, so ... God must be wrong.

God endures Job’s accusations until His time has come to bring him into His holy presence. Anyone who is in endless suffering can wrestle for some time with the question of why God let this happen. As long as we have not been in such suffering, we would do well to suspend our judgment of Job’s accusations until we have heard God speak.

What we should know is that God does not consider us His enemies when suffering enters our lives. We may not always understand God’s way with us, but we may know that to those who love God, He “causes all things to work together for good” (Rom 8:28). In addition, when He disciplines

us, He shows His love for us, and proves that He sees us as His sons (Heb 12:6). There is no enmity against us.

Job 19:13-20 | Despised by the People

13 *"He has removed my brothers far from me,
And my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.*
14 *"My relatives have failed,
And my intimate friends have forgotten me.*
15 *"Those who live in my house and my maids consider me a stranger.
I am a foreigner in their sight.*
16 *"I call to my servant, but he does not answer;
I have to implore him with my mouth.*
17 *"My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am loathsome to my own brothers.*
18 *"Even young children despise me;
I rise up and they speak against me.*
19 *"All my associates abhor me,
And those I love have turned against me.*
20 *"My bone clings to my skin and my flesh,
And I have escaped [only] by the skin of my teeth.*

In this section Job passes from the enmity of God toward the disgust of men toward him. After his total breakdown he feels abandoned by everyone. But here too he says that it is something that God is doing to him. Much of what he says about people's attitudes toward him can be applied to what people have done to the Lord Jesus and how they have seen Him. The Lord has been truly forsaken of all. Job sees no explanation for what people did to him, but the Lord knew perfectly well why He was treated this way and why people considered Him this way.

It is a great torment that those from whom you should expect support have become unreachable to you when you suffer intensely. They no longer come to you, but drop you. And when they come to you, you still feel an enormous distance because they do not understand you, cannot sympathize with you, or even come up with advice that hurts you. God allows us to be disappointed in relying on our relationships, even the most intimate

ones, to learn to rely on Him alone. When He has achieved that goal, He reveals Himself to us.

Brothers or brethren, who were always there for you, on whom you could count especially in times of need, fail (verse 13). His acquaintances, those who know him, pretend he is a stranger to them (cf. *Psa 69:8*). These brothers and friends have nothing of the brother and friend of whom Solomon says: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (*Pro 17:17*). A true friend not only loves when you are doing well, but also when you are doing badly. In times of need, that friend will become a brother, someone who will help carry the burden as a family member (cf. *Gal 6:2*). The perfect example of this is the Lord Jesus. He is like that for us and never disappoints us.

Job is completely on the skids. That is why his close relatives no longer seek him out (verse 14). They do not want to be seen in the company of such a man. They are ashamed of him. His acquaintances don't even think of him anymore and forget him. There are more important things to do than to concern oneself with someone who has got himself into such trouble. As long as somebody's doing well and there's some honor or benefit to be gained from visiting, we'll do it. But if something like pity is asked for, we let it go. We can't deal well with other people's suffering.

Job is considered a stranger by those who live in his house and his maids, as someone who does not belong to them (verse 15). Not only did they not offer him any help, but they broke off their relationship with him. These are the people who experienced him closely during the period of prosperity in daily life. Now they stare at him as if they had never seen him before, as if he came from a different country, with a different language and different customs.

The servant who used to carry out his duties willingly and faithfully is now deaf to the voice of Job when he calls him (verse 16). He does not answer and pretends that Job is air to him. Why should he still serve Job? Job can no longer give him anything, no reward and no punishment. In the old days a movement of the hand or head could be enough to make the servant do something. Now Job must use his mouth to get his servant to

do something. And instead of commanding him, Job humiliates himself by begging his servant.

Job's wife has apparently stayed with him, although she is not what a wife should be, a help to her husband (verse 17). She too sees him as an object of God's displeasure, and leaves him alone in his suffering. She stays at a distance, so that she cannot smell his breath. The love that was between her and Job has cooled down. It is extremely tragic when, in a marriage, a tragedy affecting one of the spouses causes separation. On the contrary, need should lead to greater unity between husband and wife.

He is loathsome to his own brothers and sisters. They pinch their nose for him, he stinks because of the festering wounds that cover his body.

Young children despise him (verse 18). Little children tend to stare at deformed people and walk around them with a bow. This is more out of fear than contempt. Young children may despise someone and treat him disrespectfully because of his appearance (cf. 2Kgs 2:23). Job must have looked hideous, repulsive. When he stood up, they showed no respect, but began to contradict him, perhaps even to boo him. Young children can be mercilessly hard on the weak and vulnerable in society. How important it is that parents teach their children respect for every human being as a creature of God, according to the command: "Honor all people" (1Pet 2:17; cf. Jam 3:8-11).

All those with whom Job had a confidential relationship, with whom he shared things in confidence to hear what they thought of them, turned their backs on him in horror (verse 19). With some people he had a special bond, a bond of love. That goes beyond a confidential bond. The people he loved have now become his opponents. They have turned against him. Love is answered with opposition (cf. Psa 109:4). That's very painful.

Job has emaciated so much that he has become even less than 'skin and bones' (verse 20; cf. Lam 4:8). His bones stick through his skin and his flesh. Parts of his skin and flesh have been tarnished away. He has been reduced to a skeleton. All that is left of him is his gums. He can still chew on that.

Job 19:21-24 | The Supplication for Pity

21 *"Pity me, pity me, O you my friends,
For the hand of God has struck me.*
22 *"Why do you persecute me as God [does],
And are not satisfied with my flesh?*
23 *"Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!*
24 *"That with an iron stylus and lead
They were engraved in the rock forever!*

Job has reached the nadir of the description of his situation. He makes a heartbreaking appeal to those he emphatically calls "my friends" to have pity on him (verse 21; cf. Job 6:14). He particularly needs their help now that God's hand has hit him so hard (Job 1-2). That hand still rests heavily on him, without giving him a reason for it. He yearns for them to help him bear the suffering.

Now it is still the case for Job that they persecute him and behave toward him as God behaves toward him (verse 22). When will they be saturated with his flesh? When they see him, should it not dawn on them how much he suffers? Is this not sufficient reason to stop tormenting him with their accusations, making his suffering all the greater?

Job is so sure that he suffers innocently that he wishes his words to be written down and inscribed in a book (verse 23). Then future generations will be able to read his defense. He is convinced that they will come to the conclusion that his accusers are wrong and he really is innocent.

He also wants them, in addition to being inscribed in a book, to be "engraved in the rock with an iron stylus and lead forever" (verse 24). After all, a book can perish or be lost, but what is engraved in a rock and filled with lead is very durable and remains legible for a long time. In this way he wants to lift his 'right', the testimony about his innocence and the injustice done to him, over his death.

What Job desires has been done in a much more convincing way than he proposes. His words have been taken up by God in His Word, the eternal Word. Only that did not happen as he intended it to record his innocence

forever, but to teach us about God's dealings with a man to whom He wishes to reveal Himself.

Job's words come from the desire to defend his sincerity. Thus he has defended his words before (Job 7:7-11; 10:1; 13:3,13-14). They are also a direct answer to Bildad's harsh words that his memory will perish on earth and that his name will be extinct (Job 18:17). Both Job and Bildad know the truth of the words of wisdom: "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot" (Pro 10:7). Job clings to the first part, Bildad uses the second part for Job.

Job 19:25-27 | The Triumph of Faith

25 *"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.*
26 *"Even after my skin is destroyed,
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;
27 Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes will see and not another.
My heart faints within me!*

Then in these verses we suddenly see another ray of light of Job's faith. Instead of being engraved in a stone rock on earth, Job now seeks it higher up by the Living Rock. He speaks of a Redeemer, Whom he very personally calls "my Redeemer" (verse 25). His rock (verse 24) is his Redeemer. In Hebrew the word "I" is emphasized at the beginning of the verse. It shows Job's firm conviction: 'I, yes I, know.'

The word "lives" is more than "being alive". It implies that the Redeemer will continue His work to establish Jobs' sincerity and to justify him from the charges against him. This is also contained in the words of Job in the last verses of this chapter.

In two previous chapters (Job 9; 16) where Job expresses his deep bitterness toward God, he also spoke of the Person Whom he calls here "Redeemer". In Job 9 he notices the absence of that Person: "There is no umpire between us" (Job 9:33), including the question: "If only there was one." In Job 16 he pronounces that this Person is Someone Who knows and looks after His cause: "My witness is in heaven, and my advocate is on high" (Job 16:19).

Here in Job 19 this grows to the conviction that He is a living Redeemer, Someone Who gives Him all that belongs to Him: "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Job has more in mind here than just Someone Who will testify to his sincerity. In Job 16 he sees himself as a victim of murder when he shouts: "O earth, do not cover my blood" (Job 16:18). He is counting on his Savior, his *Goel*, to testify for him, but also to do him justice. He knows that God will do this after his death. He does not yet know that God will do him justice on earth. That makes his statements statements of faith.

The Hebrew word for 'redeemer' is *goel*. Depending on the context, this word is also translated as 'blood avenger'. The word is important in the Old Testament jurisprudence. It has an aspect relating to crime and an aspect relating to civil relations. As the 'blood avenger', the *goel* had the responsibility to avenge the blood of a killed family member (Num 35:12-28). He was not seeking vengeance, but justice. The redeemer or *goel*, also restores lost rights or loss of property. He upholds justice (Lev 25:25-34).

Regarding the civil aspect, the *goel* had the responsibility to "repurchase" and thereby redeem the lost inheritance of a deceased family member. This could be done by buying free from slavery or by marrying the widow to provide for an heir. As such, he was the defender of the oppressed, as we see in the book of Ruth (Rth 4:1-10; Pro 23:10-11). In the exodus and at the exile, God is the *Goel* of His oppressed people (Exo 6:6; Isa 43:1). As the *Goel* the LORD frees persons from death (Psa 103:4).

Because his Redeemer lives, Job also knows that this Redeemer "at the last ... will take His stand on the earth [literally: dust]". This means that He will exercise His dominion over all matter, including man, who is dust. "Take His stand" means to move in order to take action. The Redeemer will rise up and come to earth to restore everything and do justice everywhere.

Job expects to die and that of his body in the grave nothing will remain (verse 26). When he dies he is stripped of his skin. However, even though his skin is gone, he will see God from his flesh. Here it appears that Job has faith in the resurrection. Here he speaks as his conviction the truth of a literal, bodily resurrection. With his statement about the resurrection

Job ‘plants the flag of victory on his own grave’. David also spoke about the resurrection (Acts 2:31). The believers in the Old Testament know that there is a resurrection (Psa 17:15; Isa 38:11-19).

In addition to his faith in the resurrection, he also believes that he will then see God. He will not hear God speak His decision in favor of him from a distance, but he will stand face to face with God in a glorified body. He will see God in the face of Jesus Christ Who is the image of God. Sickness and the grave will consume his body, but that is not the end of his existence. He says, as it were, what David later says: “As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake” (Psa 17:15).

He himself shall behold God with His own eyes (verse 27). It is that God Whom he now experiences as Someone Who is against him. At the same time he knows of that God that He is his God. There is no other God. God is the God on Whom he has always trusted, even though he is in despair about His dealings with him. He knows God and God knows him. Job will be no other person, no stranger, someone kept at a distance because he has no relationship with God. God is also no other God than the God he has served on earth.

His longing is not for the recovery of his health, the liberation from all his troubles and the return to his former prosperity and well-being, to all that God has ever given him. He knows that this is unattainable, he does not believe in it. What he longs for is what is greater than all earthly prosperity, and that is God Himself. That desire is so great that it causes his heart to faint within him. It indicates the intense and total longing of all that is within him. At the end of the book this longing is fulfilled already in a sense, while he receives in addition what he didn’t ask for.

Job 19:28-29 | A Serious Warning

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

Job concludes his answer to Bildad with a serious warning to the three friends. They have accused him unjustly. Let them turn to themselves and wonder why they are persecuting him, why they are accusing him (verse 28).

Job denies that he has sinned, but he does not deny that God judges sins. According to you, Job says, the root of what has happened to me lies within myself. But if you continue to condemn me and presume that I am responsible for my own suffering, then the sword of righteousness will come and you will find yourselves found guilty (verse 29).

That is why they themselves should fear the sword of God's righteousness. They have spoken to him in anger and not in compassion. The strong accusations they have thrown at Job were not a service of friendship, but a crime. They will have to account to God for that.

Job 20

Introduction

It's Zophar's turn for a second speech. He's the fiercest speaker. Of his friends, he is the one who leaves the least doubt as to who he means. Because of his fervor, he is also the first to stop with his statements. This is his second and last speech. The other two friends will speak to Job a third time and then remain silent.

What Zophar says is almost all true. His great error is that he applies everything he says to a righteous one. If we taste the undertone of his words to some extent, it seems that Zophar is someone who speaks from the comfortable fact that he himself is healthy and prosperous and sees therein, for himself, the proof of his own goodness and righteousness.

Zophar makes brilliant and masterful use of the Hebrew language in poetic form, a literary masterpiece. All the more tragic is the fact that a wrong message can be packaged and delivered in such a marvelous way.

He begins by explaining why he goes to fight again with words (verses 1-3). Next he describes with great attention to detail what according to his theology a wicked person looks like (verses 4-29).

Job 20:1-6 | The Joy of the Wicked Is Short

1 *Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,*
2 *"Therefore my disquieting thoughts make me respond,*
Even because of my inward agitation.
3 *"I listened to the reproof which insults me,*
And the spirit of my understanding makes me answer.
4 *"Do you know this from of old,*
From the establishment of man on earth,
5 *That the triumphing of the wicked is short,*
And the joy of the godless momentary?
6 *"Though his loftiness reaches the heavens,*
And his head touches the clouds,

It is Zophar's turn to answer Job (verse 1). The speed and fierceness of his reaction show, as is often the case, that he is expressing superficial thoughts and not truths of weight. He has formed *his* thoughts during the speaking of Job without listening to him properly. He will speak these thoughts as a response (verse 2). It is indeed his thoughts, not God's, however much truth there is in what he says. He will not waste any time on them either, for the words of Job must be immediately contradicted.

For Job has uttered a reproof – he has heard it himself – that insults him (verse 3). By this he will mean the serious warning of Job in the last verses of the previous chapter. This warning resonates. What Job said to them there, he cannot leave unanswered, of course. Job dares to accuse them of a criminal action against him. It is an insult!

But Zophar is confident that his spirit knows what to answer. He has understanding or reason enough for that. He is so convinced of his right that correction is unthinkable, yes, offensive to him. He sees himself as someone who has a good understanding of things, and especially of Job's case. Nobody fools him. On the contrary, others, especially Job, have to listen to him, because he has knowledge of things.

He will catch up with Job about something that has existed since creation (verse 4). Anyone who has a bit of sense knows that. It is about the question of the wicked and the godless or hypocrite (verse 5). Does Job know? Job has claimed that he knows something (Job 19:25), but Zophar says that Job's knowledge is modern enlightenment, for it is not based on a correct knowledge of history. So it is foolish knowledge. With this, Zophar sweeps Job's argument off the table.

Zophar will not say that the wicked and the godless have no pleasure, but it is clear that this has always been short-lived. What Zophar says may sound impressive, but it is not always true. For instance, Cain lived for a long time after the murder of his brother.

For Zophar, Job is proof that the understanding he gained in his study of history is correct. Job enjoyed prosperity and happiness. But in reality he is an ungodly and hypocrite. That is why this period of prosperity and joy has only been short, for a moment. Job can still imagine so much and walk with his head in the clouds, he ends in disaster (verse 6). In the back-

ground is also the idea that the health and prosperity enjoyed by Zophar are proof of his right.

Job 20:7-11 | He Will Soon Be Cut Off

*7 He perishes forever like his refuse;
Those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'
8 "He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him;
Even like a vision of the night he is chased away.
9 "The eye which saw him sees him no longer,
And his place no longer beholds him.
10 "His sons favor the poor,
And his hands give back his wealth.
11 "His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
But it lies down with him in the dust.*

If we try to forget for a moment who Zophar is addressing, he speaks in flowery language, full of appealing examples. He is an expert in describing evil and its results. But the application to Job is too clear to really forget to whom he is speaking. Job will perish, and in the most shameful way: just like his refuse (verse 7). Refuse will be wiped away and never seen again. There is no desire to get it back either. This is how it will be with Job. A dead body treated with contempt is thrown into the field as dung (2Kgs 9:37; Psa 83:9-10; Jer 8:2; 9:22; 16:4; 25:33).

The wicked perish in the same way as a dream and a vision (verse 8). A dream and a vision are temporary and fleeting apparitions. They are there for a moment and then disappear again. They cannot be held or recalled. When they are over, they are irrevocably gone, wiped away like a mist that dissolves because it is chased away by the wind.

No one will see him again (verse 9), for he is like a dream and a vision that are gone. The place where he lived no longer sees him either. He will never come back. His place is empty, as if he has never been there. His children become beggars (verse 10). He leaves nothing for them, for he must return the wealth he has unfairly taken away from others.

He himself may still be so full of youthful vigor, but premature death will put an end to it (verse 11). In the power of his life he will be powerless in

the dust and perish to the dust from which he was made (Gen 3:19). And, according to Zophar, untimely death is proof that God always punishes the wicked.

Job 20:12-16 | The Wicked Poisons Himself

12 *“Though evil is sweet in his mouth
[And] he hides it under his tongue,
13 [Though] he desires it and will not let it go,
But holds it in his mouth,
14 [Yet] his food in his stomach is changed
To the venom of cobras within him.
15 “He swallows riches,
But will vomit them up;
God will expel them from his belly.
16 “He sucks the poison of cobras;
The viper’s tongue slays him.*

Zophar presents the wicked as one who has sin in his mouth as something sweet (verse 12). He hides it under his tongue, for otherwise “the sweet” melts too quickly, and it is out with the fun. He wants to enjoy it as long as possible. He cherishes evil and holds it in his mouth (verse 13). To let it go, to let loose and to cease is not an option for him. He will keep it in his mouth for as long as possible. If he holds it against his palate, he will enjoy it as long as possible. The taste of it is so good ...

But this pleasure comes to an end. When he has swallowed the delicacy and it has entered his belly and intestines, the delicacy turns into “the venom of cobras” (verse 14). Sin is not candy, but snake poison. What he has greedily gained in power by robbing it from others, he will vomit out again (verse 15). God will personally take care of that. What the wicked has sucked in in sinful pleasure is nothing but snake poison (verse 16). In short, the death of the wicked is caused by his own sin.

Job 20:17-21 | Past Prosperity Does Not Benefit

17 *“He does not look at the streams,
The rivers flowing with honey and curds.*

18 *"He returns what he has attained
 And cannot swallow [it];
 As to the riches of his trading,
 He cannot even enjoy [them].*
 19 *"For he has oppressed [and] forsaken the poor;
 He has seized a house which he has not built.*
 20 *"Because he knew no quiet within him,
 He does not retain anything he desires.*
 21 *"Nothing remains for him to devour,
 Therefore his prosperity does not endure.*

Zophar depicts what the wicked would like to feast on, but what he will never see (verse 17). He holds all this up to Job to make him realize that Job is an ungodly man. The wicked one imagines that he will enjoy "streams, rivers of honey and curds". "Honey and curds" represent the highest enjoyment of earthly prosperity and earthly happiness (cf. Exo 3:8; Deu 6:3). The wicked man sees it coming in streams. He also sees in his imagination that large supplies of it are available in rivers. It is one great pleasure of undisturbed enjoyment. But he will see nothing of it.

It will be completely different than he imagined. What he has attained, he must return to its rightful owners (verse 18). He wanted to devour it in his greed, but that illusion is taken away from him. The pleasure of what he has wrongfully appropriated also passes him by.

The cause of this is his merciless act against the poor (verse 19). He first oppressed them (literally: crushed them) and took everything away and then left them to their miserable fate in which they had ended up due to his actions. The latter is done by taking everything away from them. His loot also includes a house he did not build. He chased the residents out and took possession of it.

However, he "knew no quiet within him" (verse 20). He is never satisfied. His greed yearns for more and more, he is insatiable. Restless he is always looking for more. But everything he covets will be lost. He will not be able to save anything to survive the time of need. Nothing edible remains to satisfy his hunger (verse 21). He has devoured everything and everyone. The expected benefit of his prosperity is only of short duration.

Job 20:22-25 | Payback

22 *"In the fullness of his plenty he will be cramped;
The hand of everyone who suffers will come [against] him.*

23 *"When he fills his belly,
[God] will send His fierce anger on him
And will rain [it] on him while he is eating.*

24 *"He may flee from the iron weapon,
[But] the bronze bow will pierce him.*

25 *"It is drawn forth and comes out of his back,
Even the glittering point from his gall.
Terrors come upon him,*

When the wicked man thinks he has a fulness of abundance, cramps come upon him (verse 22). The terrible possibility that he will lose everything gives him nightmares. What strikes him is worse than a nightmare. Every suffering person who has ever fallen into misery due to him will raise his hand against him and have it come down upon him with punishment.

Not only will the hand of every suffering person be against him, but God will also turn against him (verse 23). That will be his judgment. If he has something to fill his belly, God will send His fierce anger on him. God will fill his belly with His fierce anger, until it gives him abdominal pain and he has no use of his food at all (cf. Psa 106:14-15). He will get no strength from it. And while he is still enjoying his food, he will be struck by a rain of anger that God sends upon him in His displeasure.

There is no way to escape this judgment. The wicked who thinks he can escape one evil will be struck by another evil (verse 24; cf. Amos 5:19). His attempts to flee judgment are useless. If he succeeds in fleeing from iron weapons (the sword), he will be struck by an arrow with a glittering point shot by a bronze bow. No matter how hard he runs away, the arrow overtakes him and penetrates his back (verse 25). The arrow has penetrated deep into his body. When it is pulled out, it turns out to have gall on it, which means he is fatally struck. There is no cure for it. A terrible death awaits him.

Job 20:26-28 | The Anger Remains

*26 Complete darkness is held in reserve for his treasures,
And unfanned fire will devour him;*

It will consume the survivor in his tent.

*27 "The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
And the earth will rise up against him.*

28 "The increase of his house will depart;

[His possessions] will flow away in the day of His anger.

The only view the wicked has, both for himself and for his safely stored goods, is "complete darkness" (verse 26). Darkness in all its facets awaits him. That is where he ends up. There he will be devoured by an unfanned fire, which means a fire that has not been blown by men, but by God. Whoever he has left "in his tent", that is in his dwelling-place, "will be consumed" by it. This is a reference to the children of Job who also perished. Zophar did not spare Job any horror. He presents Job the way and the end of the wicked, without showing him any ray of hope.

In verse 27, Zophar refutes Job's claim that his Witness is in heaven (Job 16:18-20), by stating that the iniquity of the wicked will be revealed to others by the heavens, i.e. by God. Everyone will hear of it. The result will not be a 'silent march' for the dead wicked. On the contrary, there will be great indignation on earth. Everyone will rise up against the wicked because of what has become known.

Sometimes people are honored posthumously, that is after their death. But it can also happen that people are despised and cursed after their death. The latter sometimes happens when, after their death, the terrible things that people, who were celebrated during their lives, have done become known. This is how it will be with Job, according to Zophar. Even the earth, which has seen all these terrible things, will testify to it (Deu 31:28).

The wicked shall lose all his prosperity (verse 28). That has happened to Job. Zophar attributes this to the anger of God. It is the explanation of the friends for the loss that Job has suffered. It was all taken out of his hands by God because he has sinned. Zophar does not doubt this, as he says in his closing words.

Job 20:29 | Zophar's Conclusion

29 *"This is the wicked man's portion from God,
Even the heritage decreed to him by God."*

Zophar ends his second speech in the same way as Bildad (Job 18:21). The conclusion of his whole speech is crystal clear. Without a doubt, what he said about the fate of the wicked is exactly what God will do to Job. The wicked has spoken words against God. That is what Job has done. By doing so, he has acquired his hereditary possession consisting of God's anger. Job has acquired his heritage. The legacy of rebellion against God is the loss of everything he possessed and that life becomes one great ruin, with death as its only prospect.

Without pity, Zophar persecuted the plagued Job with his words. There is no understanding for Job's uprightness. What Zophar says, he says all under the guise of standing up for God's rights. No help is to be expected from Zophar and his friends and people like them.

Job 21

Introduction

In his reply to Zophar, Job addressed himself by way of exception, only to his friends and no longer to God. The thought that his Savior lives (Job 19:25) gives him rest. He responds to Zophar's speech, but his answer is, as so often, addressed to the three friends together. The friends represent a God Who brings righteous retribution on someone when he sins. They have all always claimed that God punishes the wicked with misfortune.

Job will refute this by demonstrating in detail that this is not true for all the wicked. He tells them that God's righteousness is by no means always exercised on earth and can often not be observed by man. There are also wicked people who prosper and live long. But also the wicked who lives a long time and is not harmed in his life, will one day have to account to God (verse 30).

Job 21:1-6 | The Seriousness of His Answer

1 *Then Job answered,*
2 *"Listen carefully to my speech,*
And let this be your [way of] consolation.
3 *"Bear with me that I may speak;*
Then after I have spoken, you may mock.
4 *"As for me, is my complaint to man?*
And why should I not be impatient?
5 *"Look at me, and be astonished,*
And put [your] hand over [your] mouth.
6 *"Even when I remember, I am disturbed,*
And horror takes hold of my flesh.

Job answers Zophar (verse 1). His answer shows his unbroken spirit. He is no longer so bitter in his speaking about God, nor so longing for death. The friends had come to comfort him, but that failed completely. It has turned out the opposite. They have increased his burden. Job now says that they

cannot comfort him in their words, but that they can comfort him by listening attentively to him (verse 2). What he has to say is fully worthy of their attention. It is a call to take his words seriously and to consider them.

Attentive listening requires a lot from the listener. If that can be done, it means comfort for the suffering one. Those who are unable to do so are better not to talk about someone else's need and even less to concern themselves with it. A suffering person desires an open, listening ear and not an open, condemning mouth. Much grief has become heavier because of impatience and lack of empathy because what was really said was not listened to properly.

Job does not ask for understanding. He no longer seems to expect that. He asks for forbearance (verse 3). If only they could bear that which he speaks. He has something on his heart that he wants them to at least hear. When he has spoken, they can continue to mock him. He does not count on approval. Yet he wants to say what he has to say. But even if he were to complain to a man, does that mean that he should not be impatient? Who would not be, if everything had been taken away from him and God's dealings with him were so inscrutable?

To himself it is so that he does not complain to a man (verse 4). His complaint has been addressed to God. Why, then, do the friends react so harshly? God does not blame Job for that. He would rather that we wrestle than be indifferent to Him or deal with His truth in an arrogant way and make it a dead matter. Job's wrestling – that he cannot understand what God is doing to him – is proof that he is not indifferent or arrogant. His counselors moderate that they know what is going on.

Job wants them to turn to him in order to take in what grief and suffering he finds himself in (verse 5). When they realize this, they will be astonished that someone can suffer so badly, and without guilt. Then they will put their hand over their mouth, which means that they will not say another word. Maybe they will realize what a great injustice they are doing to him by accusing him of secret sins.

When he remembers the possible cause of all the mountains of suffering that have come upon him, namely that God allows injustice, he "is disturbed" (verse 6). If he thinks of all the misery under which he has been

buried, he will be overwhelmed by it. The shivers crawl over his back again, and his legs begin to tremble. He who has ever experienced something very intense and thinks back to it, recognizes that reaction of the flesh.

Job 21:7-16 | The Prosperity of the Wicked

7 *"Why do the wicked [still] live,
Continue on, also become very powerful?*
8 *"Their descendants are established with them in their sight,
And their offspring before their eyes,
9 Their houses are safe from fear,
And the rod of God is not on them.
10 "His ox mates without fail;
His cow calves and does not abort.
11 "They send forth their little ones like the flock,
And their children skip about.
12 "They sing to the timbrel and harp
And rejoice at the sound of the flute.
13 "They spend their days in prosperity,
And suddenly they go down to Sheol.
14 "They say to God, 'Depart from us!
We do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways.
15 'Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him,
And what would we gain if we entreat Him?'
16 "Behold, their prosperity is not in their hand;
The counsel of the wicked is far from me.*

Job now comes to the main subject of his answer. He presents a difficulty to his friends, and that is the prosperity of the wicked (cf. Psa 73:2-3,12). The word "why" with which he begins should make them think (verse 7). As skillfully as Zophar described the demise of the wicked in the previous chapter, Job describes their prosperity. Everything contrasts with the fate that has struck him.

Job first asks three questions, after which he continues his argument with a few observations. The first question is why the wicked still live. What is the usefulness of this? Why has God given them life and why does He let

them live? The second question is why He lets them continue to live so long that they grow old. The third question has to do with the content of their life. Why can they become very powerful, live easy and carefree, get everything they want and even increase in wealth?

We can answer these questions in the light of the New Testament, but Job wrestles with them. For Job it is the world upside down. Everything has been taken away from him, the power of his life has disappeared, and its end is prematurely in sight. And this, while he is truly God-fearing. The friends have claimed that the wicked are cut off in the power of their life (Job 20:26). But what he observes with the wicked is that they constantly enjoy the company of their children and grandchildren (verse 8). Contrary to what Zophar claims (Job 20:26), the wicked do not lose their children because of God's judgments, whereas in his case he has lost them.

Look also at their houses (verse 9). There is peace there. That is because the disciplinary rod of God is not upon them. Job has heard the opposite from the mouths of his friends. According to them they do not have a moment of peace and are constantly in fear (Job 15:21-24). That is not true, at least not for all the wicked.

His cattle are also extremely fertile (verse 10). Each time an ox mates, a cow becomes pregnant. And when the calf is born, it is healthy. This is how his herd grows. God does not intervene to prevent that. Rather, it seems that He spares the wicked all that He sends to God-fearing people like Job.

Their offspring is numerous (verse 11). It looks like a herd, so many children are there. The children are also full of life, they go through life skipping. It indicates that they do not suffer from diseases, but are healthy. They also have fun in life. They make music, and at the same time they sing along with the music full of joy (verse 12). Hearing music makes them happy. In this way they live their lives carefree and cheerfully.

They enjoy the good things in life and know no trials and poverty. When their time comes, they die in peace, without being tormented by pain. Their funeral is attended by many. Under great interest, they go down to Sheol (verse 13). They have never been a burden to anyone, and there has been no sign of God's displeasure in their lives (cf. Lk 16:19,25). The scene

of happiness in which the ungodly lives is a powerful denial of the friends' claim that all evil people and their families suffer for their sins.

In addition, these wicked people not only ignore God, but even knowingly reject Him! Listen to what they dare to say to God: "Depart from us! We do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways" (verse 14). They may not say it in so many words, but this is the language that speaks from their lives. People can live in a way that they do not want to have anything to do with God. They don't want God to interfere with their lives. He has to stay away from that, because it's their life.

Nor are they people who have had no opportunity to know God's ways, but they express that they don't *want* to know them. They don't want to know anything about Him. They don't want to hear anything about the fact that He is in charge of everything and also of their lives. They are not interested in His ways. They decide for themselves how they live. If a man has come this far, how deeply he has sunk. And God doesn't intervene!

Braggishly they say: "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?" (verse 15; cf. Exo 5:2; Pro 30:9). This is quite a defiance of God. They not only reject Him, but speak of Him with great contempt. They do not even seem to regard Him as a Person. After all, they do not ask the question "Who is the Almighty?", but, as it is literally, "What is the Almighty?" What does He think He is, that we would serve Him? What does He imagine that He would have authority over us and that we should submit to His will? By the way, is it of any profit if we turn to Him and "entreat Him"? Prayer is for the weak who cannot manage on their own. Then faith in God is a nice pacifier, to get the feeling that you are not alone. We don't surrender to that foolishness.

We hear this language of the human heart everywhere. Man denies that God has authority over him. He wants to be independent and therefore he rejects all claims of his Creator. He does not want to see that he is dependent on Him for every breath (Dan 5:23b). He is not open to the fact that serving Him gives the greatest satisfaction and the greatest happiness. That he should live by grace is a reprehensible thought. Holding up his hand to get something is beneath his dignity as an independent being. No, he doesn't need God and he doesn't want Him.

But, Job says, they are very much mistaken. They think they have everything under control, but they would do well to remember that “their prosperity is not in their hand” (verse 16). It seems as if they have everything in their power and under control, but that is self-deception. It can all just slip out of their hands because of sudden disasters. They can also get sick or die and then it is also over with their enjoyment of it.

Job says he doesn’t look at life that way. It is far from him to act like a wicked man. He does not share the counsel of the wicked, nor does he share their advice. So his friends should not think that he is their lawyer and defends their way of life, even though he describes the prosperity of their lives.

Job 21:17-21 | Judgment Is Not Always Directly Visible

*17 “How often is the lamp of the wicked put out,
Or does their calamity fall on them?
Does God apportion destruction in His anger?
18 “Are they as straw before the wind,
And like chaff which the storm carries away?
19 “[You say], ‘God stores away a man’s iniquity for his sons.’
Let God repay him so that he may know [it].
20 “Let his own eyes see his decay,
And let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.
21 “For what does he care for his household after him,
When the number of his months is cut off?*

Job continues to refute what his friends have said about wickedness and the anger of God that He brings upon these wicked people during their lives. Well, let them prove it. Let them tell him how often it happens “that the lamp of the wicked” is “put out”, that is, that darkness comes into their lives through doom that strikes them because of their wickedness (verse 17). This means that their downfall is certain. It comes upon them without them being able to resist it. This happens to them by God Who in His anger inflicts sorrow on them because of their wickedness.

But does God really always act this way with every wicked person? That would mean that they would be blown away like straw by the wind, and

taken away like worthless chaff by the storm (verse 18). But is that a uniform law, to which God acts invariably? Surely the friends will have to admit that this is not always true. This is an important argument of Job. After all, there are plenty of wicked people who have long and happy lives. The world is full of wicked people. The percentage of believers is small. Yet God does not put an end to all the wicked, but still endures them.

The friends have also said that the children of the wicked are also punished for their iniquity (verse 19; Job 20:10). But God does not always do that. Sometimes children do face the consequences of their parents' sins (Exo 20:5). However, a child is not punished because of the sins of his parents (1Kgs 14:12-13; 2Chr 25:4), but because of his own sins (Eze 18:20; Gal 6:5). In the same way, the wicked is also requited by God, so that he notices that he has sinned against God.

Job clearly speaks out against the wicked. He must not be spared his decay, but see it with his own eyes (verse 20). God must "let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty". The wicked has expressed contempt for the Almighty (verse 15). But he will have to deal with Him and drink of His wrath. Then it is over with his talk. Then he will know Who he has always resisted and Who he has always ignored.

Once the wicked man has died, there is nothing left of the joy he enjoyed in his wicked life (verse 21). Once the number of his months has been cut off, he knows nothing more about it. In death, this no longer occupies him. How it goes with those he left behind is not his concern. He does not know what happens after him in his house and with his children. Cutting off the number of his months may indicate sudden death. He dies before he gets old. That can happen to the wicked as well.

Job 21:22-26 | People Live and Die Differently

22 *"Can anyone teach God knowledge,
In that He judges those on high?*
23 *"One dies in his full strength,
Being wholly at ease and satisfied;*
24 *His sides are filled out with fat,
And the marrow of his bones is moist,*

25 *While another dies with a bitter soul,
Never even tasting [anything] good.*
26 *“Together they lie down in the dust,
And worms cover them.*

No one can tell God how to deal with people. It is presumptuous to think that God should behave the way we think He should behave. This is a form of “teaching God” (verse 22). God is the Judge of even the highest created beings, the angels. So who can tell Him how He should do His work? No one, of course. God knows what He does when He allows the wicked to live, sometimes for a long time, sometimes for a short time. Therefore, the friends’ assertion that judgment in this life is always a sign of sin and prosperity of righteousness is false. It is good not to judge anything before time (1Cor 4:5).

There is much inequality in dying and the life that preceded it, Job says to his friends. This concerns not only age – one dies young, the other old – but also circumstances. A person can die in the strength of his life, without having known any worries (verse 23). He has also lived in peace, without fear. His circumstances do not at all indicate anything of God’s anger that would rest upon him and come upon him through his death. That his pails are full of milk (as it also can be translated) prove that his cows produce a lot of milk (verse 24). He himself is in good health and full of life when he dies.

Another, on the other hand, dies very differently. He dies in bitterness of soul (verse 25). The life he has had has been a life of misery. He has not eaten of the good. He had little or no pleasure during his life, but was filled with sorrow. That is a big difference in the life and death of two people.

It’s different in their deaths. After their death they lie together in the dust of death, in the grave (verse 26). Their fate is equal then. Both are covered with and eaten by worms (Isa 14:11). In the realm of the dead, all the wicked are equal. Prosperity or adversity in life does not give one a better place in the realm of the dead than the other. The bed of feathers of the rich and the bed of straw of the poor is changed in death for both into the dust of the earth. They lie down in it. The silk covering under which the rich one

has lain and the rag covering under which the poor one has lain has turned into worms for both of them.

Job 21:27-31 | Job Accuses the Friends

27 *"Behold, I know your thoughts,
And the plans by which you would wrong me.*
28 *"For you say, 'Where is the house of the nobleman,
And where is the tent, the dwelling places of the wicked?'*
29 *"Have you not asked wayfaring men,
And do you not recognize their witness?*
30 *"For the wicked is reserved for the day of calamity;
They will be led forth at the day of fury.*
31 *"Who will confront him with his actions,
And who will repay him for what he has done?*

After having explained that the wicked do not always receive their punishment in this life, Job confronts his friends with their own reasoning and theology (verse 27). He knows how they think about him, he knows their opinion about the cause of the misery in which he has ended up. He summarizes their reasoning and puts it clearly into words. You don't have to be a profound thinker to know what they think. Their words and head shaking leave no doubt about it. They forge "plans" to prove that he is a sinner and a hypocrite. By doing so they violate him, they do him a great injustice and increase his pain.

He sees that their conception of him has not changed and can never change, because then the whole building of their thought world collapses. They continue to convince him that he is an evil, sinful man. They continue to insist on the anvil that the wicked are overwhelmed by disasters. Job is overwhelmed by disasters, so he is a wicked man. To prove that he knows their thoughts and plans, he cites their hurtful assertion – 'wrong me' (verse 27) means 'hurting me' – about the house and tent of the noble yet wicked person (verse 28). They say that by God's judgment of their wickedness those have been overthrown and gone. With this they claim in so many words that Job, who has lost house and hearth, is in fact a wicked person.

But what the friends say does not correspond at all with the practice of life. Why didn't they just check their reasoning with "the wayfaring men", people who come from somewhere else, who have seen a little more of the world (verse 29). They can testify to what they have encountered. Is there any truth in their story left? Did those wayfaring men tell that they saw everywhere that the dwellings of wicked people were in ruins? Of course they didn't.

Why do they not accept the testimonies of such people? They confirm the truth of what Job said, that the wicked often prosper and live long. Job continues his argument with the observation that the wicked man is often not punished directly for his wickedness, but that this only happens later (verse 30). He certainly does not escape punishment. He "is reserved for the day of calamity" (cf. 2Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6). Pharaoh of Egypt, who again and again rejected God's command to let Israel go, is an example of such a person. It confirms once again that the wicked are not always punished immediately. Only an unwise and foolish man does not see this (Psa 92:6-7).

Job speaks of "the day of fury". That is the day when God's wrath comes upon the sins of the wicked. 'Fury' is plural. The wicked will have fury upon fury upon him. The judgment of God concerns every sin. It is also a judgment that continues endlessly. The wrath of God abides on him forever (Jn 3:36).

No one dares speak to the evildoer of his evil behavior (verse 31). Whoever does so will bring his anger upon himself. And you don't want that, do you? We know there have been people who have done this, like Elijah to Ahab and Jeremiah to the sons of Josiah. John the baptist even paid with death for speaking to Herod of his sins. The evildoers were not immediately punished for their evil deeds and could just go on with their sins, because there was no one to punish them. Any evil that is not punished immediately after it is committed, or even during the life of the evildoer, will be repaid by God on the day of judgment.

Job 21:32-33 | The End in Death

| 32 *"While he is carried to the grave,*

[Men] will keep watch over [his] tomb.

33 *"The clods of the valley will gently cover him;
Moreover, all men will follow after him,
While countless ones [go] before him.*

Often the end of the enjoyment of prosperity for the wicked only comes when he dies. He does not die by Divine judgment, but simply because he has grown old. Inevitably, the moment comes when he goes "the way of all the earth" (Jos 23:14) and is "carried to the grave", that is, the cemetery, where he has his grave (verse 32). At his funeral the necessary splendor can still be shown. His tomb is cared for, provided with a guard of honor and guarded by guards, so that tomb robbers do not have a chance to 'steal' the treasures 'given' with him in the tomb.

On his gravestone it says: 'Rest softly'. That's what people think. The speeches at his funeral take place under the motto, "About the dead nothing but good." They suppose that the clods that cover him, and that have been taken out of the wadis or riverbeds especially for him, are pleasing to him (verse 33). The man has always worked hard and lived well. He now has his deserved 'final resting place'. Even in his death he remains an attraction. The description "all men will follow after him", can mean the corpse procession. It can also mean the masses who visit his grave later. In any case, he dies as all people will do after him and as happened to the countless people who preceded him.

Job says all these things in response to his friends' assumption that the wicked has no peace and quiet, neither in his life nor in his death. There are certainly ungodly people who already suffer in their lives because of their wicked life and then die a terrible death. What matters to him is to show that it cannot be said in general terms that wicked people are suffering and good people prosper. It is also sometimes the other way around that wicked people prosper, even to their death and good people suffer. What a difference with the theology of the three friends.

Job 21:34 | Conclusion

34 *"How then will you vainly comfort me,
For your answers remain [full of] falsehood?"*

Job concludes his reflections on the prosperity that can also be the part of the wicked with a conclusion. His friends had come to comfort him (Job 2:11). But what empty words they have spoken so far (cf. Job 16:2). Nothing of what they have said applies to him. He has not had any use at all of it. On the contrary, with their theories they have aggravated his suffering. They have done nothing but admonish him and call him to repent of his sins. If only he would do that, he would be blessed again.

Their answers only revealed that they were unfaithful to their friendship with him. They have expressed their doubts about his uprightness more and more clearly. A true friend does not suppose any hidden sins and hypocrisy with his friend. He is also not enigmatic in his words if there is anything that needs correction. He does not do this concealed. Real friends trust each other through thick and thin, in prosperity and in adversity.

Instead of being convinced of Job's uprightness by his perseverance, the friends accuse him of having a hardened and unconverted heart. They come to this conclusion because of his refusal to accept their call to repent.

Job 22

Introduction

We might think that through Job's last speech the friends have now realized their mistake. They don't want to admit that right away, but perhaps they will now remain silent. But no. Eliphaz straightens his back again and replies Job in a third speech. And how. He throws off all caution. The brakes go off and without hesitation he accuses Job of the worst sins. The accusations are no longer hidden in his words, they are no longer insinuations or suggestions. In a rock-hard way, he lists the crimes he believes Job committed.

He makes no attempt to refute Job's arguments (Job 21). In his argument he insists on 'your own fault, big nose' as proof of the justice and lawfulness of God's retribution. In his opinion, his friendship for Job is demonstrated by the fact that, at the end of his argument, he tries again to make him repent (verses 21-30).

Job 22:1-5 | The Greatness of Jobs Sin

1 *Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,*
2 *"Can a vigorous man be of use to God,*
Or a wise man be useful to himself?
3 *"Is there any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous,*
Or profit if you make your ways perfect?
4 *"Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you,*
That He enters into judgment against you?
5 *"Is not your wickedness great,*
And your iniquities without end?

Eliphaz takes the floor again to answer Job (verse 1). He first asks a series of rhetorical questions. He starts with a question about the relationship of "a vigorous man" – with whom he means Job – to God (verse 2). Eliphaz asks the question whether a man would be "of use" to God, because Job insists on his righteousness. As if he is doing God a service. At the same

time he complains about his misery. The question contains the answer. Job, with all his righteousness, is of no use to God. He shouldn't think that God is in need of him. As if God is obliged to honor him for his supposed righteousness instead of disciplining him by pouring disasters upon him.

If Job already thinks he is "wise", it is only of use to himself. God does not depend on him and does not need the wisdom of Job. God doesn't need anyone, no man. The opposite is true, that man needs God. Job adds nothing to the joy of the Almighty by stating that he is righteous (verse 3). He had better drop this claim to his righteousness. Nor does God gain anything if he "makes" his ways "perfect", always doing everything better to please God.

Eliphaz merely gives a cold impression of God, as if He were not interested in us. If we remember what God says in Job 1-2 of His servant Job, we can see how badly Eliphaz knows God. By his doings and dealings, Job was a joy to God (cf. Acts 10:35). Although what a man does, does not give God any profit in itself, He does have joy in righteousness. The testimony of the Spirit about Job in the first chapters of this book shows that Job did not serve God because he believed that he was useful to God or because God gained something by it, that He was better off. Job feared and served God because He is God. God appreciates this very much.

With some sarcasm in his voice, Eliphaz asks Job if God perhaps reproves him because of his reverence for God and "enters into judgment against" him (verse 4). God of course brings a lawsuit against Job because he serves Him so faithfully. In his first speech, Eliphaz still saw Job's fear of God as something present with him (Job 4:6), but now he no longer believes anything of it. By his sarcastic way of speaking he wants to convince Job of the opposite. Surely it must be clear to Job that God does not punish a man if he fears Him, but only if that man sins against Him.

Then Eliphaz takes off. He openly accuses Job of "wickedness" and "iniquities" (verse 5). With "your" wickedness and "your" iniquities Job is addressed directly. He also leaves no room for misunderstanding that it is more than a little wickedness and an occasional iniquity. It is about nothing less than "great" wickedness and "endless" iniquity. Eliphaz is now exaggerating in order to reinforce his argument.

Although Eliphaz has no proof for this, he throws these overwhelming accusations at Job. He doesn't care that, before such a thing can be said, there must first be self-judgment. This is lacking in him as well as in his friends (Mt 7:1-5). What he does is not wash Job's feet (Jn 13:3-6). Job has ventured to resist their oh so valuable call to repentance. Job has ventured to resist their oh so precious call to repentance. He has done so in terms about God that are extremely inappropriate, they think. It is further proof that Job is completely wrong. This is all they need. Job is guilty.

Job 22:6-11 | The Direct Charge

6 *"For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause,
And stripped men naked.*

7 *"To the weary you have given no water to drink,
And from the hungry you have withheld bread.*

8 *"But the earth belongs to the mighty man,
And the honorable man dwells in it.*

9 *"You have sent widows away empty,
And the strength of the orphans has been crushed.*

10 *"Therefore snares surround you,
And sudden dread terrifies you,*

11 *Or darkness, so that you cannot see,
And an abundance of water covers you.*

Eliphaz is going to mention examples of Job's wickedness and iniquity. He makes the harshest accusations without any foundation. Evidence or witnesses are missing. This goes far beyond imputations – and how quickly we become guilty of this. Eliphaz accuses Job of social injustice. Job may think that he is in God's favor and that he is pure, but how is that possible when he has wronged his nearest and dearest? That is why God brings these disasters upon him, Eliphaz says, who cannot think of any other explanation for suffering.

If someone has misfortune in his business, sickness in his family, loses a loved one, then a conclusion is simply drawn. How cruel this is. It also goes against the clear indication that only on the basis of two or three witnesses any case is to be confirmed (2Cor 13:1). Later, Job will emphatically deny and refute all these accusations (Job 31).

Eliphaz deduces from the situation in which Job finds himself what crimes Job has undoubtedly been guilty of. He argues according to the principle 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. God punishes Job with the same things he was guilty of. Job is now without any possessions and without clothing. This means that he must have taken possessions from others and stripped men naked (verse 6).

Eliphaz does not shy away from sketching the situation as if he has been an eyewitness to it. Job lent his brothers, his relatives, money and took a pledge for it. When they failed to repay the loan, he stripped them to their bare bodies (Exo 22:26; Deu 24:6,17). He presents Job as someone who unscrupulously robs the vulnerable, even if it concerns his family.

According to Eliphaz, Job not only robbed people, i.e. took something from them, but also did not give people what they needed (verse 7). He did not give those in need of refreshment any water to drink. He didn't give bread to the hungry. This shows his criminal, heartless attitude toward the needy. That is why he himself is now tormented by thirst and hunger.

Yes, he has given something to others (verse 8). But this happened out of the same self-interest as why he gave nothing to some. Job has given "a mighty man" land. After all, he himself could benefit from that. The honorable person who lived there would certainly reward the generous Job by using his influence for him when he needed something. You shouldn't think that Job knew charity. He was one of those people of whom it is sometimes said: 'They lick up and kick down.' That is, they flatter some people who are above them in power or prestige, and they despise other people who are powerless and without prestige.

Those powerless, insignificant people include widows and orphans (verse 9). God's special care goes out to them. He is "a father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows" (Psa 68:5a). But Job did not care about that. When a widow came to him and asked him for a favor, he sent her away empty-handed. He was even more ruthless with the orphans. He crushed "the strength of the orphans", which means that he took away everything the orphans still possessed and which gave them some support in life. How ruthless!

Therefore Job should not be surprised that “snares surround” him, that he is a prisoner of the consequences of his sins (verse 10). It is precisely “therefore”, because of all those terrible sins he has committed. That is the reason why he has been suddenly overcome by dread. Eliphaz is referring to the terrible disasters that struck Job, and that God took everything from him.

Or is Job blind to the reason for the darkness in which he finds himself (verse 11)? Surely that will not be true? It is as clear as the day he brought this suffering upon himself because of his sins. The “abundance of water” that covers him speaks of the sorrows and pains that have engulfed him. If only Job didn’t think all this happened for no reason. Of course, this is a call from God that he must confess his sins.

Job 22:12-14 | Everything Is Known to God

12 “Is not God [in] the height of heaven?

Look also at the distant stars, how high they are!

13 “You say, ‘What does God know?

Can He judge through the thick darkness?

14 ‘Clouds are a hiding place for Him, so that He cannot see;

And He walks on the vault of heaven.’

Surely Job must know that God is far above men (verse 12). He should look at “the distant stars,” the highest observable in creation, “how high they are”. Well, God is once again infinitely high beyond them. What, then, does Job imagine that he takes up the word against Him and pretends to be innocent?

Instead of bowing before that supreme Majesty and acknowledging Him in the punishments He brings upon him, Job dares to attribute ignorance to God. God is so exalted that – as according to Eliphaz, Job imagines himself – He hides in thick darkness. He does not concern Himself with the earth and what happens on it (verses 13-14). And if He cannot or will not see what is happening on earth, He will of course not punish evil. So God’s judgments cannot have come upon Job because he would have sinned.

Eliphaz puts statements in Job’s mouth that Job did not make. He presupposes to know what Job thinks about God and imputes to Job thoughts

that are not present in Job's mind. Eliphaz simply draws his own conclusions from what Job said about the suffering of the God-fearing and the prosperity of the wicked (Job 21:1-16). This makes it clear to him that Job considers God to be Someone Who does not interfere with what people do. But he, the theologian Eliphaz, knows better. Of course God does interfere with what people do. For him, Job is a textbook example of that.

What Eliphaz here assumes of Job is quite absurd. It shows to what foolish ideas a man can come up with about another man, if he continues unremittently to look at things from his own theological point of view. Then people are put in people's mouths things they have never said and never intended. Words are pulled out of context and around them a conclusion is formed that fits in with the thinking of one's own theology. That theology is the yardstick to judge the other.

Whatever the other person says or does to prove the opposite, he is always wrong. Admitting that the other is right, means the end of one's own right. And that is not possible, because that right is based on solid theological research. Recently, in a report of a theological debate, there was a sentence with which criticism of a certain theological view was parried: 'Your criticism concerns the results of one hundred years of exegetical research.' This is an example of a bad response to a question about what Scripture says. Findings of people in any field should never be the end of all contradiction. This is particularly true of the study of Scripture. In such a way, Job is approached by Eliphaz and his friends.

Our experiences, our traditions or our findings should not be the yardstick by which we measure our observations. It must always be only God's Word. In Eliphaz and his friends, man dictates the interpretation of God's actions. Each of us must be aware that we can fall into the same fault as Job's friends. We judge another according to what we know of God. But we can only judge something properly if we live in a living relationship with God. We then have no high regard for our knowledge of God, but will be humble. In that state of mind we can judge all things through the Holy Spirit and God's Word (1Cor 2:15).

Job 22:15-18 | The Way of the Wicked

| 15 *"Will you keep to the ancient path*

*Which wicked men have trod,
 16 Who were snatched away before their time,
 Whose foundations were washed away by a river?
 17 "They said to God, 'Depart from us!'
 And 'What can the Almighty do to them?'
 18 "Yet He filled their houses with good [things];
 But the counsel of the wicked is far from me.*

Eliphaz accuses Job of persisting in the path of the “wicked” (verse 15). He draws a thick line under his vision that evil people suffer because of their sins. Job suffers, so he must be on the path of sinners. It is “the ancient path” that all the wicked have gone. Job is no exception. He too has followed these wicked people.

But when does Job plan to leave that path? Doesn’t it dawn on him that all the wicked have been snatched away (verse 16)? We can think of the days of Noah and the Flood. Then “their foundations”, and of course what they had built upon it, was washed away by a mighty river. “Before their time,” means that they did not grow old, but died an untimely death. Doesn’t Job recognize that it happened to him too?

What Job has said about the wicked, that they say to God: “Depart from us” (Job 21:14), Eliphaz now uses against Job from the idea that Job is one of them (verse 17). Job is someone who wants to have nothing to do with God. This is evidenced by the fact that he does not bow down to the discipline that God brings upon him. He does not want to accept that God punishes him for his sins. A God Who deals with him in this way cannot mean anything to him, nor can He do anything for him.

Eliphaz reminds Job that God had “filled” the houses of the wicked “with good [things]” (verse 18). God had done the same with Job’s house. But because the wicked did not allow Him into their lives, or only as far as they wished, He had to take everything away from them. And then Eliphaz again quotes a word that Job spoke: “But the counsel of the wicked is far from me” (cf. Job 21:16). It seems that he makes quite sure that Job takes good note of the incongruity of it. How can Job say that he does not share the intention of the wicked, when he is so clearly one of them?

Job 22:19-20 | Their Righteous Judgment

19 *"The righteous see and are glad,
And the innocent mock them,
20 [Saying], 'Truly our adversaries are cut off,
And their abundance the fire has consumed.'*

When the judgment of the wicked comes, the truly righteous see it and are glad (verse 19; Psa 58:10-11). The innocent mock the wicked when they are judged. Judgment removes the barrier to blessing. Now Eliphaz points his finger at Job in the midst of his terrible suffering. He portrays Job as an opponent of the righteous who is exterminated, while all his possessions are consumed by fire (verse 20).

Job 22:21-25 | Last Call to Repentance

21 *"Yield now and be at peace with Him;
Thereby good will come to you.
22 "Please receive instruction from His mouth
And establish His words in your heart.
23 "If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored;
If you remove unrighteousness far from your tent,
24 And place [your] gold in the dust,
And [the gold of] Ophir among the stones of the brooks,
25 Then the Almighty will be your gold
And choice silver to you.*

After his harsh accusations, Eliphaz calls Job to repent, with associated promises of blessing (verses 21-30). We still hear the same accusation in the exhortations that he is resisting God. To him Job remains an evil man. But, he promises Job, if he ceases his resistance and submits to God, he will be richly blessed.

Apart from the context in which these words are spoken, we can apply them to our personal life of faith. They contain valuable exhortations and motivating blessings for us. The starting point is the call to submit to God and not to oppose Him. As a result, we will receive rich blessings. Therefore, let us listen carefully to this wonderful message in itself and take it to heart and work it out in our life.

Eliphaz begins by telling Job to yield (verse 21). If Job simply submits to God's dealings with him, he will once again have a confidential relationship with God and thus experience peace. Also good – in a material and spiritual sense – will come to him. From the mouth of Eliphaz it is a cold call addressed to someone who wrestles with God and is not yet out of it. Eliphaz interprets this wrestling with God as opposition to God. According to Eliphaz, this is why all these disasters have come over Job.

The word of Eliphaz is an important word, not to tell others, but to ourselves. Getting used to God means getting used to God through daily contact with Him. Then we don't get upside down when things go differently than we thought, but accept that He has the best for us, even though we can't always understand why He acts this way with us. It has to do with knowing God, with His way of acting.

The result is that we have peace in our hearts. There is no peace if we live in a state of war with God. But when we are accustomed to Him, to His way of acting, peace descends in our life. That peace is a benefit for our mind, for our thinking, for our conscience, for our body. As long as we criticize Him and want to dictate to Him how He should act, we do not know this peace.

Job must open himself to receiving instruction from the mouth of God, whatever that instruction may be (verse 22). The words he hears from God's mouth must then be established in his heart. It means embracing the truth of God and not forgetting it. This is also an important word for us. Are we open to the teaching of God's Word and do we want to take it into our hearts? Only then it is able to control our deepest feelings and all our actions, for from the heart flow "the springs of life" (Pro 4:23).

Eliphaz still presupposes that Job is an unrepentant sinner. Therefore, he must first return to the Almighty (verse 23). After that, everything that has been broken down can be "restored" again. He will then become healthy again, live in prosperity and enjoy a happy family life. He can show the authenticity of his conversion by removing the unrighteousness far away from his tent. As long as he banishes sin from his life, the way to restoration is open for him.

Job is advised by Eliphaz to place the gold “in the dust”, yea, the pure gold of Ophir (cf. 1Kgs 9:28) among the stones of the brooks (verse 24). This means that from now on Job must no longer put his trust in his riches, but in God alone. Then God the Almighty will be his gold and his treasures of silver, yea, He will be his true treasure (verse 25).

We too may search for those treasures which are “above, where Christ is” (Col 3:1), “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

Job 22:26-30 | Prediction of a Beautiful Future

26 “For then you will delight in the Almighty

And lift up your face to God.

27 “You will pray to Him, and He will hear you;

And you will pay your vows.

28 “You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you;

And light will shine on your ways.

29 “When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence,

And the humble person He will save.

30 “He will deliver one who is not innocent,

And he will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.”

Eliphaz promises Job wonderful things, if only he would acknowledge that his accusers are right and follow their advice. He would then no longer complain about God, but delight in the Almighty (verse 26). The bowed head as a sign of guilt (Lk 18:13) he would then raise up again to God to look Him in the face again.

For us the encouragement is that we, when Christ is everything to us, have fellowship with Him. That fellowship gives joy (1Jn 1:1-4). We then know that we are fully accepted by the almighty God Who is our Father and feel at home in His presence, especially when there are difficulties in our lives (Rom 5:1-3).

When Job’s relationship with God is in order again, he can approach God again in prayer (verse 27), which is not the case now, according to Eliphaz. These prayers are then heard by God, for they come from the mouth of a righteous person with a sincere heart. He will also be able to keep the vows

he made during his prayers. As a result, God gives him the blessings for which he has made vows.

It is one of the blessings of living in fellowship with God that we can tell Him all that is in our heart (1Jn 3:21-22). We can be sure that He listens to us and hears us in His time and in His way. Making vows is not part of the New Testament believer's relationship to God. Making vows means that we want to do something for God with the purpose that He will give us what we ask for. That doesn't suit those of us who know God as a Father and trust Him completely, that He knows what is good for us.

Eliphaz also promises Job the blessing of prosperity in his activities (verse 28). If he decides and does something, failure is out of the question. What he intends to do will succeed (Pro 16:3). In all his ways the light will shine instead of the deep darkness that now reigns. Then nothing more is uncertain and dark. He will continue his way with joy and prosperity, because he is walking in the light of God's favor.

We may know that we are walking in the light, as God is in the light (1Jn 1:7). We are "Light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8a). Our command or responsibility is that we behave in conformity with the light and walk as "children of Light" (Eph 5:8b).

When Job is restored to fellowship with God, he can also be a blessing and help for others, Eliphaz says to him. He can help others with the experiences he has had. He can encourage someone who has been cast down, who is down, to come up (verse 29). He helps others to get back up. God will join him. He will lift up from his misery the one who has lowered his eyes and does not dare to look up at Him.

All the bitter experiences or setbacks in life make us capable of understanding and helping others. In any case, this is one of God's goals with the disasters that affect us. God doesn't want us to succumb to them, but to go through them with Him in order to come out of them purified. With the experience we have gained, we can serve others who have to go through similar situations (2Cor 1:3-4).

Job will even be able to deliver people who are not innocent, Eliphaz predicts (verse 30). This thought is a law. Someone who has returned to God

and is seen by Him as His friend can pray for others and thus deliver them from the punishment they deserve.

What Eliphaz says here, Job, ironically, will do for him and his friends. Indeed, by the cleanness of his hands – for he has not sinned – Job will deliver the not innocent Eliphaz and his friends from the wrath of God by praying for them (Job 42:8-9). Job is a righteous one whose prayer has much power (Jam 5:16b).

Job 23

Job 23:1-9 | Job Wants to Present His Case to God

*1 Then Job replied,
2 "Even today my complaint is rebellion;
His hand is heavy despite my groaning.
3 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!
4 "I would present [my] case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.
5 "I would learn the words [which] He would answer,
And perceive what He would say to me.
6 "Would He contend with me by the greatness of [His] power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me.
7 "There the upright would reason with Him;
And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.
8 "Behold, I go forward but He is not [there],
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
9 When He acts on the left, I cannot behold [Him];
He turns on the right, I cannot see Him.*

When Eliphaz has finished speaking, Job replies (verse 1). It is not so much an answer to what Eliphaz said, but more a complaint about his misery (verse 2). Nothing has changed about his complaint. Also "today" he feels rebellious against God. He does want to suppress his sighs himself, "my hand" [according to Masoretic Text, and not "His hand"]. Here we see the dilemma of Job. On the one hand there is the dissatisfaction with his suffering. On the other hand, there is his fear of sinning against God through his dissatisfaction. This causes the effort he makes to suppress his dissatisfaction and rebellion. He suffers so much that he can only express his suffering through groaning.

Eliphaz advised Job to yield to God (Job 22:21). That is what he wants. He wishes he could find God (verse 3). If only he knew where He was. Then

he would go to His dwelling place. There he would ask Him for an explanation for the suffering He is inflicting on him.

We too sometimes have the desire to talk to God and ask Him why He allows certain things in our life or in the life of others. We would like to know how to behave in such situations. Now we must be content with the revelation He has given of Himself. We must learn to accept that the things hidden from us are known to God (Deu 29:29). To Him there are no hidden things (Heb 4:13).

Job sees himself in spirit in a courtroom. There he would like to present his case before God (verse 4). He would present a multitude of arguments in his defense to prove that he is not a sinner and a hypocrite. That would convince the Judge, God, that he does not deserve all this suffering. It is not so much about his suffering as about its injustice.

He looks forward to the Judge's verdict with confidence (verse 5). He knows he is innocent, so the Judge will declare him innocent. Later Job comes into the presence of God, but then he is silent (Job 38). Of all his prepared arguments nothing remains. For before God every mouth is stopped (Rom 3:19). He listens and then has to acknowledge that the ways of God are higher than his own.

Job is convinced that God would not contend with him for his rightness, but would listen to him (verse 6). God would not use the advantage of His power against Job and therefore triumph over him. No, God would not simply push him aside, but give him the opportunity to present his case to Him.

The Judge would hear the "upright" speak, who would defend his case with conviction against Him (verse 7). The Judge would have to agree with Job that he is a righteous one. Job can leave the courtroom as a righteous one, acquitted of all charges, with his head held high. The Judge has annulled all charges and Job is free from Him forever. There is no higher court and no one will dare to sue him anymore.

Just as Job is placed before God here in a courtroom, so we should be aware that for us there is a judgment seat of Christ, before which we will be placed (2Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). There our whole life will be made man-

ifest. It is important that we live as if we are already there, that our life is already manifest to God and people.

Job had no fear of meeting God. Neither did Paul. The thought of the judgment seat made Paul feel that he was already made manifest to God and that he wanted to be so to the consciences of men (2Cor 5:11). This is how it can and should be with us. If we can't boldly look forward to the moment when we have to appear before the judgment seat, there may be things in our lives that are not right. Then we must confess them. It is not a question of being perfect already, but of serving God with a blameless conscience (cf. Acts 24:16).

Job wants to appear before God, but he does not know where He is (verses 8-9). When he goes forward, to the east, where the sun rises, God is the great Absent (verse 8). Disappointed, he then goes backward, to the west, where the sun sets. Also there is no sign of His presence anywhere. A new disappointment is his share.

Let's see if He is on the left side (verse 9). The left side is the north, the side of darkness and concealment. Could He be found there? He doesn't see Him there either. There remains one side, the right side, the south, the side of the wilderness and the heat. Can He be seen there? Again it turns out to be a disappointment, because even there Job doesn't see Him. There is still a long way to go before he will testify that his eye sees God (Job 42:5).

Job 23:10-12 | Job Points to His Righteousness

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

Though Job cannot find God anywhere, he knows in faith that God knows the way he is going (verse 10). In confidence he says that although he does not see God, God sees him. He also knows that God knows him. God knows he is upright, no matter what people may say of him. Let God try him, as is the case now. He is confident that God will do him justice. He

knows for sure that he will come out of the trial as purified gold (cf. 1Pet 1:6-7).

Job knows that he has gone the way of God (verse 11). He “has held fast to His path”. God has shown him the way to go and he has gone that way. It is a way that God went before Him, as it were, and on which Job followed Him step by step. He kept to His way, without deviating from it. He did not take a side-road, he did not choose another way, which would be a way of sin (cf. Psa 18:21).

He has listened to “the command of His lips” (verse 12). A person can only go God’s way if he does what God says. His way and His Word belong together inseparably. He has not “departed from” the words of God, but he has “treasured” them in his heart. He has valued those words more than his necessary food [literally: prescribed portion].

Although Job did not see God, he argued in response to Eliphaz’s counsel that he had heard the word of God and hid it in his heart. Therefore, he rejects Eliphaz’s counsel to convert to God (Job 22:23), for he is convinced he is in the way of God (verse 11).

Job 23:13-17 | Afraid of God

13 *“But He is unique and who can turn Him?
And [what] His soul desires, that He does.*
14 *“For He performs what is appointed for me,
And many such [decrees] are with Him.*
15 *“Therefore, I would be dismayed at His presence;
[When] I consider, I am terrified of Him.*
16 *“[It is] God [who] has made my heart faint,
And the Almighty [who] has dismayed me,*
17 *But I am not silenced by the darkness,
Nor deep gloom [which] covers me.*

Job comes back to God as the unique, unchanging God (verse 13). He does not yet realize that he did not perish precisely because of the unchangeability of God (Mal 3:6). He still feels himself the target of God’s wrath. God is against him and no one can make Him change His mind. What He desires He does, for He is sovereign (Psa 115:3). God has allotted or

prescribed something to him – disasters and misery – and He executes it (verse 14). It also happens not only incidentally, but often, because God has many of these things in stock. This also means that the terrible suffering of Job is not yet at an end.

To us, believers who belong to the church of God, it is a tremendous joy to know that God executes all His purposes and that nothing and no one is able to stop Him in this. We may know that He is fulfilling all His promises. The foundation of this is the work of His Son that has been accomplished once and for all. Whoever believes in it is once and for all perfect before God (Heb 10:14). The value of Christ's work will never change. Therefore, it is impossible for the believer to lose his perfection in Christ. He may lose his enjoyment of it through all kinds of circumstances, but that is something else.

The thought of the so exalted and unapproachable Majesty acting with him according to His will becomes too much for Job. He is overcome by fear (verse 15). Job does not repress the thought of God's sovereignty. He notices it, he has an eye for it, with the result that he is terrified of God. Although we may know God as a loving Father and have no fear of Him, we should be in deep awe of Him (1Pet 1:15-17). He certainly is love, but He is no less light (1Jn 1:5; 4:8,16). When we think about God, as Job does here, both features of God will impress us.

God has made his heart faint with everything He has brought over Job (verse 16). The heart of Job is still beating, but the strength is gone. He is still alive, but it is all extremely difficult. The terror is in Job. This is what "the Almighty" has done, He Who has all power and against Whom no one can resist. This thought has made his heart faint.

The circumstances, the darkness in which he finds himself, have not silenced him (verse 17). He has not lost everything because of what has happened to him, but because God has taken it away from him. Job sees his circumstances as the actions of God. The darkness that covers him is suffocating, yet he is not killed by it. What makes his circumstances dark and gloomy is that God remains hidden. That is the need of his soul.

Job 24

Job 24:1-12 | Does God Not Pay Attention?

- 1 *"Why are times not stored up by the Almighty,
And why do those who know Him not see His days?*
- 2 *"Some remove the landmarks;
They seize and devour flocks.*
- 3 *"They drive away the donkeys of the orphans;
They take the widow's ox for a pledge.*
- 4 *"They push the needy aside from the road;
The poor of the land are made to hide themselves altogether.*
- 5 *"Behold, as wild donkeys in the wilderness
They go forth seeking food in their activity,
As bread for [their] children in the desert.*
- 6 *"They harvest their fodder in the field
And glean the vineyard of the wicked.*
- 7 *"They spend the night naked, without clothing,
And have no covering against the cold.*
- 8 *"They are wet with the mountain rains
And hug the rock for want of a shelter.*
- 9 *"Others snatch the orphan from the breast,
And against the poor they take a pledge.*
- 10 *"They cause [the poor] to go about naked without clothing,
And they take away the sheaves from the hungry.*
- 11 *"Within the walls they produce oil;
They tread wine presses but thirst.*
- 12 *"From the city men groan,
And the souls of the wounded cry out;
Yet God does not pay attention to folly.*

Job continues his answer to Eliphaz. He knows that times are "not stored up by the Almighty" or, as it also can be translated "times are not hidden" from "the Almighty" (verse 1). By this he means that God is aware of what a person is going through, whether it be good times or bad times, which

is what is meant in this part according to the context. God determines the time of everything (Ecc 3:1-8), just as He fixed a day in which He will judge the world (Acts 17:31; cf. Acts 1:7). This knowledge causes Job to ask why those who know Him do not see His days. By this he means that those who know God do not see Him acting against evil. He hides from them and does nothing against evil. Evil can just take its course.

Job gives a list of evil things that he observes and that God must also see. He keeps that list up to God, as it were. The first evil comes from people who “remove the landmarks” (verse 2). Removing landmarks means not respecting them. By moving the landmarks they steal land from someone else and thus enlarge their own area. In Israel this is a great crime, to which a curse is attached (Deu 27:17; 19:14; Pro 22:28; 23:10). Even today, God’s landmarks are being broken. We can think of marriage and sexuality.

Surely God must also see that an entire flock is robbed and that the new ‘owners’ devour that flock. They are not immediately punished for this evil. It seems that for them the saying ‘Ill-gotten gains never benefit anyone’ doesn’t apply. Their stolen property only benefits them. Here, just as in changing the landmarks, it’s about openly practiced evil. Not only is the flock robbed, but the stolen flock is also devoured.

The “donkeys of the orphans” they drive away (verse 3). These children are powerless against these ruthless robbers. The donkey carried their merchandise to the market. They cannot carry that burden themselves. Now they have to stay at home and can’t earn anything.

From “the widow” who has to borrow money, they take the ox for a pledge. As a result, she can no longer work the land, so she has no prospect of earning a living. So she can never pay back the money she borrowed and get back her ox. With these ‘orphans and widows’ it is about exploitation of socially weak people who enjoy extra protection with God (Exo 22:22; Psa 68:5a).

“The needy” have nothing that can be stolen from them (verse 4). So they are chased away like troublesome flies. They are nothing more than hindrances, obstacles that stand in their way. “The poor” are miserable because they are despised. They have no courage to go against their oppres-

sors. That's why they hide. They seek a safe haven for these harsh people and seek support from each other.

Job's friends have insinuated that Job has behaved like one of those wicked people and that he is now being punished for it. The great question of Job and so many others who are suffering, the great mystery that occupies them, is how God can keep His eyes closed to these things and strike a man as faithful as Job instead of the evildoers. The point of Job in these examples is to show that people who do evil to others often do not bear the consequences of their actions in this life. Apparently, they can proceed unpunished.

In verses 5-8 Job speaks of the poor and wretched just mentioned. In these verses with "they" are not meant the evildoers, but their victims. This change is introduced by "behold" (verse 5). Job compares the poor and wretched with "wild donkeys in the wilderness". They are unbound animals, people with no fixed abode or residence, the pariahs. They rush from one place to another for their work. In this way they search for their food and are diligent in it. By doing so, they want to take care of their families.

They look for food on every field where something edible grows (verse 6). In this way they steal the harvest of the field from others, who bought and sowed the seed for it and took care of the field. A vineyard undergoes the same fate. They check the vineyard to see if there is anything left. It may give them some satisfaction that it is the vineyard of the wicked who treats them so disdainfully.

Their misery is also evidenced by the fact that they have to spend the night 'naked' (verse 7). They have to spend the night without the protective warmth of an outer garment that is as a blanket at night. Due to the lack of a roof over their heads, they also have no protection against the rain gushing over them (verse 8). The cold and the rain make the cold penetrate their bodies down to their bones. Expelled from their homes and naked they are without refuge. All that remains for them is to hide in the caves and holes of a rock.

The gang of robbers spares no one. Without compassion they kidnap an orphan and snatch it from a breast where it has still got some love (verse 9). They make these children slaves to themselves or to merchandise. And

heaven is silent. From the poor, who already is so wretched, they take pledge, by which he is in their power.

All who are in their power walk around naked (verse 10). They let their victims carry sheaves, without allowing them to eat anything to satisfy their hunger. Even the cattle get better treatment (cf. Deu 25:4). The same applies to the squeezing of oil and the treading of the grapes in the wine-press (verse 11). They get nothing of their harvest and are not allowed to drink water, even though they are so thirsty. What physical and mental torment. And God does not intervene! How can the friends say that people only suffer because of their own sins?

Not only in the fields, but also in the cities, the poor are abused and mistreated. It is not about bandits, but about rich people who oppress the poor. God allows all this (verse 12). Among the victims are “deadly wounded”. They cry out in pain. This is how these bandits sow fear and death and destruction. They cause enormous physical and mental suffering. And there is no one who stops them in their evil work or punishes them for it, not even God. He doesn’t seem to pay attention to the injustice done to the victims and remains seemingly unmoved. How can it be maintained that God “does not pay attention to folly”, for that is not compatible with justice, is it?

Job 24:13-17 | Darkness Envelops Sin

13 *“Others have been with those who rebel against the light;*

They do not want to know its ways

Nor abide in its paths.

14 *“The murderer arises at dawn;*

He kills the poor and the needy,

And at night he is as a thief.

15 *“The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight,*

Saying, ‘No eye will see me.’

And he disguises his face.

16 *“In the dark they dig into houses,*

They shut themselves up by day;

They do not know the light.

17 *“For the morning is the same to him as thick darkness,*

| *For he is familiar with the terrors of thick darkness.*

In the previous verses Job has described a certain category of evildoers who openly commit their sins. In the following verses he describes the fellow members of these evildoers, to whom they belong. He is going to talk about people who do their evil works in the darkness. The evildoers choose the night to perform their “unfruitful deeds of darkness” (Eph 5:11). In spiritual terms, this of course also applies to the category of evildoers described in the previous verses.

People who choose darkness to perform their sinful deeds do so because they hate light (verse 13; Jn 3:20). They do not know God’s ways, which are always in the light. “God is light” (1Jn 1:5). Because they hate light, they do not remain on His paths, for His light shines upon it. Job has said the opposite of himself (Job 23:11). Because they reject the Word of God, they go on “the paths of the violent” (Psa 17:4).

In verses 14-16 Job speaks of the murderer, the thief, and the adulterer, i.e. the transgressors of the sixth, eighth, and seventh command respectively. Before it becomes light, the murderer and thief become active (verse 14). First he kills “the poor and needy”, who are people without protection. Then he steals their paltry possessions.

The adulterer is also one who commits his sin in the night (verse 15; Pro 7:8-9). He waits until twilight before going on his way. He is well aware that he is going to do something that must remain hidden. Nobody should see him. And in case anyone should see him anyway, he puts on a mask, which means that he hides his face behind his upper garment by hoisting it up. Then he’s unrecognizable.

In verse 16 Job generally speaks of the worker of iniquity. What he does and who he is, he summarizes in three sentences:

1. He does his work in darkness.
2. During the day he shuts himself up, he hides himself, to go out the next night.
3. He abhors the light.

These men are as afraid of the morning as they are of “the thick darkness” that is the darkness of death (verse 17). Although they are familiar with

the terrors of thick darkness, they are scared to death of daylight, for then there is a good chance that they will be caught or recognized. Of course, they want to avoid that at all costs. It is just as bad to be caught as it is to look death in the eye.

The power of what Job says does not only lie in the truth of what he observes. It is above all that he indicates that people commit the most heinous sins, without God raising a hand to judge them. All perpetrators of iniquity can continue unhindered. No one stops or punishes them.

Job 24:18-20 | The End of the Wicked

18 "They are insignificant on the surface of the water;

Their portion is cursed on the earth.

They do not turn toward the vineyards.

19 "Drought and heat consume the snow waters,

[So does] Sheol [those who] have sinned.

20 "A mother will forget him;

The worm feeds sweetly till he is no longer remembered.

And wickedness will be broken like a tree.

The wicked is "insignificant [or: light, swift] on the surface of the water" (verse 18). He disappears through judgment with the speed at which a twig on the surface of the water is chased by the wind. Perhaps this is the wicked one who is a pirate. In their looting the wicked do not confine themselves to the mainland. Also the sea is not a safe area for honest working people because of the presence of pirates.

Those who earn their living in an honest way are blessed. The wicked is cursed all over the earth, wherever he gets his portion, on land or at sea. He will not turn to the vineyards to work there and earn his money in a respectable way.

What drought and heat do with snow water, Sheol does with sinners (verse 19). Snow water evaporates due to drought with heat and nothing is left of it. If a sinner lies in the grave, there is nothing left of him either. The body decays. Even the sinner's mother will forget him (verse 20). She doesn't want to think about him anymore, because this son of hers has been a blessing to no one, but on the contrary a curse to many. The only ones who

have anything to do with him are worms. To them his body is a welcome meal. No one else will miss him, no one will think of him. He is like a tree that is broken down by a storm. He breaks down and dies.

Job describes in these verses that death is the end for the wicked, but without referring to a judgment hereafter. Everything they have done is forgotten. The wicked seems to be exalted in his life and then cut away when he dies. Then everything is over, without anything of God's wrath being visible in his life. The absence of judgment for the wicked is a mystery to Job. He does not understand this, he wrestles with it.

Job 24:21-25 | God Seems to Protect the Wicked

21 *"He wrongs the barren woman*

And does no good for the widow.

22 *"But He drags off the valiant by His power;*

He rises, but no one has assurance of life.

23 *"He provides them with security, and they are supported;*

And His eyes are on their ways.

24 *"They are exalted a little while, then they are gone;*

Moreover, they are brought low and like everything gathered up;

Even like the heads of grain they are cut off.

25 *"Now if it is not so, who can prove me a liar,*

And make my speech worthless?"

Job describes a few more wrongs wicked man has committed without anyone punishing him. He has treated the childless and barren woman badly (verse 21). Such a woman already suffers from the defamation of childlessness, so that she also lacks children to help her. On top of that she now also has to deal with someone who despises her and hurts her.

The widow is also a defenseless woman. The wicked refuses to do good to a needy widow. That is considered sin. "Therefore, to one who knows [the] right [or: good] thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jam 4:17).

His ungodly actions are not limited to the poor, the wretched and the defenseless. The "valiant" are also a target for him (verse 22). He oppresses them and submits them to himself. When he rises, that is to say, when he

risers to do an evil work, no one is certain of his life. Anyone can be his prey.

God does not hinder him and therefore the wicked one can continue to live without fear (verse 23). No one blocks him. This encourages him to continue his evil practice (cf. Ecc 8:11). But there is one thing he does not count on and that is that God's eyes see him always and everywhere.

In the end, the wicked man has only been able to enjoy his prosperity for a short time (verse 24; cf. Job 20:5). Someone can grow old, but life is short after all. He may have had a successful life. People looked up to him, out of fear or flattery. Job's friends have said that the evil ones are punished for their sins already during their life, and that great criminals bring great disasters upon themselves. Job denies this and shows that great criminals can also have great prestige.

But Job also knows that no matter how many wicked deeds the wicked man has done, and no matter how long he could go on undisturbed, his regime will come to an end. Suddenly he and his friends in evil are no longer in the land of the living. None of them escapes death. Then their causing death and destruction is over. It is also over with the enjoyment of the possessions they had appropriated through their sinful deeds.

They, like all other people, are brought low in the grave and locked up there, along with all those who have gone before them. It goes with them like "the heads of grain" that are cut off at harvest, when it is ripe, and not before that time. The cut off ears are then crushed. They are cut off from life to be judged afterward. The latter is beyond Job's sight, but we know that after death judgment comes (Heb 9:27).

After these words, Job challenges his friends with the words: Is it not so? (verse 25). He has mentioned facts that no one can deny. The evil ones prosper, live long and die peacefully, without any indication that God dislikes them. Does any one of them dare to dispute what he has said? Can anyone prove him a liar? They can't get a word in edgeways. These are not meaningless, empty words, which can be sidelined as worthless words. In Paul's words, they are "words of sober truth [literally: of truth and rationality]" (Acts 26:25).

In the next chapter there will be one more response to these words from one of the friends. Bildad tries again. It is a short reply, without going into what Job said. He says a few more words about the greatness of God, and then his voice is also silent.

Job 25

Job 25:1-3 | The Greatness of God

*1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,
2 "Dominion and awe belong to Him
Who establishes peace in His heights.
3 "Is there any number to His troops?
And upon whom does His light not rise?*

Bildad answers Job (verse 1). It is his last answer. His ammunition is gone. It is hardly an answer. It's like a last convulsion of the three friends. With what he says, the words of the friends die away. After this, he's done talking and basically defeated. From Zophar, who should be next, we hear nothing at all. They have put forward all their arguments, but have not been able to convince Job in any way of the validity of them. Bildad turns out to be unable to answer Job's remarks; neither does he come up with a new point of view.

Bildad's answer is brief and contains the two points on which he and his friends have hammered again and again (Job 4:17; 15:14). In the absence of arguments, Bildad in fact repeats them. He depicts the majesty of God and, in contrast, the nullity of man. He points out that God far surpasses His limited creation, which is unlimited for our comprehension (verse 2). God alone is unlimited. In His unlimitedness He also possesses omnipotence and all authority. He rules over everything and everyone (Isa 40:12,22,26). All "dominion" is in His hands. Toward Him, man can only be in "awe" (cf. Jer 10:7).

God is the Establisher of "peace in His heights", which refers to the order He has established in the universe among His innumerable and incomprehensible works of creation. The universe breathes His omnipotence. In the universe nothing stands on its own. Everything is part of a whole that harmonizes through Him, through His natural laws. Through the word of His power, He sustains everything and is brought by Him to the goal He

has determined (Heb 1:3). He is peace in His nature. This peace is visible in His works.

In all that He does, His troops, the countless multitudes of angels, are available to Him (verse 3; Heb 12:22; Rev 5:11). On His authority they go and do as He wills. He “dwells in unapproachable light” (1Tim 6:16). “God is light” (1Jn 1:5). Therefore nothing is hidden from Him, no one can escape His revealing light. In His light everyone is seen and revealed. “It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him” (Dan 2:22).

Job 25:4-6 | The Nullity of Man

*4 “How then can a man be just with God?
Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?
5 “If even the moon has no brightness
And the stars are not pure in His sight,
6 How much less man, [that] maggot,
And the son of man, [that] worm!”*

After Bildad has spoken about the greatness and exaltation of God in the previous verses, he then speaks about the insignificance of man (cf. Psa 8:3-4). All revelation of God’s greatness and purity should effect man’s awareness of nullity, impurity, and sinfulness (verse 4). Bildad says this again with Job in mind.

God is perfect in holiness. How then would a man – read: Job –, born of a mortal, be pure in God’s eye (cf. Job 14:4)? Nothing of creation, not even the moon and the stars that shine so brightly in the night, is pure in God’s sight (cf. Job 4:18; 15:15). Job claims to be pure, but that is not true at all, according to Bildad. Everything and everyone is outsmarted by God in His holiness and righteousness.

Opposite the holy and exalted majesty of God, even the bright moon and the stars are not pure, let alone puny man who is no more than a maggot, a worm (verse 6). His body is extremely fragile. Like a moth he can be crushed to death (Job 4:19). And equally weak also are his intelligent faculties. No one suffers without having earned it, for every man is a maggot, a worm, compared to God. Eliphaz leaves open the possibility of being

restored after conversion (Job 22:23), but Bildad's question of whether a man can be just with God presupposes a negative answer.

Every man deserves to be punished for his sins. But there is a possibility of being justified. That is through faith in the Lord Jesus. Whoever confesses his sins and believes in Him is justified. The Lord Jesus became Man to make that possible. In Him as Man we see God's pleasure in man.

Job 26

Introduction

After his answer to Bildad (verses 1-4) Job describes the greatness of God even more impressively and widely than Bildad (verses 5-14).

Job 26:1-4 | The Vanity of Bildad's Words

1 Then Job responded,

2 "What a help you are to the weak!

How you have saved the arm without strength!

3 "What counsel you have given to [one] without wisdom!

What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!

4 "To whom have you uttered words?

And whose spirit was expressed through you?

Job responds to Bildad (verse 1). His answer sounds sarcastic. In his speeches he has shown how he searches for justification, but Bildad says in cold blood that this is not possible. Job acknowledges that he is someone who has no power, that he is weak (verse 2). But what a great help he has received from Bildad. His arm hung down powerless, but fortunately, Bildad was there to redeem him. Such a friend brings you something. And then the counsel Bildad gave to the poor Job who lacked wisdom (verse 3). Bildad has not been frugal with it, but has "abundantly provided" insight. Job says as it were: 'I know nothing, of course. But what a wonderful light have you shed over my situation. It's all clear now, you know.'

But to whom did Bildad actually reveal his words (verse 4)? Bildad has spoken all his words to a man in deep distress. What he said did not help Job and give him strength and certainly did not relieve his misery, but increased his suffering. Instead of oil and wine they sprinkled salt in his wounds. Bildad's words have not helped to solve the dark enigma of his present suffering. All the words said to Job by his friends have been misplaced and have proved the bankruptcy of their wisdom.

And what is the origin of Bildad's words? What spirit prompted them, and went out from him in the words he spoke? It is clear that Bildad is not a messenger of God. The speeches of Bildad and his friends were not inspired by God, but by their own thoughts about God. Bildad's speech breathes the spirit of Eliphaz (Job 4:17). What the friends said does not correspond in any way to how God really deals with a man who is immersed in suffering. Therefore God's wrath also kindles against the friends (Job 42:7-9).

Job 26:5-6 | God Dominates the Depths

5 *"The departed spirits tremble
Under the waters and their inhabitants.*
6 *"Naked is Sheol before Him,
And Abaddon has no covering.*

Bildad has spoken about God's greatness in the heights, Job here speaks about God's greatness in the depths. It relates to demonic powers, to Sheol, the realm of death, and its inhabitants (verse 5). The lost are also under the power of God. We do not see them, they are in Abaddon, the place of destruction, but they are not beyond His sight. He sees them and knows them in full.

In His time they will rise up trembling. Wherever they may be, He will call them forth by His power to judge them (Rev 20:13). In the kingdom of the dead it is not satan who reigns, but God (Psa 139:8; Phil 2:10). Everything is open to God, including the realm of death; nothing is hidden from Him (verse 6; Pro 15:11; Heb 4:13).

Job 26:7-13 | God Rules Over the Universe

7 *"He stretches out the north over empty space
And hangs the earth on nothing.*
8 *"He wraps up the waters in His clouds,
And the cloud does not burst under them.*
9 *"He obscures the face of the full moon
And spreads His cloud over it.*
10 *"He has inscribed a circle on the surface of the waters*

At the boundary of light and darkness.

11 "The pillars of heaven tremble

And are amazed at His rebuke.

12 "He quieted the sea with His power,

And by His understanding He shattered Rahab.

13 "By His breath the heavens are cleared;

His hand has pierced the fleeing serpent.

Job continues his description of the greatness of God, now looking north and upward (verse 7). He sees the vast expanse of the universe. He looks north – the place from which God reigns (Isa 14:13-14) – the northern ceiling of the heavens, which is like a curtain overhanging the expanse. In that vast expanse of emptiness, where nothing can be hanged on, the earth hangs. God has hung the globe “on nothing”.

That the earth “hangs” is an established fact. If Scripture mentions anything about creation, it is God’s truth. Scientific ‘truth’ is different. Scientific language is soon outdated. Scientific conclusions have to be rewritten regularly because new insights destroy the previous ones. The Bible, inspired by God and therefore faultless, is not written in scientific language, but in everyday language and never needs to be changed. Everything God has said remains current for all ages and generations (2Tim 3:16-17).

Thus God also wraps up the waters together in His clouds (verse 8; cf. Pro 30:4), without the cloud bursting because of its weight. It is God who gathers the fumes of the earth into thick clouds, as it were the jars of heaven (Job 38:37). It is His way of giving rain on earth wherever He wills (cf. Jer 10:13; Psa 104:3).

Above the clouds is God’s throne, which He makes invisible by spreading His cloud over it (verse 9; cf. Psa 97:2). Of course this is meant to be symbolic, because even without clouds the throne of God is invisible. The throne is the center from which creation is ruled (cf. Job 1:6-12). Man, with all his knowledge and ability, is incapable of discovering Him. He also excludes God in his research on the origin and progress of the universe. He is willfully ignorant (2Pet 3:5). As a result, he has fallen into the foolishness of evolution theory.

God not only controls the water above the earth's surface, but also the water on the earth's surface (verse 10). The water above the earth is held by God in clouds. The water on earth is held by God within the limits set by Him (Psa 104:9; Jer 5:22b).

Also in another sense God has drawn a boundary over the surface of the water. That boundary is the horizon. We become aware of this when we stand on the shore of an ocean. If we look into the distance, we see the horizon. We cannot look any further. There is the boundary between the light sky and the dark sea, the boundary between the water in the cloud sky and the water in the sea.

Also the impressive, massive, unshakable mountains, rising high above the landscape and touching the heaven, are under His authority (verse 11). They are poetically called "the pillars of heaven", as if heaven is resting on them. But when He rebukes them, and we might think of an earthquake, they tremble (Exo 19:18). Of all that imposing nothing remains. Only His majesty above all else is permanent.

Then there is also His power in the wind with which He whips up the sea (verse 12; Psa 107:25; Isa 51:15; Jer 31:35). With the same authority He also restrains the wind and causes "the storm to be still" (Psa 107:29). What is attributed to God here we see the Lord Jesus doing in the Gospels (Mt 8:26; Mk 4:39). It is one of the many proofs that the Lord Jesus is God.

God is not only great in His omnipotence and majesty, but also in His clearness (verse 13). The Spirit of God gives that clearness in heaven. We see the clearness of the sky, the clouds, the heavenly bodies. David is deeply impressed by it: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained" (Psa 8:3). God creates, controls and delivers (Isa 27:1; Rev 20:2).

That clearness was lost by "the quick [or: fleeing] serpent", the devil (Rev 12:9), when he brought sin into the world. But God is in Christ the Victor over the devil. He will renew the face of the ground (Psa 104:30) and restore creation to its original beauty. Then the devil will be bound and the corruption of creation will be taken away (Rom 8:21).

Job 26:14 | There Is Much More

*14 "Behold, these are the fringes of His ways;
And how faint a word we hear of Him!
But His mighty thunder, who can understand?"*

After all that has been said about the heavens and the earth, it must also be said that these are but the fringes of His ways. It is, so to speak, only the glory of the hem of His garments (Isa 6:1). In creation only "His eternal power and divine nature" are seen (Rom 1:20). These are the borders of God's power that a man can see. He cannot see any further. Reality is so much greater than a man can comprehend, let alone describe it. In order to see more, man needs the revelation of the Spirit.

The language God speaks in creation is clear and overwhelming (Psa 19:2-7). They are visual words. Yet they say so little compared to the fullness that is in Him. In comparison with Who God really is, they are merely whispering words. If these "fringes of His ways" show us only a glimpse of His infinite power, how could anyone understand "His mighty thunder"? Here Job means the full unfolding of the power of God.

Man is incapable of understanding God's power. Who is not impressed by an approaching thunderstorm with deafening thunderclaps and blinding flashes of light? But what do we actually understand of the power of God Who controls it? If God showed His full power, man would be blown away, wiped out, crushed and consumed.

The New Testament believer is able to see more of God than just His eternal power and divine nature. He has received the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit he is able to know the thoughts of God, "for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God" (1Cor 2:10). Children of God can behold God's glory in Christ, the "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

Job 27

Introduction

Job gagged Bildad (Job 26:1-4) and overruled Bildad's insight into the majesty of God over the lights in the sky with his praise of the majesty of God over the realm of death (Job 26:5-14). After that the friends remain silent – they have finished.

Job now begins a monologue that runs through Job 31. In Job 27 he addresses his three friends in a few sentences one more time. His tone is calmer than in the previous chapters; the language remains fascinating.

Job 27:1-6 | Job Maintains His Righteousness

*1 Then Job continued his discourse and said,
2 "As God lives, who has taken away my right,
And the Almighty, who has embittered my soul,
3 For as long as life is in me,
And the breath of God is in my nostrils,
4 My lips certainly will not speak unjustly,
Nor will my tongue mutter deceit.
5 "Far be it from me that I should declare you right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 "I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
My heart does not reproach any of my days.*

The words of verse 1 appear here for the first time (cf. Job 29:1). It means that the usual order of speech is broken here. It would have been Zophar's turn, but he is silent. So Job "continues" his discourse. But it is not an answer to a speech of one of the friends that would have preceded it.

Job begins his monologue with swearing an oath (verse 2), but in his words his struggle and incomprehension about what God has done to him resounds. He is firmly convinced of God as the Living One. What has happened to him, has been done to him by God. But he does not agree. God has taken away his right. This is incomprehensible to him, because he sees

no reason for it in his life. Although he struggles with that, he knows that God as the Living One keeps him alive and supports him. The Almighty has embittered him, but he does not know for what he has deserved it. Similar words can be found with other believers, for example with Naomi (Rth 1:20).

What Job says is the saying of someone who has a good conscience. But there is a self-righteousness in it that does not match the self-knowledge of someone who is in God's presence. Job is not there yet. He struggles and at the same time has the certainty that God has given him life. As long as he lives, he knows that God keeps him alive (verse 3). He owes his life, his breath, to God.

As long as he lives, his lips certainly will not speak unjustly, nor will his tongue mutter deceit (verse 4). He will never give up the conviction of his innocence. His friends have tried everything to convince him that he is wrong. But there is no question of him agreeing with them (verse 5). The friends have taken as their starting point the misery in which he finds himself. Their reasoning was simple: God punishes sins with suffering; Job suffers, so he must have sinned; he even suffers very much, so he must have sinned very much.

Job will reject this accusation until his last breath, until he gives up the spirit. If he did agree with them, he would lie, he would cheat with his tongue, he would give up his righteousness, for he really has not done what they claim. He will hold on to his righteousness and underlines that statement by adding that he will not let it go (verse 6).

Job can look back on every day of his life as a day on which he has served God in sincerity. There is no contempt in his heart for a day that would not have been well spent. His life is an open book, against which there can be no accusation. As long as he lives, he will hold on to his righteousness and thus to the fact that he suffers innocently.

Job 27:7-12 | Contrast With the Character of a Wicked

7 *"May my enemy be as the wicked
And my opponent as the unjust.*

8 *"For what is the hope of the godless when he is cut off,*

When God requires his life?

9 *"Will God hear his cry*

When distress comes upon him?

10 *"Will he take delight in the Almighty?*

Will he call on God at all times?

11 *"I will instruct you in the power of God;*

What is with the Almighty I will not conceal.

12 *"Behold, all of you have seen [it];*

Why then do you act foolishly?

In verses 7-10 Job speaks of the fate of the wicked and the godless or hypocrite as always presented by the friends and applied to Job. He agrees with what the friends have said, for this is indeed the general rule. God is a judge of evil. Job, however, applied this truth in a very different way than the friends did. We see this from verse 11 onward, when he teaches about "the power [or: hand] of God", i.e. the acts of God.

Job describes his friends as "my enemy" and "my opponent" (verse 7). They have addressed him "as the wicked", "as the unjust" and in this way approached him as an enemy and an opponent. He wants to make it clear to them how impossible it is to confuse someone like him with a wicked one and someone who does wrong. He is not such a person.

Indeed, for the godless or the hypocrite – to the friends Job is such a person – there is no hope if God cuts off his life and takes away his soul, his life (verse 8). But Job is not godless or a hypocrite, nor is he without hope. He keeps hoping for God, right through all the questions he has about his suffering.

God does not hear the cry of the godless or hypocrite for help when he calls to Him in his distress (verse 9). The reason for this is that the godless has no real relationship with God, the Almighty. He doesn't want that either, he doesn't take delight in Him (verse 10). That is why he does not call on God at all times, but only when distress comes upon him. This is different with Job. Job does indeed delight in the Almighty and calls on Him at all times. He did the same when he lived in prosperity. Although Job does not (yet) receive an answer to his call for help, he knows that God hears him.

Instead of being taught by friends about the ways of God, Job can give them some instruction “in the power [or: hand] of God” (verse 11). He reverses the roles. He knows the Almighty and will not hide from them what he knows of Him. Surely they have seen for themselves what he used to be like, that there was no injustice with him (verse 12)? Why then, do they hold fast to their acting “foolishly” or, as it also can be translated, their speaking “vanity”, their empty talk, their hollow phrases?

Job 27:13-18 | The Sure Destiny of the Wicked

13 *“This is the portion of a wicked man from God,
And the inheritance [which] tyrants receive from the Almighty.*
14 *“Though his sons are many, they are destined for the sword;
And his descendants will not be satisfied with bread.*
15 *“His survivors will be buried because of the plague,
And their widows will not be able to weep.*
16 *“Though he piles up silver like dust
And prepares garments as [plentiful as] the clay,
17 He may prepare [it], but the just will wear [it]
And the innocent will divide the silver.*
18 *“He has built his house like the spider’s web,
Or as a hut [which] the watchman has made.*

Job clearly tells them that the reason everything was taken away from him by God does not lie in the fact of a sinful life that deserved God’s wrath. He is not a wicked man. God has another portion for “the wicked man” (verse 13). “The tyrants” receive from the Almighty “the inheritance”. Zophar has already stated this in his second speech (Job 20:29). It is something they do not necessarily receive now, in this life, but it may also be after their death. But the Almighty keeps it with Himself until the moment of the account, irrespective of whether that moment is already on earth or only after this life (cf. 1Tim 5:24).

The wicked and the tyrants may have numerous descendants, but they will die a violent death or starve to death (verse 14). We have an example of this in what happened to the children of Haman, the hater of the Jews (Est 5:11; 9:6-10). “Be buried because of the plague” means to die by the

pestilence (verse 15). The widows will not shed a tear. They may even be happy to be rid of him.

Of his “silver” and his beautiful “garments”, both of which he has in enormous quantities, he himself will have no lasting pleasure. They will be for “the just” and “the innocent” (verses 16-17; Pro 13:22; Est 8:1-2).

A house built “like the spider’s web” is a house that collapses just as quickly and easily as the web of a spider (verse 18; cf. Job 4:19). It is no more than a makeshift hut that a watchman makes in the vineyard during grape harvest time. Thus is the house of the wicked.

Job 27:19-23 | Whirled Away in His Wickedness

19 *“He lies down rich, but never again;
He opens his eyes, and it is no longer.*
20 *“Terrors overtake him like a flood;
A tempest steals him away in the night.*
21 *“The east wind carries him away, and he is gone,
For it whirls him away from his place.*
22 *“For it will hurl at him without sparing;
He will surely try to flee from its power.*
23 *“[Men] will clap their hands at him
And will hiss him from his place.*

The wicked rich lays down to sleep without realizing that it may be for the last time (verse 19). When he opens his eyes, everything is gone. The Lord Jesus tells of such a person in the parable of the rich fool (Lk 12:16-21). His eyes, which for so long were closed to all that bears witness to God, will open in another world. The Lord Jesus tells of another rich man who lifted up his eyes in Hades, in the pains (Lk 16:23), which, by the way, is not a parable, but the real condition after death. Job describes this end calmly, because he knows that this is not his end.

Verses 20-21 are reminiscent of the parable the Lord Jesus tells of a house built on the sand by a fool (Mt 7:24-27). When the floods come and winds blow and slam against it, it collapses. There is also a sudden aspect. The wicked man is suddenly struck and taken away by a scorching wind or

a violent storm. The terrors overtake him, while it is impossible to avert them or resist them. It says so impressively: "And he is gone."

All these disasters are sent by God over the wicked (verse 22). He will want to flee quickly, but that is impossible. If God does not spare, there is no escape. Thus God has not spared His Son, but judged Him in the place of all who believe in Him. But He does not spare the stubborn sinner who continues to resist Him (2Pet 2:4-5; Jn 3:36).

The fellowmen will be bewildered at the outcome of the prosperous wicked (verse 23). One will express audibly and visibly the terror that has afflicted them (Lam 2:15; cf. Rev 18:9).

Job 28

Introduction

This chapter is a new section in the monologue of Job. The theme of this chapter is that wisdom is not accessible to anyone but one who fear God. The theme of wisdom connects well with the previous chapter, which describes the rich person and his earthly riches and their end. Here now comes the true richness that does not perish, namely the wisdom that is with God. It is a song of praise to wisdom (verses 12,20).

This chapter can be summarized as follows: man can sift through the earth (verses 1-11), but the most precious thing, wisdom, he cannot find (verses 12-19). God alone knows it (verses 20-28).

Job 28:1-6 | The Treasures of the Earth

1 *"Surely there is a mine for silver
And a place where they refine gold.*
2 *"Iron is taken from the dust,
And copper is smelted from rock.*
3 *"[Man] puts an end to darkness,
And to the farthest limit he searches out
The rock in gloom and deep shadow.*
4 *"He sinks a shaft far from habitation,
Forgotten by the foot;
They hang and swing to and fro far from men.*
5 *"The earth, from it comes food,
And underneath it is turned up as fire.*
6 *"Its rocks are the source of sapphires,
And its dust [contains] gold.*

Job is familiar with mining (verse 1). Timna's copper mines are not far from Job's place of residence. He describes the difficult and dangerous process of mining minerals. It would be wisdom for man to use the same energy

with which he is committed to earthly wealth to find the true wealth, wisdom (Pro 2:1-5; 1Cor 2:6-13).

God has placed the precious metals in the earth. They are not on the surface, so to speak, but must be dug up with hard work. When silver and gold have been found, they must be purified, so that pure silver and pure gold remain. The same goes for “the iron” and “the copper”, which are extracted in different ways (verse 2).

In order to obtain these coveted metals, man must enter the subterranean darkness (verse 3). He puts an end to the darkness by the light of his lamp. By the light of the lamp he seeks the limits of the rock that is “in gloom and deep shadow”.

The work is laborious and heavy, but no effort is too great for him. A shaft must be dug (verse 4). As its depth progresses, he is let down with ropes. There he dangles, with no hold for his foot, and floats down, further and further away from “habitation”, that is, from the inhabited world.

In verse 5 it says what is normal for the earth and that is to produce bread (Psa 104:14). But man is not satisfied with that. In his longing for treasures, he also turns the inside of the earth upside down so that it looks as if a fire has raged. He is concerned with the precious sapphires (Exo 28:18; 39:11) and the dust containing gold (verse 6).

Job 28:7-11 | The Hidden Treasures

7 *“The path no bird of prey knows,
Nor has the falcon’s eye caught sight of it.
8 “The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor has the [fierce] lion passed over it.
9 “He puts his hand on the flint;
He overturns the mountains at the base.
10 “He hews out channels through the rocks,
And his eye sees anything precious.
11 “He dams up the streams from flowing,
And what is hidden he brings out to the light.*

“The bird of prey” has a sharp eye, but he can’t see the path that man has taken to the earth’s treasures (verse 7). The “falcon” or “harrier” is also a

bird of prey and also has a sharp eye. It distinguishes itself from other birds of prey because it does not build its nest in the trees, but on the ground. It also flies low over the ground to catch its prey. “The proud beasts” and “the [fierce] lion” walk the earth with great strength and courage, but can’t make a hole in the ground to dig treasures (verse 8).

Man, the miner, comes to places the bird of prey can’t see and the lion can’t reach. He works the hardest rocks to see if there is something valuable in them (verse 9). He doesn’t shy away from high mountains either, but digs them down to the depths where the roots [the literal translation of “base”], the deeper parts of the mountains, are. He makes his way through the rocks by carving out corridors in them to see if there is something valuable in them (verse 10). This he sees at once, for that is what he searches for and that is what he works for. He also dams the groundwater to reveal what is hidden in the darkness of the water (verse 11).

Job 28:12-14 | Not Disclosed by Nature

12 *“But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?*
13 *“Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.*
14 *“The deep says, ‘It is not in me’;
And the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’*

Job has described all the efforts man is willing to make, and all he dares to deepen precious metals from the earth. In the following verses he compares this intensive work with man’s attempts to gain wisdom. Man knows where precious metals can be found, but “wisdom”, where is it to be found (verse 12)? Wisdom is an incomparably greater treasure than the most valuable precious metal hidden in the earth, the value of which is also transient. And where is “wisdom” to be sought, in what place?

The observation is that people do not search for it with the same zeal and dedication as they search for mineral treasures. They do not know its value, nor the way to it (verses 13-14). The sources or finding places of wisdom therefore do not lie in nature nor “in the land of the living”, i.e. in man.

It is necessary to look higher than the earth and man in order to find true wisdom. Wisdom cannot be found in or on earth, but is hidden in God.

Wisdom is nowhere to be found in nature by natural man or any creature. In a beautiful personification, the deep and the sea say that they do not harbor wisdom. The deepest divers in the depths of the oceans and those who go to the farthest places across the sea discover nothing of God's wisdom. To discover wisdom, they must first accept that God is there. Only then they can see that He has made all His works with wisdom (Psa 104:24).

Human effort and reason are completely inadequate to come to the knowledge of the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:21). The wisdom of God is found for us in Christ, for He is the "wisdom of God" (1Cor 1:30; Col 2:3). And in Christ we can ask God for the wisdom we lack (Jam 1:5).

Job 28:15-19 | Its Priceless and Incomparable Value

*15 "Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it,
Nor can silver be weighed as its price.*

*16 "It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
In precious onyx, or sapphire.*

*17 "Gold or glass cannot equal it,
Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold.*

*18 "Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned;
And the acquisition of wisdom is above [that of] pearls.*

*19 "The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure gold.*

In this part many different mineral treasures are listed for which a man ventures his life to possess. But the wisdom is not available against payment of any earthly riches. Nor can it be compared to it.

Wisdom cannot be obtained in exchange for "pure gold" (verse 15). One can offer as much pure gold as a means of exchange for wisdom, but the means of exchange falls short. It is also impossible to put a quantity of silver in a scale that is equal to the weight of wisdom. Wisdom cannot be weighed.

Nor is there a means of payment that exceeds the value of wisdom, even if that means of payment were "the gold of Ophir", which is the most pre-

cious gold, or the “precious onyx, or sapphire” (verse 16). Wisdom is infinitely more valuable. The value of wisdom is simply not to be measured by what is of the greatest value by earthly standards, such as gold or glass (verse 17). In ancient times, glass was just as precious as precious stones. Also “articles of fine gold” cannot possibly serve as a means of exchange for wisdom. The value of wisdom is far above that.

“Coral and crystal” do not come to mind when it comes to obtaining wisdom (verse 18). They are worthless when it comes to obtaining wisdom. Also the value of pearls is completely insufficient to acquire wisdom (Pro 3:13-15). The value of “the topaz of Ethiopia” falls far short of the value of wisdom (verse 19). Whoever wants to buy wisdom does not have to come with “pure gold”.

Wisdom is simply not to be paid with or exchanged for all the mineral treasures of the whole world together. It does not belong to the visible and tangible existence of man on earth, but to the invisible world of God. Wisdom is not for sale with earthly means of payment. It is only for sale to those who have no money, i.e. those who ask God to give it to them (cf. Isa 55:1-2; Jam 1:5).

Job 28:20-22 | Wisdom Is Neither Visible nor Audible

20 *“Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?
21 “Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living
And concealed from the birds of the sky.
22 “Abaddon and Death say,
‘With our ears we have heard a report of it.’*

Job again asks the question of the origin and finding place of wisdom and understanding (verse 20; verse 12). It takes a revelation from God to know where wisdom comes from, namely from God Himself. To know where the place of insight is, the same applies. “The eyes of all living”, that is, men, do not discover wisdom. It is covered, hidden from them (verse 21). By “the birds in the sky” can be meant in connection with the first part of this verse and the first part of the following verse: (evil) spiritual powers.

Divine wisdom is also hidden from the most cunning spirits, whose intelligence is many times greater than that of man.

“Abaddon and Death” are the places where the spirits of unbelievers find themselves after their death (verse 22). Anyone who comes into contact with them through a death in his family or surroundings realizes that he lacks the wisdom to comprehend what these places mean, what lies behind death. In this sense a rumor penetrates man’s ears. God with His wisdom sees through what is dark to man (Pro 15:11). He can lift its veil and give insight into the situation after death (Lk 16:19-23).

In summary, we see three areas where wisdom is not (cf. Phil 2:10). Wisdom is

1. not on earth with all the living, with men;
2. not above the earth with the birds in the sky or the world of the spirits;
3. not beneath the earth in the realm of death with Abaddon and Death.

Job 28:23-27 | Wisdom Belongs to God

23 *“God understands its way,
And He knows its place.
24 “For He looks to the ends of the earth
And sees everything under the heavens.
25 “When He imparted weight to the wind
And meted out the waters by measure,
26 When He set a limit for the rain
And a course for the thunderbolt,
27 Then He saw it and declared it;
He established it and also searched it out.*

From nature Job now turns to the Origin of wisdom (verse 23). Here is the answer and that is that the Creator of the world knows the wisdom. He only understands the way of wisdom because it is His wisdom. He also knows the place of wisdom because wisdom dwells with Him. In one glance He overlooks everything on earth, He sees to the farthest corners of it (verse 24). He sees everything “under the heavens”, that is the whole universe.

He sees what He has created, and He governs it all. Everything is in His hand. Thus He imparts “weight to the wind” (verse 25). The waters that go over the earth under the impulsion of the wind are measured by Him (cf. Isa 40:12). The waters of the rain that He pours out over the earth are accompanied by thunder and lightning, with thunderbolt (verse 26). God governs the extent and duration of a storm that is accompanied by rain and thunder. Man is powerless in the face of this. The fact that man is incapable of managing and directing God’s works of creation does not mean that God has lost control of them. He is still in control.

God has dealt with wisdom like a skilled craftsman (verse 27). He “saw it”, “declared it”, “established it”, and “searched it out”. Seeing wisdom means that He knows where wisdom is. It is noticing its presence. He declares wisdom, which means that He gauges or fathoms wisdom, that He knows all its facets and aspects. Then He establishes the wisdom for the work He is going to do or the action He is going to perform. Finally, He searches out wisdom in order to know how He is going to apply it. In short, God knows wisdom through and through.

Creation is the work of His wisdom (Pro 3:19). Because of that wisdom, creation is a faultless work, without flaws, a work of which it could be said that it was very good (Gen 1:31). God knows His creation inside and out in all its complexity. It is also a perfect whole. It is thousands of years old, and everything still functions as He ordained it. Look at the wind and the rain. They are still there. They never had to be adjusted. They never need to be replaced by something better, as is the case with everything man thinks up and makes.

Job 28:28 | The Revelation

28 *“And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.’”*

Here we see how man, once he knows where the wisdom is, can get this wisdom. This is by fearing the Lord (Adonai). This is what Job has done, just as he has turned away from evil (Job 1:1). These two always go together. Those who fear God can only hate evil and turn away from it. Wisdom is not simply truth, but truth applied to conscience. That is to say, truth

that puts man in his true place and enables him to receive what God has to say. The consequence is to turn our backs on evil.

The “fear of the Lord” makes man bow before Him, before Whom the seraphs cover their faces. This fear is not anguish, but awe and reverence, worship. If this fear is there, God can be seen everywhere: in the depths, on earth and in the air, everywhere in the universe (Psa 111:10; Pro 1:7; 9:10; Ecc 12:13). Materialistic man does not see the fear of God as valuable. He only seeks materialistic advantage for this life.

God is the “only wise God” (Rom 16:27). Job knows that he does not possess wisdom and that his friends do not possess it and that it can only be found with God. He will experience the scope of these words only at the end of the book.

Job 29

Introduction

Job 29-31 form a whole. It is Job's closing speech, a summary of what he has said so far. We can see these three chapters as a kind of triptych:

1. In Job 29 Job speaks about his former prosperity and greatness.
2. In Job 30 he speaks of his present disgrace, not so much in the loss of his possessions, but more in the loss of dignity and friendship with God.
3. In Job 31 he professes his innocence at length by swearing an oath under which he puts his signature, as it were, at the end of that chapter (Job 31:35).

Job 29:1-6 | Domestic Prosperity

*1 And Job again took up his discourse and said,
2 "Oh that I were as in months gone by,
As in the days when God watched over me;
3 When His lamp shone over my head,
[And] by His light I walked through darkness;
4 As I was in the prime of my days,
When the friendship of God [was] over my tent;
5 When the Almighty was yet with me,
[And] my children were around me;
6 When my steps were bathed in butter,
And the rock poured out for me streams of oil!*

Maybe Job paused after his previous speech to hear if there was a reaction. Now he starts a new speech (verse 1). With this third part of his monologue he completes his defense. It looks like a closing argument in front of a jury.

He expresses his longing for the time "gone by". If only he could be back in that time, that time when God let him live in prosperity. The first thing he says with nostalgia for that time is that it was a time when God watched over him (verse 2; Psa 91:11; 121:7). In doing so, he indicates that the great-

est loss of all the losses he has suffered is the awareness of God's nearness rather than the material loss. The protection he enjoyed then, he has now lost. He feels that God used to be for him and that He is against him now.

Also in verse 3 he acknowledges that his happiness and prosperity were due to God. God made His lamp shine over his head. This allowed him to go his way in His light (cf. Job 18:6). God led him through all kinds of situations in which he saw no way out. But now, in addition to Divine protection (verse 2), he had also lost Divine guidance.

He also thinks back with melancholy to "the friendship of God" (verse 4; Psa 25:14). This relationship of friendship was over his tent, which means that his home and family were marked by it. He knew and experienced this relationship "in the prime" of his days. By this is not meant his 'boy-hood days', but the time of his maturity, when his life had come to full development and he was in the power of his life. But also fellowship with God was gone, as was the protection and guidance of God already mentioned (verses 2-3).

Job knew God as "the Almighty" (verse 5). He knew that this Almighty God was with him. It was not a general knowledge for him, but he lived in the consciousness of God's presence. But also the joy of God's presence was gone. He also lost his "children". How he had enjoyed them when they were around him. Their presence was all the more proof of God's blessing as a result of his fear of Him (Psa 128:3).

The bathing of his steps in butter is the figurative indication of the abundant production of milk from his cattle, from which butter was also made (verse 6). Butter here is *lebani*, a curds or drained yogurt. He also possessed a large quantity of oil that his olive trees had produced. Olive trees grow on rocky ground. When he saw his supply of olive oil, it was as if it had been poured by the rock into a stream. All this abundance indicates that Job was a very wealthy man. But nothing is left of all this prosperity.

Job 29:7-10 | Prestige Outdoors

7 "When I went out to the gate of the city,
When I took my seat in the square,
8 The young men saw me and hid themselves,

*And the old men arose [and] stood.
 9 "The princes stopped talking
 And put [their] hands on their mouths;
 10 The voice of the nobles was hushed,
 And their tongue stuck to their palate.*

After talking about his relationship to God in the previous verses, Job now starts speaking about his relationship to his fellowmen. In this he is characterized by two things, namely the esteem of his fellowmen for him and his concern for his fellowmen.

Job was part of the city council meeting at the gate (verse 7; Rth 4:1; Pro 31:23). He was a counselor with prestige. Everyone was in awe of him. He could order his seat to be set up [as it also can be translated] and it happened. The radiance of his authority went to young and old and distinguished (verses 8-10). "Young men" did not dare to make fun of him or mock him (verse 8). The "old men" stopped their activities when he arrived and stood in front of him at attention, as it were.

The princes who were busy discussing, broke off their discussions immediately when he appeared (verse 9). Immediately silence fell. They withheld their words and silenced as if they had lost their voices (verse 10). They did so out of respect for giving Job the floor.

Job 29:11-17 | His Benedictions Blessed Him

*11 "For when the ear heard, it called me blessed,
 And when the eye saw, it gave witness of me,
 12 Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
 And the orphan who had no helper.
 13 "The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,
 And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.
 14 "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
 My justice was like a robe and a turban.
 15 "I was eyes to the blind
 And feet to the lame.
 16 "I was a father to the needy,
 And I investigated the case which I did not know.*

17 *"I broke the jaws of the wicked
And snatched the prey from his teeth.*

Job's description of his behavior in his days of wealth and prosperity should be a description of the behavior of every believer in this day and age. It pleads in favor of Job that he did not abuse his influence. He devoted himself to the socially weaker, the lower classes of society. In what he did for the less fortunate, he resembles the Lord Jesus Who also served them (Mt 8:17).

What anyone heard or saw from him produced a good testimony about him (verse 11). This also shows how slanderous Eliphaz's accusation is that Job exploited his surroundings (Job 22:6-9). We too are judged on what people see or hear from us (cf. 2Cor 12:6). Do we have any idea of people's reaction to what they see and hear from us?

Job received that testimony because he did good to others:

1. He helped the wretched by delivering him out of his misery (verse 12).
2. The orphan, who had no one to help him, he also helped in his distress.
3. He received the blessing of someone who was ready to perish, for example by lack of food or by oppression or by false justice, because he saved him from his hopeless position (verse 13; Pro 24:11).
4. The widow, who had been deprived of her support and was in care about how things should proceed, he gave through his help a cheerful singing heart (cf. Job 22:9).

In the middle of the description of his beneficent performance Job points out that he put on "righteousness" (Psa 132:9; Isa 11:5; 61:10; 59:17) and that it clothed him (verse 14). Job's life was so marked by righteousness that it seemed that he was clothed with it. His righteous deeds were like a robe around him, and his righteous judgment was like a turban on his head. At the same time, robe and turban speak of the fact that Job held a leading position. Righteousness was exquisitely exercised by Job and took shape in him.

He compares his "righteousness" with "a robe and a turban". The robe is a garment worn by distinguished people; it shows dignity. The turban is a priestly and royal headgear (Zec 3:5; Isa 62:3).

Righteousness and justice were not taught to him, but they dwelt in him. It characterized him, so he was. Righteousness is to do justice to someone, to give him what is due to him, to treat him well. Justice is wider and looks at everything someone does and says.

Job did not act out of his own interest, to make himself richer or to get more prestige out of it. Moses and the prophets have always called for such a life, to commit themselves to the needy, the less fortunate, the outcasts.

1. Job helped the blind man by being like eyes to him, by taking him by the hand, and by helping him to reach his goal and not to perish (verse 15).
2. The lame man, who could not walk, he himself brought where he should be.
3. To the needy, after whom no one cared, he was like a father who concerned himself with their fate (verse 16).
4. He investigated the complaints of the strangers, namely those who he did not know and who were socially vulnerable in the patriarchal society. In doing so he showed that he was enforcing the law indiscriminately.
5. He acted vigorously against those who did wrong (verse 17). If he saw that someone had made another his prey through unjust justice, he would snatch the prey out of the voracious mouth of such a person by breaking his jaws (cf. Pro 30:14).

Thus Job showed pity where it was needed at a time when there were no social provisions. He also acted vigorously against evil where it was necessary at a time when one was at the mercy of those in power.

Job 29:18-20 | Perspective on Continuing Prosperity

18 *"Then I thought, 'I shall die in my nest,
And I shall multiply [my] days as the sand.*
19 *'My root is spread out to the waters,
And dew lies all night on my branch.*
20 *'My glory is [ever] new with me,
And my bow is renewed in my hand.'*

All the honor he received and the benefits he did, made life very pleasant for Job. He also counted on a long life as a reward for his commitment to others. This thought as such is also found in Scripture (Deu 5:33). And Job will get it too (Job 42:17)! However, this will only happen after he has stood face to face with God and retracted and repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:6).

He will then be freed from all expectations based on things that belong to the earth, no matter however good those things may be in themselves. In a following comparison he says that he saw himself as a tree planted by the water as a picture of continuous life force (verse 19). To this he adds the picture of the dew sleeping on the branch of the tree. In the night, too, there was this benevolent refreshment for him. Such a tree does not wither or cease to bear fruit (Jer 17:8; Psa 1:3). How contrasting his current situation is.

Job received honor for what he did. Each new act of benevolence brought him additional, new honor (verse 20). Instead of a decrease in strength, there was always renewal of strength – the bow is a picture of strength (Gen 49:24; 1Sam 2:4). This can refer to physical and spiritual strength (cf. Isa 40:31). Everything God has given in creation is good, but it is not good to put our trust in it. God wants to teach us to trust Him alone. He wants us to expect everything only from Him and not from any achievement of our own.

Job had thought to die in his own “nest”, that is, in his own house, surrounded by his wife and children and in possession of all his goods (verse 18). He thought he would die a natural death, without disasters and suffering, after a number of days that was countless “as the sand”, i.e. in old age.

Job 29:21-25 | A Comforter of Tried and Tested

21 *“To me they listened and waited,
And kept silent for my counsel.*

22 *“After my words they did not speak again,
And my speech dropped on them.*

23 *“They waited for me as for the rain,
And opened their mouth as for the spring rain.*

24 *"I smiled on them when they did not believe,
And the light of my face they did not cast down.*
25 *"I chose a way for them and sat as chief,
And dwelt as a king among the troops,
As one who comforted the mourners.*

Here Job does not return to the discussion with the leaders at the gate of verses 7-10, but he describes his attitude toward those he was doing well. All those he benefitted listened to him (verse 21). They expected the solution to their need from him. That is what they were waiting for. His counsel would help them. When he had spoken, they were satisfied and did not need to ask any further (verse 22). His words were to them like the spring rain on thirsty ground (cf. Deu 32:2). They waited for him with their mouths open, indicating a longing for what he would say (verse 23; cf. Psa 119:131).

When he smiled at people, it enraptured them (verse 24). They could not believe that he was paying attention to them, and that in kindness. No matter how miserable they were, Job didn't look worried, his face didn't budge. He continued to smile at them, encouraging them that he would attend to their needs and provide for them. He had the means to do so.

He chose to join them on their path of misery, and to support them on it (verse 25). He was as it were their chief, their king. This seems to be a position he had been given by those he had helped as an appreciation for a highly respected life. He behaved royally in everything he did. In that he is an example to us. We are a royal priesthood to proclaim the excellencies of God (1Pet 2:9). Job has shown that.

Job has involved us in his nostalgia for the time when he was prosperous in all circumstances, when he was doing better. The question is whether this is in accordance with the wisdom he described so beautifully in the previous chapter. The wise Solomon, having become wise through harm and disgrace, says: "Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this" (Ecc 7:10).

At the same time, a warning is appropriate here. In judging what Job is saying about himself here, we must always exercise the greatest caution. Job is in unprecedented suffering and in that situation thinks back to the

days of old. Who among us never thinks back to a time of untroubled joy in a time of great trial?

It is not wise to take what we have heard Job say in this chapter as haughty. By recalling these memories, he wants to relive that beautiful and pleasant past. Job is not hypocritical when he speaks of his exuberant behavior. He does not boast about it, but speaks out of despair.

It holds up a mirror to us. Doesn't it happen among us that when someone talks about his good deeds, it comes close to boasting, that it borders on pride? Scripture warns us not to praise ourselves (Pro 27:2). Paul is sometimes forced to say something about himself, about what he has suffered for the Lord (2Cor 11:16-33). He had to do so because his apostleship and thereby his Sender Jesus Christ were attacked. He didn't like to do it, but he had to do it. And how does he do it? Instead of slapping himself on the chest, he says he speaks "as if insane" (2Cor 11:23).

There's one more lesson we can learn. The hankering for the past because of the sweet memories of it, doesn't help us overcome the current difficulties. It is also said: 'Yesterday's manna is not food for today.' We can't prey on past glory. Paul had praised in the past, but had given up all that for Christ (Phil 3:7-8,14).

The only thing that helps us is that we regain sight of the fact that through faith in the Lord Jesus we stand in grace and that, as far as the future is concerned, we may exult in hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:1-2). God even wants to teach us to exult in today's tribulations (Rom 5:3).

Job 30

Introduction

In the previous chapter Job recalled his past and now lost prosperity. Now he is forced to return to the reality of the present. In this chapter he deals again with his present misery. He starts describing it with “but now” (verse 1; cf. verse 9), which underlines the contrast with the previous chapter.

The change from prosperity to disaster cannot be described more dramatically than in these two chapters. If we get any sense of it, we can imagine how much the soul of Job has been overwhelmed by this change. He used to be honored by the most significant and important people; now he is despised by the scum of society. He used to be praised; now he has become a mockery. God used to guard him; now God has become cruel to him.

Job 30:1-8 | His Horrible Mockers

- 1 *“But now those younger than I mock me,
Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.*
- 2 *“Indeed, what [good was] the strength of their hands to me?
Vigor had perished from them.*
- 3 *“From want and famine they are gaunt
Who gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation,*
- 4 *Who pluck mallow by the bushes,
And whose food is the root of the broom shrub.*
- 5 *“They are driven from the community;
They shout against them as [against] a thief,*
- 6 *So that they dwell in dreadful valleys,
In holes of the earth and of the rocks.*
- 7 *“Among the bushes they cry out;
Under the nettles they are gathered together.*
- 8 *“Fools, even those without a name,
They were scourged from the land.*

Job begins in these verses to describe the dimensions of his misfortune by pointing out the kind of people who now besmirch him. It is the scum among the people. In despicable words Job speaks out about the people he used to do well but who now set themselves above him.

As noted above, the words “but now” indicate a change with respect to the preceding chapter (verse 1). The word “now” of this chapter is in contrast to “months gone by” from the beginning of the preceding chapter (Job 29:2). Job is now mocked. And by whom? By people younger than him (Job 19:18). Young people used to hide when he went to the gate (Job 29:8), but now they laugh at him, they amuse themselves by making jokes about him.

The fact that young people speak disdainfully about older people or criticize them negatively is unfortunately becoming more and more common in our time. Such an attitude goes against God’s Word. Whoever does this will face God Himself (Lev 19:32). Young people are called to be submissive to the elderly (1Pet 5:5a). Older people may wonder if they behave in such a way that this is not so difficult for young people.

Job says of these mocking young people that they are the offspring of inferior fathers. How can you expect such fathers to teach their children appropriate standards of decency? He wouldn’t even want to give those fathers a place among the (shepherd) dogs – the only time the Bible mentions these dogs. A place among the dogs means great contempt, for in the east dogs were despised animals (2Sam 16:9).

Job did not want to use these people, but they were also unfit to be used (verse 2). They could not and would not do anything. They had never learned to do anything because they did not want to. When they became old and powerless, there was nothing more to be expected of them. And the descendants of such people have the evil courage to mock Job.

The fathers suffered from want and famine and were therefore “gaunt”, which means that nothing came out of their hands that was of any use to others (verse 3). They were not tolerated anywhere either. Therefore they “gnaw the dry ground”. Their gaunt life suited perfectly to a barren place, which also speaks of barrenness. They stayed in dark dens in the midst of

devastation and destruction. Their whole environment speaks of death, darkness and desolation.

They lived from mallow they could pick and from leaves of the bushes (verse 4). In this way they seemed to lead an animal life. From "the root of broom shrub" was made the best kind of charcoal that could burn for days. In Job's time, it was a task for the lowest class of people.

The community was better off without them. When they knocked somewhere, they were chased away like tramps, while being called dirty thieves (verse 5). They were not pathetic people, with whom you should have pity, but people who in no way wanted a decent existence. They chose this kind of life.

As a dwelling place they chose the dreadful valleys, where no one else wanted to live (verse 6). Like rabbits they dug holes in the dust or inhabited the holes which existed in the rocks.

Their mutual communication happened by crying out (verse 7). The same word is used for the braying of a donkey (Job 6:5). "Under the nettles" they huddled together for some warmth, but also for the blunting of their sexual lusts. They were totally shameless. Perhaps the unabashed crying out between the bushes should also be seen in connection with that. They lived like animals in every way.

These fathers themselves were [literally] "sons of fools", i.e. of fathers who lived without God and commandment (verse 8). They came from what we today call antisocial backgrounds of the worst kind. They did not have a name, that meaningless they were. There is little that offends a man so much in his dignity than to pretend he doesn't exist, as if he is air. The people Job speaks of are such people who had no right to exist, because they did not take any responsibility. That is why they were "scourged from the land".

And it is the descendants of these idlers with no decency and no name who now come to Job to express their contempt for him. The question is whether we are able to understand somewhat what kind of grief this must be for him. In any case, it requires a great deal of empathy on our part. If we sit down in the spirit beside Job, we will feel something of the bitterness of the suffering it inflicts on him.

Job 30:9-15 | Their Contempt

9 *"And now I have become their taunt,
I have even become a byword to them.*
10 *"They abhor me [and] stand aloof from me,
And they do not refrain from spitting at my face.*
11 *"Because He has loosed His bowstring and afflicted me,
They have cast off the bridle before me.*
12 *"On the right hand their brood arises;
They thrust aside my feet and build up against me their ways of destruction.*
13 *"They break up my path,
They profit from my destruction;
No one restrains them.*
14 *"As [through] a wide breach they come,
Amid the tempest they roll on.*
15 *"Terrors are turned against me;
They pursue my honor as the wind,
And my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.*

In the preceding verses Job described the depraved environment from which the scum that despised him came. In verses 9-15, Job speaks of the way in which the scum, which he has described in the preceding verses, defames him (verses 9-12) and attacks him (verses 13-15).

In verse 9 Job says for the second time "now" (cf. verse 1) as an introduction for a description of the situation in which he finds himself now and which contrasts with his earlier situation. He is now mocked by the foam of society, by people for whom no one has any esteem, but only contempt. They sing mocking songs about him and make fun of him through mocking words. They amuse themselves with him.

Even such people look down on him with an abhorrent resentment (verse 10). They stay far away from him. Sometimes they run to him to spit in his face and then run away again. They do not do this out of fear, but because he stinks so much. Spitting on the ground when you see someone is a sign of contempt, but spitting in someone's face is much worse. How deep his misery must be!

What Job says in verses 10-11 is strongly reminiscent of what people have done to the Lord Jesus (Psalms 22; 69; 102). He also felt the deep pain of it, but He suffered and did not threaten. He “kept entrusting [Himself] to Him who judges righteously” (1Pet 2:23). If anyone can speak of the difference between past glory and present suffering, it is the Lord Jesus during His life on earth. He voluntarily exchanged glory with the Father for the greatest insult and mockery in the world.

In all the misery inflicted upon him by men, Job knows that in the end he was made powerless and humiliated by God (verse 11). His “bowstring” or “tent cord” is the thread by which he is bound to life. Peter speaks of his dying as “laying aside of my earthly dwelling [or: my tent]” (2Pet 1:14). Job thought he had the thread of his life in his hand and controlled everything well. But God pushed him out of his socially strong and honorable position.

Now all respect for him is gone. The scum is exploiting his misery and defenselessness to belittle him even further. Everything that had kept them in check (“bridle”) when he lived in prosperity, they cast off and now they turn their biting mockery on him. They do not restrain their tongues, but give them free rein to ridicule and insult him (cf. *Psa* 39:2; 141:3).

In verse 12 Job seems to speak of another group of opponents. They are of the same low rank, for he calls them “brood”. However, they don’t leave it at mockery, but also sue him and storm him. The right side is the place of the accuser (*Zec* 3:1; *Psa* 109:6). Possibly by this brood and these prosecutors he means the disasters and ailments that have come over him. They are taken as a reason to accuse him of evil.

The heavy accusations drive him on the run. He compares himself to a besieged city. Against the wall of that city, siege walls are built, to take the city. Job feels the disasters as roads that are being made to lead him to ruin.

As a result, his path, or escape route, is cut off (verse 13). There is no escape. They are all striving for his downfall. Everyone and everything is against him. Among those who surround him there is no one to help him, there is no one who restrains them (cf. *Job* 29:12). All of them are besieging him. He is abandoned by God and people.

After the mockery the signal comes to the attack (verse 14). The attackers have made a breach in the wall of his defense. And it is “a wide breach”. In the disasters and accusations comes the destruction. Job is in danger to perish in the sea of suffering.

At the sight of the oncoming flood of suffering, Job feels that the horrors have turned against him (verse 15). As if by a gust of wind, his dignity has been taken away from him. All his happiness is gone, wiped away, like a cloud that has passed by and dissolved (cf. Hos 6:4; 13:3).

Job 30:16-19 | His Suffering

*16 “And now my soul is poured out within me;
Days of affliction have seized me.*

*17 “At night it pierces my bones within me,
And my gnawing [pains] take no rest.*

*18 “By a great force my garment is distorted;
It binds me about as the collar of my coat.*

*19 “He has cast me into the mire,
And I have become like dust and ashes.*

Job’s soul is poured out within him, which means that he surrenders to his misery (verse 16). He collapses, as it were. He feels how the last bit of life is flowing out of him. The days of his misery seize him, as if they have hands that grip him powerfully, they overwhelm him. His whole existence and feeling are controlled by it. Every day is full of misery, and the days are string together without any relief presenting itself.

The night is no better than the day (verse 17). It seems as if the pain increases at night. The pain shoots through his bones. Pain in the bones is the deepest pain. We sometimes say that we are cold to the bone and by that we mean that we are cold through and through. Thus Job suffered through and through pain in the night, so that he had no rest even at night (cf. Job 33:19). Nor did his gnawing pains take rest at night. He constantly had palpitations, through which he also remained awake.

After Job spoke of the invisible bones and gnawing pains in his body, he spoke of “my garment”, which is his appearance. He became unrecognizable because of the devastating power of his illness and ulcers (verse 18).

He feels seized by God with “great force” at the throat, in a way that a collar of a coat can be so tight around the neck that you feel as if you are suffocating.

Job then feels himself thrown by God into the mire of calamity and misery (verse 19). As a result, he finds himself in a terrible situation and is shunned by everyone. As for him himself, all strength and life have vanished from him, which he expresses by saying that he has become “like dust and ashes” (cf. Gen 18:27). From the beginning he has been “in the midst of ashes” (Job 2:8) and now he feels as if by God’s action he has become as low and worthless as dust and ashes.

Job 30:20-23 | No Help From God

*20 “I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me;
I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me.*

*21 “You have become cruel to me;
With the might of Your hand You persecute me.*

*22 “You lift me up to the wind [and] cause me to ride;
And You dissolve me in a storm.*

*23 “For I know that You will bring me to death
And to the house of meeting for all living.*

Several times Job has spoken about God and accused Him of acting unjustly. Now the time has come for him to speak directly to God Himself (verse 20). But there is no answer. In the true sense of the word only the Lord Jesus could say this (Psa 22:1b-2). And what a difference there is between Him and Job. Never did the Lord give up His confidence in God and His righteousness, while Job doubts the righteousness of God. Job doesn’t get an answer (yet) because he isn’t ready yet to receive it. The Lord Jesus was forsaken by God and received no answer because God laid the sins of all who believe in Him upon Him and judged Him for them. He did not attribute anything incongruous to God.

Job does attribute incongruous things to God. His suffering remains undiminished and even increases day by day. He stands up straight before God, but he notices that God does not pay attention to him. That is the greatest torment. He knows that God is there and sees him. Yet God pre-

tends not to be interested in him. It seems to Job that God is indifferent to his condition.

This leads Job to say that God has “become cruel” to him (verse 21). This is a very strong accusation. At the same time, it implies that God is paying attention to Job, but without showing any pity for his situation. On the contrary. God has changed from Someone Who has blessed him into Someone Who now treats him cruelly. The changed attitude of people he has described in the previous verses is also present with God, according to Job. God has turned against him with the might of His hand, His mighty deeds.

Job feels himself a plaything of God, just as a leaf is a plaything of the wind (verse 22). Through the disasters that have blown his life away like a wind, he has lost all hold. He is a defenseless prey of the course of events over which he has no control, just as the wind cannot be grasped. The misery is like a chariot on which he sits and which carries him away, without the possibility of getting off the chariot. How could he if God is the ‘chariot-ter’? In this way his existence melts away and loses all solidity.

He “knows” that God is leading him unstoppably toward death on His ‘chariot’ (verse 23). Then he arrives at the place where all the living eventually end up, the grave, nobody excepted – apart from Enoch and Elijah. The fact that he “knows” this does not contradict what he said earlier: “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25). It is part of the back and forth and up and down going of his feelings. Here again he is completely overwhelmed by his disasters and plagues and sees no perspective.

Job 30:24-27 | The Triumph of Misery

24 *“Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out [his] hand,
Or in his disaster therefore cry out for help?*

25 *“Have I not wept for the one whose life is hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the needy?*

26 *“When I expected good, then evil came;
When I waited for light, then darkness came.*

27 *“I am seething within and cannot relax;
Days of affliction confront me.*

Job wonders if God does not stretch out His hand to one who is in a heap of ruins when he calls to Him because he cannot put himself out of this misery (verse 24). He who, in his disaster, calls to God for help – surely He will redeem him? Surely God will not keep quiet when He is called upon?

Job refers again to his earlier practice (verse 25; Job 29:1-25). Then he had been involved with heart and soul in the suffering of others and had shown compassion and comfort. He had “wept for the one whose life is hard” (cf. Psa 35:13; Rom 12:15). He had done so out of sincere compassion, with sadness in his soul (cf. Isa 58:7,10).

But for him there is no comforter and inner peace. This is a great disillusionment and disappointment. He does not understand why he has to endure all this and that is what makes his suffering so deep. It reminds us again of the Lord Jesus Who also complained: “Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none” (Psa 69:20).

Job expected good because he had done good (verse 26). He expresses his deep disappointment that instead of the expected good, evil had come. He sits in the darkness of the misery that has entered and spread over his life, hoping for light.

He cannot understand that this is how it went with him and is inwardly in the greatest need (verse 27). Verse 27 is literally: “My inward parts are boiling.” His inward parts represent his inner feelings (Isa 16:11). It bubbles and boils in him, there is restlessness in his soul and feverish heat in his body. He cannot reconcile himself with his misery and sorrow. It is impossible for him to remain silent in resignation. Unexpectedly the days of misery have come over him. They threatened to ruin his plans and hope for the future, and they succeeded. This makes him totally hopeless, as he shows in the last part of this chapter.

Job 30:28-31 | Everything Is Woe

28 *“I go about mourning without comfort;
I stand up in the assembly [and] cry out for help.*
29 *“I have become a brother to jackals
And a companion of ostriches.*

30 *"My skin turns black on me,
And my bones burn with fever.*

31 *"Therefore my harp is turned to mourning,
And my flute to the sound of those who weep.*

Job can no longer discover a ray of light. He goes "blackened, but not by the heat of the sun" as it also can be translated (verse 28). This is because of the illnesses that have affected him so severely and so extensively. This is how he goes; this is how he lives, from second to second, this is how his life ends. Job feels like a lonely wanderer in the darkness, although there is a circle of people around him, even if it is at a distance. When he gets up and calls for help, his cry for help is not addressed to them. It is a general cry for help, made from the greatest need, by someone who used to be ready to help people in need.

He has become "a brother to jackals and a companion of ostriches", of animals that shun people's company and that people loathe (verse 29). In the sounds they make, the howling of jackals and the moaning of ostriches, they express the sorrow and lamentation of Job (Mic 1:8). Job feels expelled from the fellowship of men and banished to these animals.

His skin has turned black and is about to fall off (verse 30; cf. Lam 4:8). His body has been torn down by festering ulcers and his bones by burning fever. All joy is gone (verse 31). "Harp" and "flute" are used for expressions of joy, but Job can only use them to play songs of mourning and grief (Lam 5:15). His voice chokes with the sobs of a crying one.

Job 31

Introduction

We have seen how Job's closing plea for his innocence in Job 29 began with a vivid description of the time when he lived in prosperity. He speaks about his place in the community, his high position, his personal sincerity and his concern for the weak and poor in the city. In Job 30 he described the misery in which he found himself, for which he cannot see any justification.

In the chapter we now have before us, he concludes his plea. In Job 29 he has spoken at length about his good things. Here, in Job 31, he declares that he has done no evil things, nothing that could be a cause of the disasters that have afflicted him. He utters severe curses upon himself, which should strike him if he were guilty of anything criminal. He does so out of the conviction that he has done nothing to deserve the disasters that have come upon him.

He is a broken man, an outcast, abandoned by God and despised by men. But his spirit is unbroken. He straightens his back and makes a powerful plea. While the Prosecutor does not let Himself be heard or seen (yet), Job pleads himself free. What it amounts to is that God must now justify Himself for what He has done to him, from which He derives the ground for His dealings with him. His speech here is not addressed to his friends, but to his God.

Job lists all kinds of possible crimes. In some of them he swears that he did not commit them. Many verses start with "if". These are what we can call "conditional" statements. In a number of cases they are followed by a curse. The idea is: if what is written in the conditional sentence would be or will be reality then what is written in the curse can and will happen.

So the "if"-phrases deny something in the most solemn way, we can say, under oath. Although not every "if"-phrase is followed by a curse, we understand that the intention is to solemnly deny something. The chapter is

full of solemn statements, in which Job swears that he is not guilty of the sins mentioned in those statements.

These statements of innocence are the last words we have of him that he speaks to his defense. His innocence is of the utmost importance to him. He pronounces the final conclusion in verse 35, where he confirms all his statements with his signature. That's the climax.

Job 31:1-4 | A Covenant With the Eyes

*1 "I have made a covenant with my eyes;
How then could I gaze at a virgin?
2 "And what is the portion of God from above
Or the heritage of the Almighty from on high?
3 "Is it not calamity to the unjust
And disaster to those who work iniquity?
4 "Does He not see my ways
And number all my steps?*

Job's friends never attacked his personal purity. Yet his first declaration of an evil that God must judge and that he did not commit has to do with his personal purity. It has to do with sexual desires (verse 1). It is remarkable and significant that he begins the list of sins he enumerates with this.

At some point, somewhere in the past, he has, he says, "made a covenant" with his eyes. It supposes that he had a hard time with this desire, as today (almost) all young people – especially boys – who want to live for the Lord Jesus, have a hard time with it in a certain period of their life. Job then made a solemn promise before God that he would keep himself pure in his thoughts and actions, and that starts with the eyes. What a lesson for young people today! He did not seek the satisfaction of his own desires. Instead, he has sought to serve others, as we have seen and also see in this chapter.

He has made a covenant with his eyes to escape the danger of adultery mentioned by the Lord Jesus (Mt 5:27-28). In this way Job has answered the call: "Flee immorality" (1Cor 6:18). Joseph fled when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him into fornication and remained pure (Gen 39:7-12); David did not flee and fell into fornication (2Sam 11:1-5). Job's statement indicates

that he held and practiced the monogamous view: he was the husband of one wife.

Job emphasizes his choice of a covenant to remain pure by referring to “the portion of God from above”. He knows himself to be responsible to Him (verse 2). God is above evil. He has a portion for believers, but also for unbelievers. The believers’ portion is blessing, but the unbelievers’ portion is judgment. When we think of “the heritage of the Almighty from on high” we can think of the right He has to exercise judgment. That right is the heritage of the Lord Jesus Who will come from on high to judge the wicked and their wickedness. The Father has given all judgment to Him, the Son of Man (Jn 5:22,27).

In verse 3 Job explains what ‘the portion’ and ‘the heritage’ is that comes from God over wrong sexual desires. It is “calamity to the unjust and disaster to those who work iniquity”. ‘Unjust’ and ‘iniquity’ is general and refers to all sins, but in this context refers primarily to fornicators and adulterers (Heb 13:4).

Job is well aware that God sees all his ways and numbers all his steps (verse 4; Jer 29:23; Pro 5:21). God knows all the way he goes, all his life’s path. He also knows the individual steps he takes, i.e. all his individual considerations to go a certain way and how he behaves on that way. That thought was and is enough to deter him from committing what Joseph calls “this great evil” (Gen 39:9).

We see several times that for Job the thought of God seeing him is a motive not to do something that is evil. Accountability to God pervaded his life and determined his mind, his words, and his actions. He did not see being accountable as a threat, something to be afraid of, but as the sound awareness of his personal responsibility to everyone he was dealing with. Something similar we see in Paul. The thought of being accountable before the judgment seat of Christ did not frighten him, but rather motivated him to be pleasing to Christ in everything (2Cor 5:9-10). This is how it may be with us.

Job 31:5-8 | Falsehood and Deceit

| 5 *“If I have walked with falsehood,*

*And my foot has hastened after deceit,
6 Let Him weigh me with accurate scales,
And let God know my integrity.
7 "If my step has turned from the way,
Or my heart followed my eyes,
Or if any spot has stuck to my hands,
8 Let me sow and another eat,
And let my crops be uprooted.*

A second evil from which Job vigorously distances himself is falsehood and deceit (verse 5). He has never resorted to falsehood, for example by misrepresenting himself in order to exonerate himself from an accusation. Nor has he ever used deceit quickly, for example, in order to benefit from something. He has always been sincere and honest. Here does not follow a curse, but a challenge to God to weigh him with accurate scales (verse 6). Then the righteous God will see how the scales turn to the side of his sincerity.

The next "if" to testify of his innocence concerns the way he has gone (verse 7). He has not deviated from the right path. There has been nothing in his heart that has caused him to attach himself to anything sinful that his eyes have seen and that has led him to wrong deeds, so that sin now clings to his hands.

To this "if" he attaches a "let" followed by a curse that should strike him in case of guilt (verse 8). If a finger could be laid at him for any of these things, he wants to be punished for it. That punishment is the lack of blessing for which he has sown and worked. In addition, he must face the fact that another person benefits from it or that the result of his work is destroyed (cf. Deu 28:33a; Lev 26:16b).

Job 31:9-12 | Adultery

*9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
Or I have lurked at my neighbor's doorway,
10 May my wife grind for another,
And let others kneel down over her.
11 "For that would be a lustful crime;*

Moreover, it would be an iniquity [punishable by] judges.

12 "For it would be fire that consumes to Abaddon,

And would uproot all my increase.

The next statement of innocence, introduced by "if," is about immorality. Job here affirms and defends his high esteem for the marriage commitment. It is the logical consequence of the covenant of verse 1, which he may have made when he was still unmarried. He swears that he is free from any attempt at, or search for, an opportunity for adultery (verse 9). To seek that opportunity, he had to lurk at his neighbor's door. He would then wait for the husband to leave and then go to his wife. He kept away from this action with a purpose of heart.

Who today can say the same as Job with regard to the temptation to look at pornographic sites on the Internet? We can apply the expression "I have lurked at my neighbor's doorway" to this very topic. Visiting pornographic sites is such a 'lurking', something that happens very sneakily. If someone reads this and has to admit to his shame that he is such a 'lurker', let him confess this sin immediately and make a radical break with it in his heart. He who continues to have difficulty or in whom temptation has already become addiction, let him seek help.

To Job there was only one wife to whom he could give his undivided attention and devotion, and that was the wife of his youth. He swears that if he were unfaithful to her, he would bear the shame (verse 10). That shame is that his wife would be abused by another. That was a great humiliation for her, as it was for him. It would bring shame upon him in two ways. He would experience the rule 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'.

It is not a question for Job how he should call such behavior. There is no discussion possible. Unfaithfulness in marriage is "a lustful crime" (verse 11). There is never any justification for adultery, never is there even one good word to be said for it. It is absolutely reprehensible. It is also "a crime" that deserves punishment, without any mitigating circumstances. Therefore, whoever commits this sin must be brought to a tribunal. The fact that this no longer happens in the Netherlands, for example, does not take away anything from the seriousness and gravity of this sin.

As mentioned before, God will judge that sin (Heb 13:4). It is a sin that deserves the judgment of the fire of hell (verse 12). Through this sin, a devastating and consuming fire is already kindled in relationships on earth. Unfaithfulness in marriage ruins and destroys the lives of every person involved – in spirit, soul, and body. Everything that life produces is affected by it and characterized by this destruction. Whoever is unfaithful in this is not reliable in any other area.

Job 31:13-15 | Injustice

13 “If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves

When they filed a complaint against me,

14 What then could I do when God arises?

And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him?

15 “Did not He who made me in the womb make him,

And the same one fashion us in the womb?

In a new declaration of innocence, Job professes his righteousness in the way he dealt with his male or female slaves (verse 13). He was not a hard, indifferent lord. His male or female slave could talk to him if they disagreed with something. He listened to them, and if they were right, he gave them to what they were entitled. Job didn't use his position to silence them then.

Job acted as a lord who knew he had a Lord himself (verse 14; Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). He realized that he would have to account to God for his dealings with his slaves. God watches how people treat their slaves. There comes a time when God stands up to do justice, to pronounce judgment, and to execute it. For that He will investigate everything we have done and ask why we have done it and why we have done it that way.

In rendering account before God, Job sees no distinction in social position (verse 15). He sees himself in the same position before God as his slave, because they are both made by the same Creator in his mother's womb. They were both fashioned by the same God in the womb (Psa 139:15; Mal 2:10). God shapes their bodies and members and gives them certain abilities. Every person must realize that he has received from God what he has.

Job 31:16-23 | Exploitation of the Weak

16 *"If I have kept the poor from [their] desire,
 Or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
 17 Or have eaten my morsel alone,
 And the orphan has not shared it
 18 (But from my youth he grew up with me as with a father,
 And from infancy I guided her),
 19 If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
 Or that the needy had no covering,
 20 If his loins have not thanked me,
 And if he has not been warmed with the fleece of my sheep,
 21 If I have lifted up my hand against the orphan,
 Because I saw I had support in the gate,
 22 Let my shoulder fall from the socket,
 And my arm be broken off at the elbow.
 23 "For calamity from God is a terror to me,
 And because of His majesty I can do nothing.*

Eliphaz in his last speech accused Job of exploiting the poor by abusing his power (Job 22:5-9). Job calls in this section a curse on himself if any of these accusations were true. He has been guided in his life by the idea that he will be accountable to God for his actions (verse 23).

This section contains several statements of innocence. We can see that from the frequently used word "if". They all have to do with the fact that he has not exploited the weak, but on the contrary has helped them. He did not do this as a benefactor handing out presents to pathetic people, but as someone who cared about the other person's needs.

Job shows that someone who is pure and sincere in his inner being will also treat his fellow man in a benevolent way. He showed mercy. When poor people asked him for something, he gave it to them and thus fulfilled a desire (verse 16). Even if a widow asked nothing, but he saw the need in her eyes, he did not smother her. He had an eye for unspoken need.

He also had an eye for the orphan (verse 17). When he ate his bread, he thought of him and shared his bread with him. He did not do this as a generous benefactor, but as a father. He regarded the orphan as someone who

had grown up with him from childhood, and gave him the feeling that he was his son (verse 18). He also helped the widow from the very beginning, that is, from the moment he saw her troubled condition. He did not run away from it or took a long time to think about it. Job is an example of someone who has a 'pure and undefiled religion' (Jam 1:27).

Job also shows us another example. What a blessing it must have been for the orphan that someone took care of him as much as Job did. He always found someone in Job who was like a father to him and thus provided for the lack of his own father. It must have given him the feeling, as we say today, 'I may be here'. Isn't Job setting an example here for all those who are foster parents?

He also had an eye for someone who was cold and therefore was in danger to perish (verse 19). Job gave this poor man, who could not buy clothes himself, fleece of his sheep so that he could get warm again (verse 20). He did not dismiss such a man with beautiful talk, but showed the works of faith (Jam 2:15-17).

His actions brought him thanks from the "loins" of those he favored (cf. Job 29:13). Here the loins are introduced as a person and represent the person with all his strength and soul. It was on the loins that the beneficent warmth was felt most, because there the belt pressed the clothing close to the body. At the same time, the warmth gave the person strength to walk again, to which the loins also symbolically point.

Job comes back again to his attitude toward the orphan (verse 21; cf. verse 17). With regard to this socially very weak person he never violated the law. He never threatened to harm the orphan, feeling supported by his fellow counselors in the gate. They would support him, because he was an inferior orphan after all. It could be that he meant that he never brought a lawsuit against an orphan in order to exploit him, knowing that he would be supported in this intention by his fellow counselors.

Job underlines all his statements of innocence with a powerful curse (verse 22). If he is guilty of something, he may be made completely and irreparably powerless. It is about the loss of his shoulder and arm. Both refer to the loss of strength. When the shoulder is gone, there is no more strength

to carry something, and when the arm is gone, there is no more strength to do something.

The motive of all that Job has done, and especially has not done in this chapter, is His reverence for God (verse 23). He knows that God's doom comes over the crimes he has mentioned. This has prevented him from committing them. He could prevent the judgment of men by his influence on them, but not the judgment of God. "His majesty" surpasses every human highness by far. If we are impressed by this, we will refrain from committing any kind of injustice.

Job 31:24-28 | Greed and Idolatry

24 *"If I have put my confidence [in] gold,
And called fine gold my trust,
25 If I have gloated because my wealth was great,
And because my hand had secured [so] much;
26 If I have looked at the sun when it shone
Or the moon going in splendor,
27 And my heart became secretly enticed,
And my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,
28 That too would have been an iniquity [calling for] judgment,
For I would have denied God above.*

In his next statement of innocence, Job denies that he is guilty of a materialistic lifestyle. When his wealth increased, he had not put his hope and confidence in it (verse 24). In Job 1 Job is described as an extraordinarily rich man. To be rich is not sin; to trust in riches is sin (1Tim 6:17). We should not place our hope in gold, but in the Lord, for He is our hope (Pro 3:26; 1Tim 1:1).

Nor did Job gloat in the fact that his wealth was great, that he was a wealthy man (verse 25). The source of his gloating was not his wealth, but God. Boasting in his own accomplishments, was not present with him either. Certainly, he worked hard, "my hand", and therefore "had secured [so] much". He did not inherit or steal his wealth, but obtained it through his own effort. He is aware that all his work would have been in vain if God

had not blessed it. He has not served himself with the results of his work, but others. That is the right way to deal with wealth.

He also swears that he does not attribute his wealth to such magnitudes in creation as the sun and the moon (verse 26; Deu 4:19; 2Kgs 23:5). With this Job says that he is free from idolatry. Relying on earthly possessions is a form of idolatry. Idolatry is closely related to greed and is even identified with it (Col 3:5). Job did not walk in the light of the sun and moon, as if he saw them as the source of his prosperity, but in the light of God.

His heart was not secretly tempted to worship those impressive celestial bodies that can so gracefully illuminate your way (verse 27). Nor did he express this by bringing his hand to his mouth and kissing it. This outward expression of love, of which a kiss speaks, happened in cases where the object of worship was too far away to touch it, as is the case with the sun and moon. Here we can think of what we call a 'hand kiss'. It is kissing the hand and then blowing this kiss in the direction of the object of love.

To worship something from creation instead of the Creator Himself is an iniquity (verse 28; cf. verse 11; Rom 1:22-25), on which the judge must pronounce a condemnation. It is the transgression of the commandment not to have other gods before God (Exo 20:3). This sin denies God as the One Who is above all things and sets Him aside. This is a heavy insult to Him.

Job lived, as we assume, in the time of the patriarchs, that is, when the people of Israel, and with them the law, were not yet there. Yet he knew what was fitting for God. That was because of his relationship with Him. Even if we still know little about the Bible, we can still feel through the new life and the Holy Spirit whether or not something is in accordance with God's will. Of little children in faith it is said: "And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know" (1Jn 2:20).

Job 31:29-32 | Gloating and Lack of Hospitality

29 *"Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy,
Or exulted when evil befell him?*

30 *"No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin
By asking for his life in a curse.*

31 *"Have the men of my tent not said,*

'Who can find one who has not been satisfied with his meat'?

32 "The alien has not lodged outside,

[For] I have opened my doors to the traveler.

In this testimony of innocence Job says that he was never guilty of gloating (verse 29). When someone who hated him got into great financial difficulties, for example, no triumphant sense of joy came over him. Nor did he suddenly become in an excellent mood when his hater was struck by, for example, a terrible illness. Can we repeat that after him?

Apart from the fact that he did not allow any gloating within him, he also refrained from expressing it in words (verse 30). He distinguishes between the inner and outer sin of gloating. Job now speaks of the outer side of this sin. He did not wish his enemy anything evil by casting a curse on him, for example that he may drop dead. To be able to say in all sincerity what Job is saying here, someone has to live close to God.

An accusation of lack of hospitality is refuted by Job by pointing out people who can testify of his hospitality (verse 31). We can think of his servants. Anyone who has ever sat at Job's table has enjoyed the meat he had served. Job's hospitality was well known and widely praised.

His hospitality was not limited to a meal and not to acquaintances. He went out into the streets and invited the stranger who had no shelter to sleep with him (verse 32). The traveler did not have to go to an inn, but Job opened his doors to him and welcomed him into his home.

Job 31:33-34 | Hypocrisy

33 "Have I covered my transgressions like Adam,

By hiding my iniquity in my bosom,

34 Because I feared the great multitude,

And the contempt of families terrified me,

And kept silent and did not go out of doors?

Here Job bears witness to his complete transparency before God and men. He walked in the light of God's face. He was never hypocritical by seeking a cover for his transgressions and covering them up, but confessed them honestly (verse 33). Adam had covered his transgression by covering himself with an apron of fig leaves and hiding from God (Gen 3:7-8). Job

openly confessed his sin and didn't keep it hidden within himself. Confession of sin made him feel free before God and men. This also applies to us. Not confessing sins can also come from fear of what people will say. Job did not let this prevent him from confessing his sins (verse 34). He was not afraid that everyone would despise him and that he would get completely upset as a result. An additional consequence of this would be that he no longer dared to say anything and no longer dared to show himself anywhere. Job here declares that he has a pure conscience before God and men.

Job 31:35-37 | Job Challenges God

35 *"Oh that I had one to hear me!
Behold, here is my signature;
Let the Almighty answer me!
And the indictment which my adversary has written,*
36 *Surely I would carry it on my shoulder,
I would bind it to myself like a crown.*
37 *"I would declare to Him the number of my steps;
Like a prince I would approach Him.*

Job is almost at the end of his pleading. He has so far rejected every accusation. In verses 38-40 there comes one last statement of innocence, and then he stops speaking. However, in verses 35-37 he turns once again toward God. In a general complaint he says that he desires so much that somebody would want to listen to him (verse 35). But what he means is that he wants a judicial decision from God.

He keeps the list of his declarations of innocence before God. Let God take a good look at it. He can say that he has 'filled out truthfully' the whole statement, as is written under forms that we have to sign after we have filled them out. He points out to God his 'signature' that he placed under it. That signature says he and his whole person stand for what he said.

Then he challenges God to answer. After all, he is "the Almighty," Who controls everything and has everything in His hands. Job's whole plea served to convince God of his innocence, God Who makes him suffer so much, Who is his adversary, for He makes him suffer without cause. The

document of his innocence, confirmed by his signature, he presented to God. Let God even write down His reaction and explain why He has made him suffer so much.

He will carry the answer of God on his shoulder and bind it on himself like a crown (verse 36). Job also says this in the full conviction that God will not be able to give any valid reason for his suffering. The document of God will show that he suffers innocently. Everything that God will write will absolve him of all accusations against him. He would carry God's answer around in triumph. Everyone would be convinced of his innocence. God's acquittal would turn his defamation into an ornament.

He would account to God for all his footsteps, for every step he had taken, and that it had been done in obedience to Him (verse 37). In the awareness of his righteousness, he would approach God like a prince.

Job is mistaken in this conclusion, as will be shown. He will approach God quite differently when he comes face to face with Him. Job is not approaching God, but God is approaching Job. And then there is nothing of his own righteousness left, nothing of his 'prince' feelings, but he despises himself (Job 42:6). Then he will realize that he didn't actually understand what he was talking about and that he should have waited for God to speak before he could say anything.

Job 31:38-40 | Land Abuse

38 *"If my land cries out against me,
And its furrows weep together;
39 If I have eaten its fruit without money,
Or have caused its owners to lose their lives,
40 Let briars grow instead of wheat,
And stinkweed instead of barley."*
The words of Job are ended.

After Job has declared and signed his innocence extensively, another P.S., an after writing, follows, because actually Job still has a lot to say. He only will speak about his land, how he has dealt with it, what he has done with the proceeds and how he has treated the tenants of it. He can testify that he has managed his land with care and has not neglected it (verse 38). In

accordance with the (later) commandment, he has given the land rest at regular intervals (Exo 23:10-11; Lev 26:35-36) and seeded it properly (Lev 19:19; Deu 22:9).

The furrows he plowed on his land did not weep, which means that he worked his land properly. The cultivated land is given the floor as a person to testify of Job's correct handling of it. He did not overexploit his land, which means that, due to unwise management of his farmland, it loses its fertility and the yield considerably decreases or even disappears. His land brought the full yield (verse 39). He ate and enjoyed its yield. He was not plagued by a conscience that accused him of not paying his workers who had collected and processed the yield (cf. Jam 5:4).

He also had owners or tenants, people who rented a piece of land from him. He did not treat them harshly by asking for more than was fair or threatening to punish them if they could not pay the rent because of crop failures. He didn't let them sigh. Laban was a very different kind of boss. He did ask the utmost of Jacob and made him sigh (Gen 31:7,39-41).

Job concludes this declaration of innocence again with a curse (verse 40). If he is guilty of one of the things mentioned, he deserves that briars or thistles grow instead of the wheat he has sown and that poisonous stinkweed grows instead of the barley he has sown. The blessing he thought he was getting must then turn into a curse, for he has deserved it.

Job is not unwilling to suffer if he deserved it. He has emphasized this throughout this chapter. His statements of innocence alone are intended to show that his suffering is useless if his suffering is linked to sin, for he has not sinned. He has therefore not deserved this suffering. What Job must come to is not to look at cause and effect, which his friends have always done, but at God. He is almost ready for this.

For the time being Job has finished speaking (cf. Psalms 72:20). God has patiently listened to all his words without interrupting him or responding to Job's challenges to Him. As long as we justify ourselves, God cannot tell us anything. Only when we have finished speaking, He will have the opportunity to say something to us. In preparation for this, we first hear Elihu in the following chapters. After that, when God has spoken, Job will speak again, but briefly and very modestly.

Job 32

Introduction

There seems to be a stalemate situation. The three friends have given up trying to persuade Job to change his mind. Job persists in his view that he is innocent. His complaint against God hangs in the air. He has alluded to a possible mediator, if only there were an umpire ... (Job 9:33). And all of a sudden someone stands up.

In this chapter we will meet the mediator desired by Job in the person of Elihu. Elihu suddenly appears on stage, without any preliminary announcement. Contemporary (neo-)evangelical commentators, under the influence of modern theology, have said that it is 'very important to note that if his speeches had been omitted, we would not have missed them at all'. It was also noted that most modern commentators reject Elihu's speeches. All we're saying about this is that the idea that God includes six meaningless chapters in His Word is downright foolish!

Elihu's role is to prepare Job for the appearance of God to him. When Elihu has finished speaking, there is no answer from Job. Elihu speaks about God as it should be and is therefore a help for Job. He takes the position of a mediator between Job and God. Through this he reminds us of the "one mediator ... between God and men, [the] man Christ Jesus" (1Tim 2:5). He speaks only after Job and his friends have finished speaking and have nothing more to say. Similarly, the Lord Jesus only came after there was nothing more to be expected from man.

Much of what Elihu says, Job and his friends also said. But there is an important difference. Elihu does not claim that God only punishes because of certain sins, but he also says that God wants to instruct through suffering (Job 36:8-10). Job's friends have accused Job of hidden sins and that's why he suffered so much. Elihu doesn't do that. He wants to convince Job of his present sin, and that is his lack of submission to what God does. He does not blame Job for sinful acts or insincerity, but for his rash words. In

Elihu the wisdom that is from above speaks, while the friends have spoken wisdom that is from below.

Unlike the friends, Elihu does not make vague suppositions about Job's sins, but he says what he has heard from Job's mouth with his own ears. He does not express any suspicions, but points out inappropriate statements Job has made. We can certainly learn a lot from this. The secret of the heart is God's cause; we can only judge what we hear and see. What Elihu is doing is answering what Job said (Job 33:8-11; 34:5-6; 35:1-3).

Elihu's speech can be divided as follows:

1. He begins with an introduction in which he addresses both Job and his friends (Job 32). In the following chapters he speaks only to Job.
2. In the first part of his speech to Job he talks about how God speaks to man (Job 33).
3. In the second and third parts he justifies God against Job's reproaches. He shows that God's government and His righteousness run parallel (Job 34), and that God, as the sovereign Lord, is not the servant of his desires and of those of men in general (Job 35).
4. In the fourth and last part of his speech Elihu proves the righteousness of the Creator (Job 36:3). He explains that God's omnipotence is guided by perfect love (Job 36) and that God reveals His sovereignty, power and wisdom in His works of creation (Job 37).

Job 32:1-5 | The Anger of Elihu

1 Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2 But the anger of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram burned; against Job his anger burned because he justified himself before God. 3 And his anger burned against his three friends because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. 4 Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were years older than he. 5 And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of the three men his anger burned.

Job has finished speaking (Job 31:40). The friends, "these three men", have also finished speaking (verse 1). They got nothing closer to each other. The friends have given up before, but now they have nothing at all to say. They

have not been able to convince Job of their rightness in their view of his suffering. Job continued to hold on to his view of his innocent suffering and his doubts about God in His dealings with him.

Then all of a sudden we hear someone who has followed the whole conversation, but who has not made himself heard and from whom we have not heard before (verse 2). He has not been an indifferent listener. Everything he has heard, he has absorbed. When both sides have finished speaking, his anger burns, only then, and not before. It is a great anger. The word is used no less than four times in these few introductory verses. It is also a controlled anger. Elihu did not speak before his time and waited until Job and the friends had finished speaking.

"The anger" is mentioned even before the name of the person who is angry is mentioned. The anger, his mood of mind, as a result of the conversations he has heard, is paramount and therefore has the emphasis. It proves his deep engagement. Then his name is mentioned. It is the anger "of Elihu".

The origin of Elihu, whose name means "my God is He", is described in more detail than that of the three friends (Job 2:11). He is the son of "Barachel", which means "God blesses". He is also "the Buzite", a descendant of Buz, which means "the despised". One of the sons of Nahor was called Buz (Gen 22:20-21). If it is this Buz, Elihu is related to Abraham. Elihu is also said to be "of the lineage of Ram". Ram means "the exalted". If we can see a type of the Lord Jesus in Elihu, the meaning of the names Buz and Ram reminds us of Him, for He is both the Despised and the Exalted (Isa 53:3; 52:13).

The reason for Elihu's anger against Job is that Job justified himself toward God in front of his friends. The friends gave a totally wrong impression of God, but Job did not give a good impression of God by extensively justifying himself, even with oaths (Job 31).

Elihu's anger against the three friends concerns the fact that they did not come up with an answer to Job's suffering, but nevertheless declared him guilty (verse 3). Without any proof, they made their verdict and did not deviate a millimeter from it during and through the conversations with Job. The Lord Jesus speaks serious words about this form of judgment (Mt 7:1-2). They have seated on the throne of the Judge and Lawgiver (Jam

4:11-12). Therefore, their sin is greater than that of Job and they are openly punished by God, while Job is justified toward them by God (Job 42:7-8).

Elihu waited until Job had spoken as the last speaker, because Job and his friends are older than him (verse 4). He waited for Job in particular to finish his speaking, because he wants to speak to him (Job 33:1). He has also waited to speak because he knows his place in front of them all. As someone who is younger than Job and his friends, he takes the appropriate place in relation to the elderly.

God's Word is clear about the respect that young people should have toward the elderly (Lev 19:32; 1Pet 5:5a). We also see this attitude of respect in the Lord Jesus when He is twelve years old and sits among the teachers (Lk 2:46). This attitude of respect toward the elderly is disappearing more and more. It is one of the indications of the coldness of society (2Tim 3:1-4).

Although Elihu's anger also concerns Job (verse 2), his anger is mainly directed against the friends because of their input (verse 5). They have said a lot, but in their mouths he has not noticed an answer that helped Job to understand his suffering. The reason is that they tested Job's need against to their theological views on God. Their theologically correct statements did not come from a personal relationship with God. We do notice this relationship with God with Elihu. Because of this we see in him, although he is younger than they are, that he sees things more correctly than they do (Psa 119:100).

Job 32:6-10 | Reason to be Silent

6 *So Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite spoke out and said,
"I am young in years and you are old;
Therefore I was shy and afraid to tell you what I think.*
7 *"I thought age should speak,
And increased years should teach wisdom.*
8 *"But it is a spirit in man,
And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.*
9 *"The abundant [in years] may not be wise,
Nor may elders understand justice.*
10 *"So I say, 'Listen to me,*

| *I too will tell what I think.'*

The word "so" (verse 6) indicates that Elihu responds to the inability of his friends. Because the ancients failed to answer Job, and now are silent, Elihu begins to speak. First he explains why he has remained silent so far. He apologizes for his age, for he is young compared to these old men. In various ways, he expressed his respect for them before giving his vision of the matter, in which he did not aspire to his own honor, but to the honor of God.

He is only so short in the world and they have been for so long; he has had so little experience and they already have so much; they already know so much and he knows so little. In their presence he felt shy and afraid to tell his feelings about what he saw and heard from them. So with Elihu there is not only a good attitude outwardly, but there is also inner respect. He looks up to them and does not dare to compete with them.

He has deliberately given priority to the elderly, because he assumed wisdom with them (verse 7). "Age should speak, and increased years should teach wisdom" is a saying that expresses his tribute to the elders. They had had many days of experience in life and had made many observations in the multitude of years. It was only natural that they had stored a large stock of wisdom that they could reveal in giving answers to life's questions. They are far above Elihu in age and therefore he judged that they would also be in wisdom and knowledge.

But Elihu came to a different conclusion because of what he heard and saw. He has discovered that only the Spirit of God working in him, a man, gives him the ability to speak a wisdom that is not bound by age (verse 8). Through the breath, or rather the inspiration, of the Almighty, men are made wise and can understand what God is doing. The answers to questions of life must come from Him. Man is only "man", while God is "the Almighty". Elihu emphasizes that man, including himself, is dependent on God in everything. Only God has the wisdom necessary to answer the problem of Job.

Wisdom is therefore not necessarily linked to old age (verse 9). The understanding of "justice", of what is good and evil in God's eyes, is also not only reserved for old people. The old friends of Job, to whom Elihu

addresses, are themselves an example of this. We can also think of some kings in Israel who showed wisdom in their younger years, but who fell into folly in their old age, such as Solomon, Asa and Joash. Old age is no guarantee of wisdom.

After Elihu has said this, he no longer feels any hesitation in calling them to listen to him (verse 10). He feels free to tell his feelings about what happened to and was said by Job. There is also no arrogance in his words. What he does is to present his view of the matter to Job, without passing judgment on it. He offers his thoughts to him and leaves the judgment to him.

Job 32:11-13 | The Failure of the Friends

11 *"Behold, I waited for your words,
I listened to your reasonings,
While you pondered what to say.*
12 *"I even paid close attention to you;
Indeed, there was no one who refuted Job,
Not one of you who answered his words.*
13 *"Do not say,
'We have found wisdom;
God will rout him, not man.'*

As a youngster Elihu patiently waited for the words of the friends and listened attentively to them (verse 11; cf. Pro 18:13). He did so in the hope that they would give Job a satisfactory answer. It is good that young people first listen to what the elders have to say (cf. Jam 1:19). As has already been pointed out, the elderly, generally speaking, by experience know more than young people. Because they are older, they have experienced more. Yet that is not decisive for the correct understanding of things. The right insight can only be given by the Spirit of God and He can give it to young people as well (verse 8).

Elihu listened to their insights about what happened to Job and why. He did not do this passively, but with the intention of understanding the meaning of their insights. Until they had to "ponder what to say", which

means that he noticed that they chose their words carefully. They proceeded with thoughtfulness and consultation in making their statements.

Not only did he listen carefully, but also paid close attention to them (verse 12), how they spoke, whether what they said came from the heart, or only from memory. They had repeatedly hammered on the same anvil and without any sympathy, fired their ‘theological’ views at Job. They had not really listened to Job, but had kept telling him their own righteous views in different words over and over again. As a result, none of them were able to convince him that they had the right answer to the question of why he was suffering, an answer he was so desperately seeking.

With his words, Elihu wants to take away from the friends the thought that they reacted very wisely to Job (verse 13). It is as if they are now sitting with Job as if they are unhappy, looking sullenly because Job has so stubbornly ignored their wise words. But they should not imagine anything. Only God can tell him why all this has happened to him, for He “will rout him”, that is what these disasters have brought upon him. No man has done this and therefore no man can claim with certainty that he knows why God has done this.

Job 32:14-22 | Why He Must Speak

14 *“For he has not arranged [his] words against me,
Nor will I reply to him with your arguments.*

15 *“They are dismayed, they no longer answer;
Words have failed them.*

16 *“Shall I wait, because they do not speak,
Because they stop [and] no longer answer?*

17 *“I too will answer my share,
I also will tell my opinion.*

18 *“For I am full of words;
The spirit within me constrains me.*

19 *“Behold, my belly is like unvented wine,
Like new wineskins it is about to burst.*

20 *“Let me speak that I may get relief;
Let me open my lips and answer.*

21 *“Let me now be partial to no one,*

Nor flatter [any] man.

22 "For I do not know how to flatter,

[Else] my Maker would soon take me away.

Job did not speak to Elihu, nor did he challenge him as he did his three friends (verse 14). Elihu does not respond from personal agitation, as the friends did. Job cannot accuse him of partiality. Elihu will speak to Job in a different way, not with unfounded, vehement accusations, but with the words of God.

The friends look "dismayed" (verse 15). They look like people who marvel at the despicable rejection of their so well-intentioned advice. Their mouths fall open with amazement, and they can no longer utter a word. They are defeated. They also know nothing more to say. Their words have failed them, because they can't think of any more. Fervently, they had begun to express their opinions. They were going to convince Job. But gradually the fire disappeared from their speeches until they finally came to a complete standstill.

Elihu waited for a reaction, but they didn't make themselves heard anymore (verse 16). Shrouded in silence they stand there. They stopped speaking. They can no longer sit down, but neither can they leave. They look like statues, without strength to move, paralyzed as it were by the awareness of their defeat.

Elihu has clearly shown that the friends have failed in their approach to Job. This clears the way for him to respond to Job in turn and tell his feelings, his opinion, about him (verse 17). Elihu says this not in pride and with contempt for their failure. He does not speak before his turn and only speaks when the others really cannot say anything anymore.

It is more that now, because the others, the elders, are completely out of words, he has the opportunity to put his thoughts into words. The conversation is completely deadlocked and the participants find themselves in a stalemate. His performance is not premature and inappropriate, but courteous and with a proper sense of the status of the conversation or even more of the status of silence. He does not speak because he wants to assert himself, but out of zeal for God.

Elihu sees the silence that arises as an indication from God that it is his turn to tell what is on his heart (verse 18). And that is no small thing, for he is “full of words”. This is another indication that he has waited in self-control until it was his turn to speak. But when it is his turn, he can no longer hold back, he has to speak, so much so that the spirit in his innermost being constrains him. He feels like someone who has held back his breath for so long that his lungs burst.

Just as Jeremiah and Paul could not keep silent in certain situations, he cannot keep silent now either; he feels the need to speak as something imposed upon him (Jer 4:19; 20:9; 1Cor 9:16; Psa 39:2-3; 2Cor 5:14). It is also important for us to be “full of words” to speak them at the right time and at the right opportunity. This will be so when “the word of Christ” richly dwells within us (Col 3:16).

Elihu says that his belly, which means his inner feelings, is about to burst, so great is the pressure he feels (verse 19). He compares the feeling he has with new leather wineskins. When the wine is fermenting, the pressure on the wineskin can become so great that it bursts. Elihu experiences this pressure in his inner being. Therefore he has to speak (verse 20). Then the inner pressure will disappear and he will get relief. By opening his lips he can answer Job. The opening of his lips refers to the opening of the new wineskins to prevent them from bursting. This way opening his lips prevents him from being torn inside.

What Elihu says in verse 21, he does not say to anyone in particular, but is more a loudly expressed sigh. He does not want to take sides with anyone, and he does not intend to do so. Nor does he want to speak to anyone in order to win that person’s favor. He does not want to speak flattering words, but he wants to speak without regard for the person. Thus he acts the same as God and as Paul (Gal 1:10; 2:6; Deu 1:17; 10:17; 16:19; 2Chr 19:7; 1Tim 5:21).

He is also unable to flatter anyone at all, because he lives in fellowship with God and is filled with respect for his Maker (verse 22). That determines his speaking. Because God is his Maker, he must fulfill God’s purpose with him. God made him with the purpose of representing Him. If he does not, he knows, God will take him away immediately. Then He will no longer

use him. Elihu fears God more than men. That's why he has so much more wisdom than his friends to answer Job wisely.

Job 33

Job 33:1-7 | Elihu Asks Job to Listen

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

Elihu speaks directly to Job, he explicitly mentions his name, unlike the three friends. He asks Job to listen to his speech and to hear all his words (verse 1). "My speech" is the whole story. "All my words" are the individual words that make up the story. He speaks in this way, to draw attention to the importance of what he is going to say. He opens his mouth to speak words worthy of being heard (verse 2). His words are not meaningless expressions of a man who also wants to have his say on a matter. They are words that he has, as it were, tasted with his palate. He is cautious in his choice of words; he does not speak impetuously.

What he says comes from an upright heart, and the knowledge he utters is sincere (verse 3). He does not speak with hidden intentions. They are not beautiful, pleasant sounding words to win Job for his insights, but words he utters in sincerity before God.

He can speak in this way because he is aware that the Spirit of God has made him and that he has life through the breath of the Almighty (verse

4). With this he indicates once again that he has no wisdom of his own, but owes everything to Him Who gave him life and helps him to live that life to His glory. Therefore he can be used by God for Job. God can also use us to win the hearts of others only when we realize this.

In verse 5 Elihu invites Job to refute him because Job has the right to do so. Job does not have to accept what Elihu says about who he is, because he has his own connection to God. God kindly makes His thoughts known. It is not Elihu's concern to overload Job with reproaches or imputations, as the friends have done. He offers Job his thoughts on an equal footing with him.

Elihu does not put himself above Job, but stands beside him (verse 6). He knows that he and Job are both in the same relationship with God. God has formed both him and Job "out of clay" (Gen 2:7; cf. Acts 10:26). Like Job, he is a weak, fragile creature. In his frailty, he is no more to God than Job. This awareness of one's own weakness is important if we want to win a failing brother (Gal 6:1). If we want to wash someone's feet, we have to bow before him (Jn 13:1-5).

After so placing himself next to Job, he reassures Job about what he is going to say (verse 7). He will tell Job serious things, but Job does not have to be afraid of them. He will not let his pressure [or hand] be heavy on him. Job feels God's hand heavy on him (Job 13:21). By positioning himself next to Job, Elihu takes that fear away. The friends have aggravated Job's suffering by accusing him of sin as the cause of his suffering. Elihu will not do that. He will not increase his suffering, but alleviate it by letting God's light shine upon it.

Job 33:8-13 | God Is Greater than Job

8 *"Surely you have spoken in my hearing,
And I have heard the sound of [your] words;*
9 *I am pure, without transgression;
I am innocent and there is no guilt in me.*
10 *'Behold, He invents pretexts against me;
He counts me as His enemy.*
11 *'He puts my feet in the stocks;*

He watches all my paths.'

*12 "Behold, let me tell you, you are not right in this,
For God is greater than man.*

13 "Why do you complain against Him

That He does not give an account of all His doings?

Elihu said to Job that he will not be hard on him. That does not mean he will not point out to Job his faults and call him to account. Yet he speaks differently from his friends. That is why there is no response from Job. Job is ready to listen to Elihu.

Elihu starts by reminding Job of something he heard from his mouth (verse 8). This is not vague, enigmatic or presumptuous, but concrete. Everyone present at the conversations will confirm the correctness. Elihu does not quote verbatim what Job has said, but he does so entirely according to its content. He summarizes Job's argument and gives the main lines of it.

Job has repeatedly asserted that he is sincere and innocent (verse 9; Job 9:21; 10:7; 13:18,23; 16:17; 23:10; 27:5). Especially in Job 31 he makes a powerful plea for his innocence. Elihu summarizes this in the four concepts of "pure", "without transgression", "innocent" and "no guilt". This was not arrogance on the part of Job. Elihu does not throw that at Job as an accusation either. Job's claim of innocence is justified, as we know from Job 1 (Job 1:1). Job does not mean here that he is sinless (cf. Job 7:21; 13:26), but that he has done nothing that deserves the judgment of his heavy suffering.

But Job has gone too far by suspecting that God is looking for something with him and that He is therefore acting with him in this way (verse 10). Job believes that God is seeking something with him in order to sue him and that He is acting with him as His enemy (Job 13:24; 19:11; 30:21). Elihu has heard Job say that God puts his feet in the stocks and that He watches all his paths (Job 13:27). Elihu answers to this (verse 11).

Elihu's answer to this is that Job is "not right in this" (verse 12). In this he has not done justice to Who God is and who he himself is. He has forgotten Who God is and who he himself is, for "God is greater than man" as Job is. How did Job dare to call God, Who is so much greater than man, to account (verse 13)? That God is greater than man does not only apply to

God as Creator, but here above all to the greatness and exaltation of His actions with man.

Furthermore, Job has accused God of when he called to Him, that God did not answer Him (Job 19:7; 30:20). Surely, God can't do that, can He? Surely, He can say why He makes him suffer so much, can't He? Surely, he has a right to that, hasn't he? But God is God. He is in no way obliged to account for His actions to man, not even to His own.

What Job says, we see time and again in the history of mankind up to the present day, to a much greater extent and also in a rebellious form. With Job there is no rebellion, but a wrestle. He does not put up a big mouth against God. With rebellious man this is so. In man there is resistance, opposition and rebellion against God's actions, which is inspired by unbelief and self-exaltation. Man puts God in the dock and challenges Him to tell us why He allows or works things (Rom 9:20).

Job 33:14-22 | God Speaks Once or Twice

14 *"Indeed God speaks once,
Or twice, [yet] no one notices it.*
15 *"In a dream, a vision of the night,
When sound sleep falls on men,
While they slumber in their beds,
16 Then He opens the ears of men,
And seals their instruction,
17 That He may turn man aside [from his] conduct,
And keep man from pride;
18 He keeps back his soul from the pit,
And his life from passing over into Sheol.*
19 *"Man is also chastened with pain on his bed,
And with unceasing complaint in his bones;
20 So that his life loathes bread,
And his soul favorite food.*
21 *"His flesh wastes away from sight,
And his bones which were not seen stick out.*
22 *"Then his soul draws near to the pit,
And his life to those who bring death.*

The word “indeed” Elihu uses in verse 14 indicates that he is going to explain what he said in the previous verses. Job’s accusation that he called and God did not answer is not justified. However, God has spoken. What Job considers to be God’s unjust dealings with him, is in reality God’s speaking to him. Only Job did not recognize God’s voice. That is why God sends in His grace a man like Elihu to explain this to Job.

Although God is infinitely superior to man, He is not indifferent to His weak creature or acts arbitrarily with him. He speaks to him. He does this “once or twice”. It is not God’s fault that man does not heed it, but man’s fault. God speaks and He does so several times. One time He uses “a dream, a vision of the night” (verse 15), the other time He uses sickness and suffering (verse 19). Sometimes He uses His reason, His Word, another time His rod, His punishment.

“When sound sleep falls on men, while they slumber in their beds”, there are no outside influences that can distract him. Someone who sleeps does not feel whether he is poor or rich, whether he is healthy or sick, whether he is hungry or not. God can use this condition of rest in His grace to speak to him in a dream or a vision and make His will known. In the time of the patriarchs, and also later, God spoke in dreams or visions, as with Abraham, Joseph and Daniel, but also with someone like Abimelech, Laban, Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. This is typical of the time when the Bible was not yet complete. Then God spoke “in many portions and in many ways” (Heb 1:1).

Now that the Bible is complete, God makes His will known through His Word, the Bible. Certainly He still speaks through a dream in certain cases. This usually concerns people who do not have a Bible. But certainly in the western, post-Christian part of the world, where the light of the Bible has shone for so long, the written Word of God suffices for the Christian.

When God speaks to a man in a dream, He reveals His will to “the ears of men” (verse 16). Here the ear is mentioned and not the eye, which is what we would expect in dreams and visions. However, it is not about seeing, but about hearing. It is about God speaking and that is always directed at the ear. It is about listening to what God has to say.

The dreams or visions do not appear to contain any sweet or pleasant scenes. They are not 'sweet dreams', but cautionary dreams or visions that literally and spiritually awaken a person (Gen 41:7). God thus "seals their instruction". He puts His seal on it that it will be as He has shown in the dream or the vision. The word "instruction" includes admonition, warning, and education. The seal implies God's assurance that the message is reliable and will be carried out.

God speaks in this way because He wants to bring man to contemplation and to a standstill, so that he renounces the wrong act he wanted to commit (verse 17). It is not about that single act, but about his whole life consisting only of evil deeds. He is guided in it by his pride. The end of it is destruction (verse 18). But God intervenes in grace and warns him. By doing so, He keeps back "his soul from the pit", for God has no joy in the death of a man, but that he turns from his way and lives (Eze 33:11).

If a man does not listen to God's speaking in dreams and visions, He speaks in a different way, by punishment in the sense of chastisement, which is represented here by Elihu in the form of a serious illness (verse 19). That is what happened to Job. But Elihu is not making accusations against Job which the friends have so often made that his suffering is proof of a secret sinful life.

Elihu describes in verses 19-22 the process of a debilitating sickness, with the intention that Job should get an eye for God's interference in it, that he should be able to hear the speaking of God through all this. It begins "with pain on his bed", which indicates that the place of rest (cf. verse 15) becomes a place of torment. The fever rages unceasingly in his bones. His appetite not only disappears, but he abhors the bread, he hates to think of eating anything (verse 20). He even abhors his favorite food.

Because of this he emaciates so much that there is nothing left of his flesh, and his bones, which at first were not visible, now stick out and can be seen (verse 21). In this way his powers flow away and with them his life. What comes closer and closer is the grave (verse 22). His life is about to fall into the grip of death. And it is precisely with this in mind that God brings suffering upon man. He wants to chastise him for his own good, because he stands face to face with death, that he may turn to Him.

Job 33:23-30 | God's Angel and His Work

23 *"If there is an angel [as] mediator for him,
 One out of a thousand,
 To remind a man what is right for him,
 24 Then let him be gracious to him, and say,
 'Deliver him from going down to the pit,
 I have found a ransom';
 25 Let his flesh become fresher than in youth,
 Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor;
 26 Then he will pray to God, and He will accept him,
 That he may see His face with joy,
 And He may restore His righteousness to man.
 27 "He will sing to men and say,
 'I have sinned and perverted what is right,
 And it is not proper for me.
 28 'He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit,
 And my life shall see the light.'
 29 "Behold, God does all these oftentimes with men,
 30 To bring back his soul from the pit,
 That he may be enlightened with the light of life.*

In order to benefit from the chastening, a person has to understand the meaning of the chastening and for this he needs again someone who explains the meaning (verse 23). Eliphaz has claimed that no mediator in heaven would ever listen to Job (Job 5:1). But Elihu testifies that there is such a person. With "an angel" it is best to think of "the Angel of the LORD", the Old Testament appearance of the Lord Jesus. This is also apparent from the following name Elihu uses, "mediator". We know the Lord Jesus as the "one mediator ... between God and men" (1Tim 2:5).

And of whom else can it be said with truth that He is "one out of a thousand", an expression that indicates that He is truly unique (cf. Ecc 7:28b)? There is no one like Him Who is familiar with the ways of God and is more qualified than anyone else to make them known.

Christ has come into the world "to remind a man what is right for him". That is, Christ has made man known with what is the right way for him.

That right path is He Himself. This is explained in verse 24. Whoever listens to the Angel, the Mediator, and accepts His explanation of the right path, may count on God to be merciful to him. That grace is manifested in the command He gives to deliver the sufferer from his sickness, from not “going down to the pit”. God does not do that just like that. He has a righteous foundation for that redemption, and that is the ransom, or atonement. He cannot give deliverance without atonement.

It sounds like an exclamation of joy from the mouth of God: “I have found a ransom.” It means that He has found a covering for sins, the ransom of the blood of Christ, through which He can redeem. Here we see the work of the Angel. He has come to work reconciliation. He has done so by giving His life, His blood. He shed His blood, which means He died. For “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22b). Through this and through nothing else can God show grace to guilty, sinful people and deliver them from death. We are “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10).

Verses 23-24 are that special that they are quoted every year during the day of atonement in Jewish prayers.

In verses 25-28, Elihu describes the happy consequences of deliverance for those who share in it by God’s grace. After the atonement and the received forgiveness there is also for Job the physical healing, the return of health and prosperity with the vigor of youth (verse 25; Job 42:10-17; cf. 2Kgs 5:14). It is a picture of the situation of the realm of peace, where the severely tested faithful remnant will enjoy the blessing of forgiveness, healing, and redemption from destruction (Psa 103:3-4). God will then have reached His goal with the first creation. We do not yet live in that situation.

In a spiritual sense, we can apply this to the new birth, the new life a person receives at his conversion. This new life also manifests itself. The first in which it becomes visible is prayer, which is fervent prayer (verse 26). There is a longing for fellowship with God through prayer. Paul’s first activity after his conversion is prayer (Acts 9:11).

Someone who approaches God with fervent prayer “He will accept”. He takes him into His favor with great joy. He rejoices over anyone who in-

tensely desires to have fellowship with Him. He will be of good will and support such a person in his spiritual development.

The restored believer, who is a weak mortal in himself, has been declared righteous by God in His Son. He stands before God clothed in His righteousness and not in the garment of His own righteousness. Any fame of his own is absent. He who stands before God testifies before men that everything is due only to God's grace (verse 27).

One who is redeemed will confess his sin in an open confession of guilt. It is not a confession made in generalities, but a confession in which sin is mentioned by name. His sin was to pervert what is right, to twist what is right. Sin disrupts everything, makes everything crooked and twisted. That is the devastating work of man without God. But through the work of Christ on the cross, what is crooked becomes straight again (Isa 40:4; 42:16; Lk 3:5). This will also be seen in the realm of peace, when the Lord Jesus restores all things to the original purpose of God (Acts 3:21).

He who is aware of the grace of God will also praise Him for not dealing with him according to his sins (Psa 103:10). God has redeemed his soul, saved his life (verse 28). He was able to do so because the price of atonement was paid, for which He Himself provided by giving His Son in death. Thus the sinner did not come into the pit, into the darkness of death, but his life sees the light. With these words, Elihu let Job look over death and the grave – which Job had for himself as the only prospect – to life in the light. Job's present darkness is not the end. Job does not end in darkness, but in light.

Elihu points out to Job that God is patient in His work with a man (verse 29). He does "all these", He makes all kinds of things happen in life, to give a man like Job the true view of life. Thus God is busy "oftentimes with men". This means that He shows His interference with someone over and over again. In doing so, He uses various methods, such as Elihu mentioned before.

He does this so that a man does not end up in the darkness of the pit, but "that he may be enlightened with the light of life" (verse 30). This is a strong reminder of the Lord Jesus, who said: "I am the light of life" (Jn 8:12). It is therefore profoundly about Him. The God of Whom Elihu

speaks is no other God than Jesus Christ, the Son of God Who came in flesh, in Whom the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelt on earth and still dwells, now that He is in heaven (Col 1:19; 2:9). With Him is the source of life and in His light we see light (Psa 36:9). In His light, life is lived in joy.

Job 33:31-33 | Elihu Wants to Teach Job Wisdom

31 "Pay attention, O Job, listen to me;

Keep silent, and let me speak.

32 "[Then] if you have anything to say, answer me;

Speak, for I desire to justify you.

33 "If not, listen to me;

Keep silent, and I will teach you wisdom."

Again Elihu calls for Job to pay attention to what he has just said, and also to what else he has to say (verse 31). Then he will not get stuck in his despair, and will no longer attribute incongruous things to God. Elihu asks Job what he has to say about this (verse 32). Job may make his objections heard. It is not Elihu's intention to win a debate, but to show the reality.

He only wants to help Job to "justify" him. By this he means that he wants to put Job in the right relationship with God, that he wants to persuade Job to trust God and not to accuse Him. He says to Job, as it were: 'The friends are wrong, Job, but so are you. God is more righteous than you are.' Here in Elihu we see a picture of Christ yearning to justify a man before God.

Job does not answer (verse 33). He has no objections. His silence may be seen as approval of what has been said. Then Elihu continues. He will teach Job wisdom that comes from God, which is to give insight into what God has done and what has caused so much discussion. Job is a wise man, but he can increase in wisdom if he continues to listen to what Elihu has to say (Pro 9:9).

Elihu speaks with great confidence in the truth of what he is about to say, without arrogance. He treats Job with the utmost respect and makes sure that he does not hurt his feelings or blame him for injustice.

Job 34

Introduction

The words of Elihu are “with grace”, but also “seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6). He does not address Job as an iniquitous man, but he does point out his wrong statements he made thoughtlessly. In addition, he also addresses the three friends.

Job 34:1-4 | The Appeal to Wise Men

*1 Then Elihu continued and said,
2 “Hear my words, you wise men,
And listen to me, you who know.
3 “For the ear tests words
As the palate tastes food.
4 “Let us choose for ourselves what is right;
Let us know among ourselves what is good.*

Elihu has given Job the opportunity to respond to his words, but Job is silent. Therefore, Elihu continues his answer (verse 1). He addresses the “wise men” and those “who know” (verse 2). By this Elihu means Job’s friends. By doing so, he says that they must take their place again as wise and knowing people and must stop saying unwise and unreasonable things to Job.

Elihu’s words apply to all wise men in every age. Elihu talks about principles that are always valid and applicable everywhere. He submits his words to them for judgment. That is an indication for us that we have to judge what is being said. The Lord Jesus points out that man has that capacity and is therefore responsible to use it when He says: “And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?” (Lk 12:57). Paul also urges to judge what he says: “You judge what I say” (1Cor 10:15).

Elihu involves the wise and knowing men in his judgment of what Job has said. He calls upon them to listen to his words and to hear him and to do so carefully. They should test his words with their ears “as the palate tastes

food” (verse 3). In this sense, Job has complained that the friends, under the guise of wise words of grey men, have passed on to him words that cannot be eaten (Job 12:11-12). Words and teachings are food for the spirit. Good words are good food and bad words are bad food. Elihu asks Job and the listeners to taste his words.

To know what something tastes like, we must first try it. Tasting something is different from eating it and swallowing it, but it precedes it. Thus the listeners must taste Elihu’s words. They must listen to his words about and to Job, hear them and consider whether they are right, whether they do justice to Job and to God, how they should see God’s actions with Job.

When they have tasted his words, they can make their choice (verse 4). This is a choice for “what is right”. Elihu calls for this, both for himself and for the wise. Together with them he wants to “know among ourselves what is good”. Also for us it is important to first taste what is being said with the ear and only then to give our judgment.

Job 34:5-9 | Job Has Accused God

5 *“For Job has said, ‘I am righteous,
But God has taken away my right;
6 Should I lie concerning my right?
My wound is incurable, [though I am] without transgression.’*
7 *“What man is like Job,
Who drinks up derision like water,
8 Who goes in company with the workers of iniquity,
And walks with wicked men?
9 “For he has said, ‘It profits a man nothing
When he is pleased with God.’*

Elihu expresses no suspicions, but refers to what Job said (verse 5). Job has said that God has wronged him, who knows of himself that he has done nothing wrong, by taking away his right. Job said this literally (Job 12:4; 13:18; 27:2,6), but it is also the whole tenor of his defense.

Here the question may arise, what right did Job have? Can he, and can we, assert a right before God, something of which we can say to God that He should not touch? After all, we have no other right before God than the

judgment of hell, have we? As creatures, we have no right before the Creator (Rom 9:20), and as sinners we should be silent altogether (Rom 3:19).

Job believes that he is fully within his rights, but that because of what has happened to him, he is seen as a liar (verse 6). That is what his friends have always said to him in veiled terms. They have always said that Job, because he suffers so much, must have sinned heavily. Job denies that he has sinned, but his friends do not believe him, so he is a liar to them.

He ended up in that position because of what God has brought upon him. The wound was delivered to him by the Almighty, Job said (Job 6:4; 16:13). By this he means the disasters that God has brought upon him. They are disasters that have given him an incurable wound. And that is what God has done, Job judges, “without transgression”. Job thus pronounces that God has wronged him. What matters to Elihu is to make clear to Job that he has gone too far here.

In verse 7 Elihu exclaims in amazement at Job that there is no one like him, a man who derides God’s dealings with him and does so with the ease with which someone drinks water. In verse 8, Elihu says that Job has gone too far in his utterances about God. He says of Job that he “goes in company with the workers of iniquity” and that he “walks with wicked men”. He does not say that Job commits iniquity or is wicked man, but that he is in their company.

It does not mean that he himself is wicked. Elihu says so because Job has spoken out about God in the same way as those do who commit iniquity and as wicked people do (Job 21:14-15). This is how he unites himself with them in spirit. For Job has said that it is of no use at all if you are “pleased with God” (verse 9).

These are words that Job did not say literally, but that resonate in what he said about God (Job 9:22). He has always shown in his life that he feared God. And now look, what is God’s answer to that? He took everything away from him and instead gave him deep, hopeless misery. No, according to Job’s statements, piety and fear of God have no profit (cf. Mal 3:14). It doesn’t matter if you serve God, worship Him and walk with Him, because God doesn’t take that into account. Just look at his misery.

Job 34:10-15 | God Does Not Pervert Justice

10 *"Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding.*

Far be it from God to do wickedness,

And from the Almighty to do wrong.

11 *"For He pays a man according to his work,*

And makes him find it according to his way.

12 *"Surely, God will not act wickedly,*

And the Almighty will not pervert justice.

13 *"Who gave Him authority over the earth?*

And who has laid [on Him] the whole world?

14 *"If He should determine to do so,*

If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath,

15 *All flesh would perish together,*

And man would return to dust.

Elihu starts, before the ear of the "men of understanding" (verse 10; cf. verse 2), to refute the vision of Job on God. With a "therefore" – that is, because Job has a wrong view of God – Elihu calls on them to listen to him, for he will tell them the truth about God. It is unthinkable that there would be "wickedness" with God. That is simply out of the question.

There is also no doing "wrong" with "the Almighty". With mighty people it is often different. Might means right, it is said. Then the mighty puts the right to his hand, so that it often becomes injustice. It is impossible for God, the Almighty, to act like this. God is "a God of faithfulness and without injustice" (Deu 32:4; 2Chr 19:7; Psa 92:15; Zep 3:5). As the Almighty, He can do anything, but not anything that is contrary to His Being. This is not a limitation of His omnipotence, but a perfection that features Him. He cannot lie (Tit 1:2; Num 23:19), nor can He do injustice (cf. Rom 9:14).

He is perfectly righteous in His ways with man (verse 11). Everything a man does and the way he goes is weighed by Him and righteously requited (Pro 5:21). This is similar to what the friends have said. Yet it is completely different. Elihu points to a feature of God as an answer to *statements* of Job because of his suffering and not as an answer to the *cause* of Job's suffering. The friends did the latter.

In verse 12 Elihu says again what he also said in verse 10. This repetition is already an underlining, but he puts an extra stripe under it by starting the repetition with “surely”. In this way he emphasizes that it is completely against the nature of God to act wickedly and that it is therefore completely against the use of His omnipotence to pervert justice. Elihu thus demonstrates the seriousness of Job’s words to denounce God.

Then Elihu points out the sovereignty of God (verse 13). God is so totally different from and so far exalted above man. Is there anyone who has appointed God over the earth to govern it? Of course there is not. For there is no higher authority that would have given God authority over the earth. He Himself has taken this position. He controls all things on earth, including the life of every human being, including Job. It is man’s presumption that he places himself above God and tells Him how to govern.

Is there anyone other than God who has “laid the whole world”? In other words: Is there anyone other than God who would have created the whole world with everything in it and the whole hierarchy and order in it? Again, the answer is: Of course not. He really is absolutely sovereign. God the Son is the Creator and Sustainer of all things (Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:1-3).

If that almighty Creator and Governor would determine to gather to Himself the spirit and the breath of man [not: *His* (i.e. God’s) spirit, and not: *His* (i.e. God’s) breath], that would be the end of everything that has spirit and breath (verses 14-15). He has the power and the right to do so. “All flesh would perish together”, which means that there would be no living human being left on earth. So how can a man complain about loss of health, possessions, friends, and tell God that He is committing injustice?

Elihu not only has Job in mind, as if God would turn His heart against him alone, but all men. It is about God’s omnipotence against the nullity and also sinfulness of man as such. Man has no right to life, but to death. Through his sin, death has come into the world. Man who dies thus receives his wages, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23a). When he dies, he returns to the dust from which he was taken (Gen 3:19).

Job 34:16-22 | God Is Great, Impartial and Omniscient

| 16 “But if [you have] understanding, hear this;

Listen to the sound of my words.

17 "Shall one who hates justice rule?

And will you condemn the righteous mighty One,

18 Who says to a king, 'Worthless one,'

To nobles, 'Wicked ones';

19 Who shows no partiality to princes

Nor regards the rich above the poor,

For they all are the work of His hands?

20 "In a moment they die, and at midnight

People are shaken and pass away,

And the mighty are taken away without a hand.

21 "For His eyes are upon the ways of a man,

And He sees all his steps.

22 "There is no darkness or deep shadow

Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.

In verses 16-30, Elihu magnificently presents God's righteousness and declares about Him that He

1. is great, impartial and omniscient (verses 16-22) and
2. will judge (verses 23-30).

From verse 16 Elihu turns to Job again with a new exhortation to listen. In doing so, he appeals to the insight that he presupposes to be present with Job. Job can show this by taking the words Elihu speaks to heart and absorbing them. Elihu asks Job if someone who hates justice can rule (verse 17). It is clear that those who are averse to justice cannot govern well. Although this is often the case with human rulers, it is not the case with God. Only someone who loves justice can rule well. God is "righteous". Well, if there is any insight in Job, he will have to admit that he cannot declare God guilty of committing injustice.

God rules. He does so through His Son. He has already given to Him "all authority ... in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). David spoke of Christ, the Son of God, as the Ruler in the future, in the realm of peace, when he spoke of One "who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God" (2Sam 23:3). We hear the same from the writer of the letter to the Hebrews who says about the kingship of Christ that "the scepter of righteousness is

the scepter of His kingdom” and that He “loved righteousness and hated lawlessness” (Heb 1:8-9). Everything with God and Christ is perfectly righteous. Every injustice is absent.

People should not use abusive words against a king (verse 18). People today dare to do so, but that does not change what suits us. We are called to honor the king and other dignitaries (1Pet 2:17; Acts 23:5). We should have an attitude of respect toward them because of their position, even if they need to be clearly confronted with their sins. We see this with Daniel toward Nebuchadnezzar and with John the baptist toward Herod.

But what is forbidden to man, God does. He says to a king that he is a “worthless one” and He does say to nobles that they are “wicked ones”. He has the right to do so, because He is their Creator and sees through them. In His assessment and judgment, He shows no partiality (verse 19; Rom 2:11; Deu 10:17; 2Chr 19:7; Acts 10:34; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; 1Pet 1:17). It makes no difference to Him whether He has to do with a prince, or a rich one, or a poor one. He need not spare anyone, “for they are all the work of His hands”; He made them all (cf. 1Sam 2:7). And He made them for the purpose of serving Him.

If they do not fulfill that purpose, He takes away their lives (verse 20). To Him this is only a matter of “a moment”. The darkness of the night is not a problem for Him, for “at midnight” it is as light for Him as it is in the middle of the day.

Nor is it a matter of whether they are a mighty people or a mighty individual. A people has power because of the multitude of people; a single person sometimes has power because of his position. To God it makes no difference. He shakes a people to and fro as if they were a few, and the people pass away. Just a touch with His almighty, invisible hand, not the weak hand of some mortal, and they are gone.

God is omnipotent as well as omniscient. He sees and sees through every man in the way he goes (verse 21). He sees all the footsteps a man sets on his way, that is, he notices all his behavior in all his actions and all his words. There is no need for anyone to point out to Him something He would have overlooked. To Him there are no secrets. He doesn’t need to do a thorough investigation to find out the truth. It doesn’t take months

of processes with multiple trials. He sees through everything immediately (Heb 4:13).

He sees every worker of iniquity, even in the darkest and most hidden places, even in the deep shadow of death (verse 22). All sinners who are in the grave, wherever that grave may be, will not escape judgment. People can mean to escape a certain punishment by putting an end to their own lives. But that is a terrible mistake. God will make them rise up and will judge them (Rev 20:11-15). That He judges is shown by Elihu in the following verses.

Job 34:23-30 | God Judges

*23 "For He does not [need to] consider a man further,
That he should go before God in judgment.*

*24 "He breaks in pieces mighty men without inquiry,
And sets others in their place.*

*25 "Therefore He knows their works,
And He overthrows [them] in the night,
And they are crushed.*

*26 "He strikes them like the wicked
In a public place,*

*27 Because they turned aside from following Him,
And had no regard for any of His ways;*

*28 So that they caused the cry of the poor to come to Him,
And that He might hear the cry of the afflicted —*

*29 When He keeps quiet, who then can condemn?
And when He hides His face, who then can behold Him,
That is, in regard to both nation and man? —*

*30 So that godless men would not rule
Nor be snares of the people.*

God doesn't need much consideration to judge man (verse 23). He made him and also gave him the ability to serve Him. He does not impose too much trouble on man either. Concerning the believer, He does not tempt him beyond what he is able to endure (1Cor 10:13). Job has difficulty with that, which we can understand very well. Only he wants to go against God

about this in court, and therein he goes too far. No one can call God to account for what He imposes on a man in His wisdom.

Again Elihu points to the exaltation and sovereignty of God (verse 24). How could a man (like Job) disagree with that mighty, judging God about what He does to him? God has the right and power to break in pieces the mighty men and set others in their place (cf. Dan 2:21; Pro 8:15-16). He does not do this arbitrarily, without reason. The fact that man cannot fathom that reason does not give him the right to demand that He tells him why He is doing it.

Still, Elihu gives an explanation, which we see in the word “therefore” (verse 25). God does so because He knows the works of these mighty men. How He has acted with Pharaoh and his people, the Egyptians, is an example of this. God shattered the pharaoh when He killed all the first-born in the land of Egypt in the night, thereby crushing His power (Exo 12:29-30; Psa 105:36). Other examples are the Assyrian soldiers who were killed in the night, and Belshazzar, who was also killed in the night (2Kgs 19:35; Dan 5:30).

God is perfectly righteous when He strikes the wicked because they are wicked (verse 26). Among other things, He has done this with the wicked inhabitants of Canaan. He does this in a public place, where other people see it. He makes His actions of judgment visible to everyone. He does not hide His power and righteousness. For the righteous it is an encouragement and joy, while the wicked are warned not to continue living wickedly, but to repent.

God’s judgment affects especially the apostates, those who first followed Him but “turned aside from following Him” (verse 27). These are those who live wickedly (verse 26) by oppressing the poor (verse 28a) whose cry for help is heard by God (verse 28b). The act of these wicked people is seen as a stunning abandonment of God’s commandments and departing from behind Him. They have not noticed His ways in His government with men and nations. They do not want to see Him interfering in the lives of men and peoples, but attribute everything to natural causes or bad luck. They don’t want to see that a higher hand controls everything.

The wicked is punished by God for oppressing the poor. God thus responds to the cry for help of the wretched. He hears it when they call to Him in their need. God does not always respond directly with judgment about injustice or with help in case of need. He can also remain silent (verse 29). Job has reproached God for keeping quiet and allowing everything to be done. But if He does not judge or help, who will condemn Him? This is what Job did.

To Job it was as if God was hiding His face. We too may sometimes feel that God is hiding from us, that we cannot perceive Him because we only see misery, like Job. God can hide Himself both from a people and from a single human being. He considers “the nations ... like a drop from a bucket” and regards them “as a speck of dust on the scales” (Isa 40:15).

If God hides His face, it has a purpose, which is indicated by the words “so that” (verse 30). He wants to make people feel the lack of Him and begin to ask for Him. If they do so, He ensures that no godless or hypocrite men will come or stay in power. A godless or hypocrite man is someone who has nice talk for the people, but who only uses it to manipulate and exploit them (2Sam 15:2-6). He sets traps for the people and causes their demise. Those traps are the ungodly laws he enacts and the ungodly life he leads.

Job 34:31-37 | Job Did Not Speak With Knowledge

31 *“For has anyone said to God,
‘I have borne [chastisement];
I will not offend [anymore];
32 Teach me what I do not see;
If I have done iniquity,
I will not do it again’?*
33 *“Shall He recompense on your terms, because you have rejected [it]?
For you must choose, and not I;
Therefore declare what you know.
34 “Men of understanding will say to me,
And a wise man who hears me,
35 ‘Job speaks without knowledge,
And his words are without wisdom.
36 ‘Job ought to be tried to the limit,*

Because he answers like wicked men.

37 'For he adds rebellion to his sin;

He claps his hands among us,

And multiplies his words against God.'"

In this section it turns out that some verses are not easy to translate, including verses 31-32. The translation that satisfies us most is to take these verses as an advice from Elihu to Job. Elihu says: 'For say to God ...' So in this case it is not about what Job said, but about what Elihu says. Elihu tells Job how he should behave toward God under his affliction. For this he gives him the words of verses 31-32 in the mouth. He does not command Job to pronounce them, but suggests it. It suits Job to tell God that he is bowing down under His chastisement and that he will not accuse Him anymore.

Such words have not yet come out of his mouth, for he still persists in his innocence and blames God for his suffering. These are the words of someone who wants to learn things he does not understand. Job had not done sinful deeds for which God wants to force him to confess through the calamities He brought upon him. This is how the friends have always declared the suffering of Job. However, God has said that Job did not sin (Job 1:22; 2:10). But that does not mean that he is not a sinner. He is not a hypocrite, but by accusing God, he is sinning. That he is a sinner is apparent from his words in response to suffering.

Even though he does not know of any concrete sin in his life, he must be aware that he is not perfect in knowledge about himself. He may have done something that is sin in God's eye without being aware of it, for "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23b).

He can show that he is aware of his lack of self-knowledge by asking God: "Teach me what I do not see." If he says this sincerely to God, he is making it clear that he is not doubting God, but himself. It will bring him to the prayer that David also prayed: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psa 139:23-24).

This is the attitude that also suits us. Maybe we are not aware of something evil, but that should not lead us to the thought that we are 'okay'. God is so much bigger than we are. Paul was well aware of that. We hear this when

he says: "For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord" (1Cor 4:4). We must also remain aware of this. If we continue to realize that we are imperfect people and that only the Lord will ultimately make the right judgment of all our actions and words, it will save us from the feeling of self-righteousness.

Then Elihu goes on to tell Job how his attitude has been so far (verse 33). He is still someone who wants to tell God how to recompense someone. In fact, Job tells God how he thinks God should rule. God's government has been despised by Job by rejecting His way of acting. Now what should God do with Job's guilt? Should God just act according to Job's standards and absolve him of his debt? But it is not for him to judge God, for he refuses to accept God's government over his own life. God does not ask anyone for advice or permission for His actions, but does what He judges to be right.

Job, and not Elihu, must choose what he thinks. Let him say what he knows of God's actions, whether he submits to them or not. God acts with Job, not with Elihu.

Elihu points out to Job what wise men will say to him about Job (verse 34). He also points to the wise man who will listen to him. Elihu is not alone in his judgment of Job. He knows that understanding and wise people agree with him. They all agree with him when he says that Job did not speak with knowledge, and that his words were not with wisdom (verse 35).

Job has spoken about God in a way that makes it clear that he has no knowledge of God regarding His chastisement. He has uttered words about the situation in which he has ended up, that came from his feelings and not from his mind. They betray his lack of knowledge of God and his lack of understanding of his present situation.

It arouses a sigh from Elihu that the work of trial will at last lead to the purpose purposed by God, so that it may end (verse 36). That goal is for Job to trust God that He is in control of his circumstances and that His ultimate purpose is to bless him. Now it is still the case that with his answers he denounces God and attributes incongruous things to Him, with the re-

sult that he gives a wrong impression of God among the wicked men. As a result, he also connects with these people.

If Job persists in ascribing injustice to God, he will add “rebellion” to his sinful words (verse 37). Rebellion here is the act against a commandment or a rule. Clapping hands means that this action comes from a rebellious heart. Job is not yet a rebel. In his many words he said to God in his great need, he said wrong things. In doing so, he has clapped his hands as an expression of his anger about God’s lack of understanding (cf. Num 24:10). But now Elihu has pointed out the wrong thing in Job’s words about God. If he continues in spite of this, he adds rebellion to his sin.

Job 35

Job 35:1-8 | God Doesn't Need Anything From Anyone

*1 Then Elihu continued and said,
2 "Do you think this is according to justice?
Do you say, 'My righteousness is more than God's'?
3 "For you say, 'What advantage will it be to You?
What profit will I have, more than if I had sinned?'
4 "I will answer you,
And your friends with you.
5 "Look at the heavens and see;
And behold the clouds—they are higher than you.
6 "If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against Him?
And if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him?
7 "If you are righteous, what do you give to Him,
Or what does He receive from your hand?
8 "Your wickedness is for a man like yourself,
And your righteousness is for a son of man.*

Job has suggested that God-fearing living is of no use to God. Therefore, Elihu continues to answer Job and to teach him about true Godliness, possibly after a pause to give Job an opportunity for a response, which, however, does not come (verse 1). He again quotes what Job has said (verse 2; Job 32:2). He says to Job, in questioning form, whether he finds it righteous that his "righteousness is more than God's". Job thinks that he is right in judging his situation and that God is wrong in dealing with him like this.

Elihu explains in verse 3 with a new quote from Job what Job has said in verse 2. The word "for" indicates this. For Job has asserted that not sinning brings no more benefit than sinning (cf. Job 9:22; 10:15). He has not sinned and yet God has brought the most terrible disasters upon him. Well, then there is no point in fearing God either. Paul speaks very differently when he says that Godliness with contentment brings benefits, even great gain (1Tim 6:6; cf. Mal 3:14).

But Elihu – “I” has emphasis – will answer Job with words that will make it clear to him that he is very much mistaken (verse 4). That answer is not only for Job, but also for his friends. They too must listen to Elihu carefully because they have accused Job from their wrong view of God.

In verse 5 Elihu speaks about God’s greatness in creation. At the end of his speech he will talk about nothing else. Then, that is from Job 36:26 and onward, he speaks about the clouds and the weather to point to God’s control of all things. He has arranged things in creation in such a way that we cannot influence them. He is so much higher than Job.

Elihu points Job to the heavens and the clouds above him. In comparison, he must feel insignificant. They are enormously high above him. What can he do with them? Nothing at all. He can’t touch them. He can’t reach them. They’re completely beyond his control. The heavens stretch motionless above him. The clouds float by. He can’t exert influence on either of them, causing them to change place or course.

So it is with God. If Job or a man sins against God, it does not change anything about or in Him (verse 6; cf. Jer 7:19). He is always the same God Who is infinitely high above him. Even if a man transgresses His commandments many times, it does not negatively affect Him, it does not harm Him. Man cannot take anything away from Him.

The same applies in the opposite case (verse 7). If Job or a man lives as a righteous man, God does not become richer as a result. Man cannot give Him anything that He does not possess, for everything is His. God does not depend on anyone; He lacks nothing. He has all happiness in Himself, He is “the blessed God” (1Tim 1:11). No one can decrease or increase His happiness. What He can do, is to let others share in it. That is the great subject of the New Testament: the love of God.

No, Job’s bad or good deeds have no effect on God. What Job does only affects other people. If he commits wickedness and thereby dishonors God’s Name, it only affects his equal, a man like himself (verse 8). He damages them because of his wickedness. The same goes for a righteous deed he would do. Only a human being would benefit from this.

Job 35:9-13 | Why God Sometimes Does Not Answer

9 *"Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out;
They cry for help because of the arm of the mighty.*

10 *"But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker,
Who gives songs in the night,*

11 *Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth
And makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens?'*

12 *"There they cry out, but He does not answer
Because of the pride of evil men.*

13 *"Surely God will not listen to an empty [cry],
Nor will the Almighty regard it.*

God is far above man, but therefore He is not yet without attention for man. This may seem so, because He sometimes does not answer the cry for help (verse 9). That cry for help comes to Him from the oppressed who cry out because "of the arm of the mighty" weighs heavily upon them. And these oppressions go on and on, without God intervening. They do cry out, but that is only to be freed from the power of their oppressors, not to be free for God.

They do not cry out to Him acknowledging that He is their Maker (verse 10). Job has acknowledged that (Job 10:8). That acknowledgment is lacking among the oppressed. If there was, it would mean that they also serve Him and this is what they don't want to do. Through their denial of their Maker they also block the way to a happy life, a life they will live even if the circumstances are difficult, if it is night in their lives. God gives to those who acknowledge Him as their Maker "about midnight ... singing hymns of praise" to Him (cf. Acts 16:25; Psa 42:9). This is because they have faith in Him in trouble. Therefore they must have a relationship with Him.

Man's acknowledgment as an erect being that God is His Maker is the wisdom he possesses over the animals of the earth and the birds of the air (verse 11). There is no sense of God in animals. They do cry out to Him (Psa 147:9), but without a sense of God. Man who does not acknowledge Him as Maker is not even equal to these animals, but lowers himself below them. Animals know no better, while man deliberately excludes God as his Maker (2Pet 3:5; Rom 1:19-23).

Such people do cry out to God when they are in need (verse 12), but they do not want to bow down before Him as their Maker. Their crying is disingenuous and hollow. They are arrogant and therefore God does not answer. Elihu states that God is not indifferent to people, but that people are indifferent to Him. People want God to save them, but they are not interested in honoring Him as their Creator, Savior, and Source of wisdom.

This is the kind of people who are hungry and want bread while at the same time they do not want God. This is what the Lord Jesus said to the crowd: “You seek Me, ... because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (Jn 6:26). Their hearts only went out to Him because He gave them a full stomach, but they did not want His message. An appeal to God must be made in the right spirit, in the acknowledgment of Who He is (Psa 51:19).

God does not listen to the lie, to what is not in accordance with the truth (verse 13). The born blind person joins Elihu when he says: “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him” (Jn 9:31). God does not hear the liar, and as the Almighty He does not see him. He turns ear and eye away from him. God can only behold someone in connection with Christ. A sinner who acknowledges to be a sinner may know that Christ has accomplished everything for him. For this reason God accepts him.

Job 35:14-16 | Learning to Wait

*14 “How much less when you say you do not behold Him,
The case is before Him, and you must wait for Him!*

*15 “And now, because He has not visited [in] His anger,
Nor has He acknowledged transgression well,*

*16 So Job opens his mouth emptily;
He multiplies words without knowledge.”*

Elihu has explained why God sometimes does not answer when a cry is made to Him. By this he does not mean to say that Job is a proud sinner who is insincere and does not fear God. God Himself has given His clear testimony about this (Job 1:1,8; 2:3). What Elihu wants to make clear to Job is that the reason for God’s silence lies with man.

Job has said that he does not behold God (verse 14; Job 23:3), that God does not respond to his complaints and does not show Himself. He is in great distress and struggles with the reason for this. In his life he cannot find any justification for the misery God has brought upon him. As a result, he has come to accuse God of iniquity and to start, as it were, a trial before Him (Job 23:4). But to his great disappointment, God does not appear at the trial!

Elihu does not blame Job for this, but gives him advice: "Wait for Him." It is important that Job takes a different attitude toward God. He must stop calling God to account and forcing Him to justify him. He can only patiently take this waiting attitude if he accepts and acknowledges that God is not human and that he cannot control Him. God does not let Himself be commanded. Then he will wait for God in the confidence that He is in control.

Elihu points out to Job that he may be thankful that God did not respond to his summons and did not appear at the trial he had planned. God has been reticent toward him and has not punished him in His wrath (verse 15). In the same reticence, God also has not "acknowledged transgression well" which Job expressed about Him.

God's attitude has been interpreted by Job as indifference. This caused him so much inner turmoil that he could not keep his mouth shut (verse 16). A multitude of words came out of his mouth, both to God and to his friends, to defend himself. From those words, however, it has become clear that he has no knowledge of the ways that God goes with a man, with him, and with the purpose that is before Him.

From Christians we may expect insight about Who God is. The knowledge that God "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all" (Rom 8:32), is enough to know in all difficulties that nothing and no one "will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39).

Job 36

Introduction

The fourth and last part of Elihu's speech we hear in Job 36-37. It contains no quotation of what Job said. It is now about Who God is, the connection between God's righteousness and His power over creation.

Job 36:1-4 | More Words in God's Behalf

- 1 *Then Elihu continued and said,*
- 2 *"Wait for me a little, and I will show you*
That there is yet more to be said in God's behalf.
- 3 *"I will fetch my knowledge from afar,*
And I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.
- 4 *"For truly my words are not false;*
One who is perfect in knowledge is with you.

Elihu has not yet finished speaking and continues (verse 1). He has already made three speeches – just like Job and his friends – but he adds a fourth. He asks Job to wait a little for him and to listen to him (verse 2). He wants to tell in God's behalf, what else he can show in His favor. A lot has already been said by him about God, but there is still more in his heart that he wants to pass on about Him, which will be of use to Job. These are not superfluous words. We will see that they are a wonderful introduction to the apparition of God to Job and His speaking to him immediately after Elihu has finished speaking.

Elihu says that he will "fetch from afar" his knowledge regarding God and His actions (verse 3). Thus, he will not speak from his own perceptions like his friends, not walk the paths that have been trodden, and not appeal to tradition. This means that he will not go back to a distant past, but will appeal to what lies beyond the human understanding. He appeals to God Himself, Who is far above man (Jer 23:23; 31:3), the Source of wisdom that comes from above (Jam 3:17).

With the knowledge he obtains from God, he will ascribe “righteousness” to Him Whom he calls “my Maker”. Anything that a person can say about God and do justice to Him can only happen if such a person has been informed about it by God. For the knowledge of God, we must be with Him. The condition of God’s knowledge of Himself is to acknowledge Him as his Maker.

In this way, in that state of mind, we will do God justice in our speaking. We do not seek our own honor, our own right, but His honor. Then we will be, like Elihu, a true servant of God. We can then be used by Him to give Him righteousness, that is to declare Him righteous in His actions. When we realize that, the consequence is that we trust Him. Then all doubt about His purposes will disappear and we will not accuse Him, however covered up, of injustice.

Before Elihu speaks about God, he again points out the importance of what he is going to say (verse 4). “For truly my words are not false.” He insists he’s telling the truth. His words are reliable and worthy of all acceptance. They are, to use Paul’s words, “of truth and rationality” (Acts 26:25, literal translation). Yet without restraint and at the same time without moderation, he can add that he is “perfect in knowledge”. There is nothing secretive in what he says, and there is no double ground in his words. He adds that he is with Job, saying once more that he is the same before God as Job (Job 33:6).

Elihu – he is that “one who” – does not owe his perfectness to himself, but to God; he has received it from Him, “from afar”, as he said in verse 3. He does not exalt himself there, but is with and beside Job, on the same level before God.

Job 36:5-7 | God Does Not Despise Any

5 *“Behold, God is mighty but does not despise [any];
[He is] mighty in strength of understanding.*

6 *“He does not keep the wicked alive,
But gives justice to the afflicted.*

7 *“He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous;
But with kings on the throne*

| *He has seated them forever, and they are exalted.*

In verse 5 Elihu begins to speak words that ascribes righteousness to his Maker as he said in verse 3. In amazement he exclaims that God is mighty and that Godliness or wickedness are not indifferent to Him. That combination is very rare among people. Mighty people almost always despise those who have no power. God is not like that. God is mighty, but that doesn't mean He despises the insignificant man. For the might of God lies in "the strength of understanding". The word 'understanding' can also be translated as 'wisdom' or 'reason'. It means that His strength lies in His love, His wisdom, His mind. Love, wisdom, reason underlie everything He does in His might. That is what makes Him so admirable!

His wisdom is mighty and powerful. This is expressed in His knowledge of the wicked and the afflicted (verse 6). He knows who is a wicked person and what to do with such a person, and He knows who the afflicted are and what to do with them. He does not let the wicked live, even if he seems to prosper and grow. He gives justice to the afflicted, though everything seems to be against them. Job is an afflicted one, so he may know that God will heed him and give him justice.

The righteous may experience that God takes His eyes off him, that He does not see him (this is so with Job). But God does not withdraw His eyes from him (verse 7). Elihu says this in a way that shows that this is impossible to God, for His full interest is in the righteous (Psa 34:15a). He keeps a constant and close eye on him and watches him, even though the righteous may not always experience it. God knows that the righteous suffers and gives him His full attention.

In the end He will place the righteous "with kings on the throne ... forever". Then He will lift them out of all misery and exalt them to a place of honor and reign that will never end. He will do this in the future (Rev 3:21; 20:4,6; 22:5). We see this in a way in the end of the Lord with Job (Job 42:10-17; Jam 5:11).

Job 36:8-15 | The Purpose of Oppression

| *8 "And if they are bound in fetters,
And are caught in the cords of affliction,*

- 9 *Then He declares to them their work
And their transgressions, that they have magnified themselves.*
- 10 *"He opens their ear to instruction,
And commands that they return from evil.*
- 11 *"If they hear and serve [Him],
They will end their days in prosperity
And their years in pleasures.*
- 12 *"But if they do not hear, they shall perish by the sword
And they will die without knowledge.*
- 13 *"But the godless in heart lay up anger;
They do not cry for help when He binds them.*
- 14 *"They die in youth,
And their life [perishes] among the cult prostitutes.*
- 15 *"He delivers the afflicted in their affliction,
And opens their ear in [time of] oppression.*

Now it may still be so, that righteous people are bound and caught by affliction (verse 8). They cannot free themselves from it and cannot get away from it. They are, as it were, bound in fetters and cords (cf. Lam 3:7). Although it seems as if God is targeting them, it is precisely His loving concern for them. He acts with them because He is merciful and wants to make them realize this.

He thereby makes their work known to them (verse 9). He lets them know what they are doing, but that they do not involve Him in it. A situation has arisen in which the transgressions have "magnified themselves". If transgressions have taken over, that means that God, by denouncing Him, no longer stands in the first place. Job has transgressed by blaming God for his misery. To return from evil means here: to acknowledge that God has the right to do with him according to His own wise purposes, even if he does not understand them.

Through the affliction that comes upon them, He wants to open their ear to His instruction or discipline (verse 10; cf. Job 33:16). Affliction aims to make man repent, to make him reflect on his former life, and to wonder why all this happens to him. Elihu does not look at the cause of the instruction – the friends did – but at its purpose. God speaks to them through the

trial. Through what He brings to the righteous, He says that they must “return from evil”. That evil is that they do not involve Him in their life.

First the positive result of God’s instruction is presented (verse 11). If the righteous listen to God’s voice in the trial, it will be seen in serving Him (again). God will get the first place again in the heart. As a result, they will enjoy prosperity for the remaining days of their lives. They will become “years in pleasures”, years full of everything that is pleasant. Job will experience this (Job 42:12,17). This is what the grace of God has in mind with trials.

But if people do not hear, they shall perish (verse 12). These are people who appear to be righteous but are not. When they are tested, they do not submit to God’s will, but resist Him. They do not accept His instruction, which He brings upon them by means of discipline to draw them to Himself, but reject it. They perish “by the sword,” that is to say, they are taken away by sudden death.

They pass away without having submitted their spirit to God. Without knowledge of the ways God has gone with them and the discipline He has brought upon them for their sake, they die. In all that God has brought upon them, they have never seen a purpose from on high. They never thought deeply about the usefulness of what happened to them. Job did. He did not understand God, but he did seek Him.

Nor is Job a man with a godless or hypocritical heart (verse 13). People with a hypocritical heart sin continuously. In their dissatisfaction they accumulate anger in their hearts; their anger about the course of events increases more and more. But there is no cry from them to God for help if He brings misery upon them and binds them with it. Instead of turning to God, they rebel against Him. Job has constantly called for help in his affliction. This proves that Elihu does not mean him, but speaks of people who hold to a form of Godliness, but deny its power (2Tim 3:5; Mt 15:6-9).

Such people will not live long, for they will die young (verse 14). This is in contrast to the blessing given to the righteous who hear and serve God (verse 11). They will also die an extraordinarily shameful death. In their death they will receive no honor, which they claimed for themselves in

their hypocrisy during their life. The way their life ends fits the way they have lived. They lived in depravity and that will also mark their end.

On the other hand, the afflicted in their affliction are delivered by God (verse 15). Job will experience this when he comes face to face with God. God will open his ear in the affliction in which he finds himself. He will make His purpose known to him, so that he will understand why all this suffering has come upon him. God does not deliver the afflicted *out of* the affliction – which He will do later – but *in* the affliction. It means that God comes to him and supports him in his affliction and gives him comfort and strength to persevere. He delivers him from doubt, fear, and unbelief by turning his heart to Him.

Job 36:16-21 | The Application to Job

16 *"Then indeed, He enticed you from the mouth of distress,*

Instead of it, a broad place with no constraint;

And that which was set on your table was full of fatness.

17 *"But you were full of judgment on the wicked;*

Judgment and justice take hold [of you].

18 *"[Beware] that wrath does not entice you to scoffing;*

And do not let the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.

19 *"Will your riches keep you from distress,*

Or all the forces of [your] strength?

20 *"Do not long for the night,*

When people vanish in their place.

21 *"Be careful, do not turn to evil,*

For you have preferred this to affliction.

Elihu will now apply to Job the general principles of the government of God he has just described. Through the disasters that have come upon Job, God has enticed him "from the mouth of distress" (verse 16; cf. Hos 2:13). God has taken everything away from him in order to bring him to "a broad place with no constraint". Now that Job has lost everything, God is free to do His work in Job. Job is physically depleted, but God presents him with food on his table that is full of fatness. Perhaps here we can think of a table in a spiritual sense. A table symbolizes fellowship. God wants that fellowship with Job, full fellowship.

Job is not there yet (verse 17). He is still “full” of something else, namely “full of judgment on the wicked”. This trial and the justice dominate his thoughts, making him incapable of hearing God’s voice. In this way he behaves like a wicked person who does not listen to God’s voice either. Elihu did not say that Job was a wicked man, but warned him not to behave like one.

He warns him not to get so angry that he comes to scoff at God (verse 18). If he does not bow down, he can come to that. If he cannot control it and commits this evil, even a great ransom will not be able to avert the punishment that will then be his portion. He will then have to bear the consequences of his intransigence.

Job should not think that his riches gave him a certain protection toward God (verse 19). He may – rightly – have seen his wealth as a proof of God’s goodness. He has also worked hard for it, and that hard work has been blessed by God. But did he not rely somewhat on his wealth and strength in the process? Has he seen it as a merit of his own rather than a favor from God? Has the thought occurred to him that God was also obliged to give him his riches?

Now that he has lost everything, he has not yet lost confidence in himself. But because he has lost everything and feels that he has lost God as well, he longs for the night (verse 20). By this he means that God must take him away. He has expressed this longing once before (Job 7:15). Elihu tells him not to do that anymore. Otherwise, he will fare like the nations who are driven out of their land and taken into exile.

Let Job take care that he does not resort to evil, whether he commits it himself or joins those who commit evil (verse 21). It may offer a prospect of forgetting the misery, but over time it will become clear how much he has made a mistake. It is always a wrong choice to follow our natural tendencies instead of repenting and bowing before God (verse 16). And so Job is at a crossroads. What choice will he make?

Job 36:22-25 | Exalt God’s Work

22 *“Behold, God is exalted in His power;
Who is a teacher like Him?*

23 *"Who has appointed Him His way,
And who has said, 'You have done wrong'?*
24 *"Remember that you should exalt His work,
Of which men have sung.*
25 *"All men have seen it;
Man beholds from afar.*

Elihu returns to his starting point (verse 5) and points out to Job the high exaltation that God has by His power. He is the Almighty God, Who holds everything under His control and controls everything according to His counsel. As far above man, He bends down to that puny man to teach him. He does so in an inimitable way. No one is equal to Him as a Teacher.

God teaches His teaching in creation and in the lives of individuals. Elihu here says to Job, as it were, that God teaches him lessons in the exercise of His power. In all that God has brought over Job, He shows that He wants to tell Job Who He is and who Job is. Job receives private lessons from God, because God is deeply interested in Job personally and caring about him.

God composes His lessons for Job, and every man, Himself (verse 23). No one prescribes them to Him. Nobody tells Him how He should teach, what practical exercises He should have performed. No one can say to Him that He adds injustice in the material He has for each person. He composes the package with the care that is proper to Him. He never commands anyone more than he or she can bear (1Cor 10:13). He knows us through and through and knows exactly what we need to learn and attunes the lessons accordingly. All His works are special lessons for us.

Therefore, it is fitting for Job that he exalts God's work (verse 24) rather than complaining about it. God's deeds invite us to sing about them. People have done this throughout the ages and it is fitting for us as well. That is why we have been created. Because of sin people don't do that anymore. If we are saved by the blood of Christ, we have all the more reason to sing of God's work in redemption.

"All men", without exception, see the sun, the moon, and the stars; they see the storms, the rain, and the lightning (verse 25). In it they can perceive His exalted might. All men also see His work in the lives of other people when He brings them into trial, or in disasters in nature. In contrast, man is null

and void. Elihu therefore speaks of “man”, i.e. mortal man. He stands by it, beholds it, and stands at a great, incalculable distance from it.

That distance is literally when it comes to celestial bodies. That distance is spiritual when it comes to what can strike a person personally. The friends saw the suffering of Job from afar (Job 2:12). The distance in kilometers did not remain, because they sat down with him. But the spiritual distance with respect to understanding Job’s suffering has remained.

Job 36:26-29 | God Is Exalted, and We Do Not Know Him

26 *“Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know [Him];*

The number of His years is unsearchable.

27 *“For He draws up the drops of water,*

They distill rain from the mist,

28 *Which the clouds pour down,*

They drip upon man abundantly.

29 *“Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,*

The thundering of His pavilion?

How great God is cannot be understood by us (verse 26). Whether it is His strength and power, His wisdom and knowledge, His love and grace, His counsel and His purposes; we humans cannot grasp the extent of it. Also “the number of His years is unsearchable”, it cannot be fathomed by us, for He is eternal. It determines us by our smallness and limitation as creatures and by the folly of our attempts to understand God’s actions and the reasons for them.

The word “for” (verse 27) is the introduction to a number of examples that prove God’s greatness, omnipotence, and wisdom to mortals, as well as their inscrutability. Elihu begins with the origin of “the drops of water”, something that is clear to almost all people and all nations. But who is aware of how this happens, that God works in the way Elihu describes here? Imperceptible to man, God draws up drops of water in the form of vapor through the heat of the sun (Psa 135:7; Amos 5:8). Then those drops are poured out over the earth in the form of rain.

Of the raised-up water drops He forms the clouds, by which He bundles the raised water as it were into clouds (verse 28). He also sets the course

of the clouds so that the raindrops “drip upon man abundantly”, that is on their fields. Thus He cares for them and shows them His goodness (Mt 5:45b; Acts 14:17). Man can only observe, sometimes predict, but not understand how God works in this.

How the clouds spread under the heavens over the earth is also incomprehensible to man (verse 29). A cloud can start small and over time blacken the whole sky (1Kgs 18:44-45a). Who can understand how He expands the clouds, then dispels them and creates them somewhere else? Science can sometimes predict where and when there are clouds. But it cannot create or disperse the clouds, nor can it determine their course.

The clouds are for God as “His pavilion” (Psa 18:11; 97:2). From there He sends His commands and sounds the thunder of His voice. We can see this, but it is impossible for us to understand why God does it.

Job 36:30-33 | God Speaks in Lightning and Thunder

30 “Behold, He spreads His lightning about Him,

And He covers the depths of the sea.

31 “For by these He judges peoples;

He gives food in abundance.

32 “He covers [His] hands with the lightning,

And commands it to strike the mark.

33 “Its noise declares His presence;

The cattle also, concerning what is coming up.

During the thundering thunderstorm God spreads His light over the earth by lightning (verse 30). He does so in the high, in the sky. By “His lightning” He covers “the depths of the sea”. The depths – Hebrew: roots – of the sea are the darkest places and invisible to us. But these dark depths of the sea are not hidden from God, Who is light. God’s greatness is seen in the highest and lowest regions of creation. He is everywhere and He reigns everywhere. He is in the light of lightning and in the impenetrable darkness of the water depths.

He can use the rain to judge peoples by causing a flood (verse 31; cf. Gen 7:11,23). He may also use the rain as a blessing to moisten the land, so that

corn and other agricultural products that depend on the rain grow well and there is “food in abundance”.

Lightning, which frightens us, is covered by His hands (verse 32). This means that lightning comes out of His hand and is guided by His hand to His purpose. He determines the purpose of lightning, where it hits the earth. We can wait for lightning, but never know when it will come, how it will go nor where it will go. The moment, the speed and the direction of lightning are unpredictable and inimitable for us.

When God gives rain, He announces it (verse 33). We hear rumbling in the distance and know that thunder is coming. That is His call. His call announces that He Himself is coming. The animals, the cattle, feel instinctively that a storm is approaching, which is noticeable by their behavior. Their behavior therefore also announces Him. The cattle react to His speaking and His coming. But man often does not recognize Him when He speaks and shows His presence.

Job 37

Introduction

Elihu made it clear in the last verses of the previous chapter (Job 36:26-33) that God in His sovereignty has control over nature. This serves as an example that He has control over all things. In this chapter he continues to describe God's control over nature. In verses 1-12 he cites more examples of "great things" that God does in nature that we do not understand (verse 5).

In verse 13 Elihu says what the effects of God's control over nature are on people. What God does can cause pain, it can also give relief. When Elihu arrives at that point, he turns to Job again to apply these truths to his situation (verses 14-24).

Job 37:1-4 | The Thunder of God's Voice

- 1 *"At this also my heart trembles,
And leaps from its place.*
- 2 *"Listen closely to the thunder of His voice,
And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth.*
- 3 *"Under the whole heaven He lets it loose,
And His lightning to the ends of the earth.*
- 4 *"After it, a voice roars;
He thunders with His majestic voice,
And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard.*

Elihu continues speaking of God's voice in the thunder (verse 1), which he began in the previous chapter. Yes, about that ("at this") his heart trembles and leaps from its place. There is no fear, but deep awe of this expression of God's majesty. What he says to Job in his description of that majesty touches him himself. He stands, as it were, trembling on his legs. He does not teach Job physics, but undergoes the greatness of what he describes and passes on what he hears the creation of God's eternal power and di-

vine nature (Rom 1:20). In this we see again how he stands beside Job before God. This is necessary in order to serve someone.

Elihu calls upon Job to “listen closely to the thunder of His voice” (verse 2). “The rumbling that goes out from His mouth” is the sound of the approaching thunderstorm. It is an impressive sound, not clearly spoken words. It is recommended to read Psalm 29 (Psa 29:1-11). In that psalm God’s majesty in the thunderstorm is impressively described. By listening to it attentively, lessons can be learned from it.

When the thunder of the voice of God rolls, that voice is heard “under the whole heaven” (verse 3). National borders do not count, nor do all kinds of differences on earth. Everyone is addressed by it. The same goes for His lightning. As far as the eye can see over the earth, His lightning goes over the horizon of our field of vision. In what Elihu says here, we can think of the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth to judge. The Lord says so Himself: “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt 24:27).

After the lightning a deafening thunder breaks out. This is the roaring of God with His voice (verse 4). Thunder is “His majestic voice” (cf. Psa 29:4). Then, after “His voice is heard”, other things follow that He does not restrain. This is seen in the rain and the storm that follow the lightning and the thunderstorm (Jer 10:13). His voice announces something and it will come. He does not deceive.

Job 37:5-13 | God Does Great Things

5 “God thunders with His voice wondrously,
Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.

6 “For to the snow He says, ‘Fall on the earth,’
And to the downpour and the rain, ‘Be strong.’

7 “He seals the hand of every man,
That all men may know His work.

8 “Then the beast goes into its lair
And remains in its den.

9 “Out of the south comes the storm,
And out of the north the cold.

10 *"From the breath of God ice is made,
And the expanse of the waters is frozen.*

11 *"Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud;
He disperses the cloud of His lightning.*

12 *"It changes direction, turning around by His guidance,
That it may do whatever He commands it
On the face of the inhabited earth.*

13 *"Whether for correction, or for His world,
Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.*

Elihu, and we with him, cannot but say that "God thunders with His voice wondrously" (verse 5). The voice of His thunder is a wondrous display of His majesty and power. Not only the voice is wondrous, but also what causes the thundering voice of God. It sometimes cracks rocks and mountains, the earth trembles, and mighty trees break like matchsticks (Psa 29:5-9).

With verse 5a the description of the thunderstorm ends. The "great things" of verse 5b not only refer to the thunderstorm, but they are also about the things Elihu mentions hereafter. They all have in common that we have to say, "which we cannot comprehend". All natural phenomena are manifestations of Who God is. They refer to Him. How He works in them and controls them remains incomprehensible to man.

There are theories about their origin. By researching a number of natural phenomena, people can now partly explain their origin on the basis of cause and effect, through which for them the wonder has been explained and disappeared. Elihu and his contemporaries were not burdened with this 'handicap'. But what people with all their intellect can never do is create or stop a thunderstorm. They can discover and apply laws of nature, but never change them. It takes faith in God to keep seeing the wonders in nature and to keep seeing them as expressions of His presence therein.

To come this far it takes faith in the greatest and most incomprehensible wonder and that is that God gave His Son to save those arrogant, proud creatures. Whoever believes that cannot but praise God for that wonder of His grace. The more we penetrate through the study of God's Word into what Christ has done for lost sinners, and the more we become aware of

our own sinfulness, the more we will understand its incomprehensibility. It will lead us to great thankfulness and a life dedicated to Him. Then it is no longer a question of how the worlds and the laws of nature came into being, for we will understand this "by faith" (Heb 11:3).

No one but God knows the origin of the snow and He alone knows where it falls on earth (verse 6). Physical explanations for the process of snow formation have been discovered far after the time of Job, but how the process as such originated is unknown. Here we hear that snow is created at the command of God and that He commands the snow to be on earth. Natural phenomena are there because God commands them to be there (Psa 148:8). With the same commanding voice, He created the whole world (Psa 33:6,9).

Just because we know now how snow is formed, it should only increase our admiration for God as its origin. Everything we see and discover of God's work in nature brings us to a greater admiration of Him. What we first admired, and rightly so, without knowing the laws of nature, we now admire all the more, now that we also know how God worked.

What Elihu said of the snow also applies to the downpour and the rain. He tells them: "Be strong." At His command they go to earth to the extent He determines. They can be invigorating showers, but also devastating downpours. He, and He alone, gives rain and He alone determines the amount of it and where it falls.

When snow and downpours fall on the earth, man is eliminated in his outdoor activities (verse 7). God "seals the hand of every man", which means that he cannot do anything. He is powerless against the forces of nature. God therefore speaks to "all men". He makes known to them His work, that He is at the helm of life and that every human being is dependent on Him. People cannot always do what they want.

The sealing of every man's hand is meant to bring man to a standstill and give him time to think of his Creator. In a practical sense this happens, for example at farms in northeastern China in winter when it is not possible to work on the land for a few months because of freezing of the ground and snowfall. Many believers who have their work on the land are therefore

able to occupy themselves as much as possible with God's Word and to be taught in it.

God has given the beasts the instinct to go into their hiding places during the snow and rain in winter and remain in their dens for as long as the snow and rain lasts (verse 8). For people, God's speaking through snow and rain is a call to think of Him. Perhaps the beasts are an example to man and there is a lesson in this for man. That lesson is that man seeks refuge with God in a time of spiritual cold by taking refuge in Christ.

In verse 9 Elihu mentions "the storm" and "the cold". He shows where they come from. The storm comes from God's "chamber" [literal translation of "south"]. The cold is caused by winds from the north that spread snow and rain over the earth. The point Elihu is making is that all these things are under God's control, whether it is the hot desert wind or the cold north wind.

Also, making ice is God's work (verse 10). It happens physically through the freezing wind, but in reality it happens through "the breath of God". That breath is so powerful that not only small ditches, but even "the expanse of the waters is frozen". What used to be liquid is transformed by God's breath into a massive mass that can no longer be broken through.

The enormous masses of ice in the polar regions are made by His breath and therefore remain. Once again, it makes it clear that God is the Creator and Processor of natural phenomena. We can think of the Lord Jesus, Who is the Word of God and of Whom it is written: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (Jn 1:3).

Just as God controls the water on earth and can make snow and ice out of it, so He also controls the water in the air by collecting it in clouds (verse 11). As a result, they become large reservoirs of water, heavy "with moisture". No matter how heavy the clouds are with moisture, God keeps them under His control. His mighty hand leads them wherever He wills. Likewise, during the darkness of the rain clouds, He spreads His light over the earth through a shining cloud, that is to say, the lightning coming out of that cloud.

The shining cloud is also controlled by Him (verse 12). Behind the course of a cloud “His guidance” is hidden. Not only He determines its course but also its work. Every cloud, wherever it floats above the earth, is not there by chance, but has been placed there by God with a purpose. The cloud will do without resistance anywhere “on the face of the inhabited earth” everything God commands.

What a cloud must do is described in verse 13. God possesses the clouds and the lightning and uses them to carry out His counsel. The area He has in mind is “His world”. This means the earth and the people who live there (Psa 24:1). In view of them, God uses the elements of nature. In His speaking through what He does in nature, He has a dual purpose.

He can use the elements “for correction”. This means that He can use thunderstorms, rain, lightning, snow and the like as means of discipline to bring people back from the wrong path. Natural disasters and crop failures are always a speaking from God to people, to bring them to their senses. He can also send the weather conditions “for mercy”, so that people will thank Him for what He has done. Abundant harvests thanks to favorable weather conditions are proof of His mercy.

We see here that Elihu had more in mind than just impressing Job with God’s power in nature. In this verse he makes a direct connection between God’s rule over nature and His rule over the lives of men. In other words, he shows here how the unfathomable secret of God’s ways in nature coincides with the unfathomable secret of His ways with man. It is the direct preparation for God’s addresses in the following chapters. Elihu’s speech thus reaches a climax.

Job 37:14-24 | The Closing Words of Elihu to Job

14 *“Listen to this, O Job,
Stand and consider the wonders of God.*
15 *“Do you know how God establishes them,
And makes the lightning of His cloud to shine?”*
16 *“Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds,
The wonders of one perfect in knowledge,*
17 *You whose garments are hot,*

When the land is still because of the south wind?

18 *"Can you, with Him, spread out the skies,
Strong as a molten mirror?*

19 *"Teach us what we shall say to Him;*

We cannot arrange [our case] because of darkness.

20 *"Shall it be told Him that I would speak?*

Or should a man say that he would be swallowed up?

21 *"Now men do not see the light which is bright in the skies;*

But the wind has passed and cleared them.

22 *"Out of the north comes golden [splendor];*

Around God is awesome majesty.

23 *"The Almighty—we cannot find Him;*

He is exalted in power

And He will not do violence to justice and abundant righteousness.

24 *"Therefore men fear Him;*

He does not regard any who are wise of heart."

Elihu is ready for his closing words after the climax of verse 13. In it he turns to Job (verse 14). He asks him to listen "to this", these are the lessons of God's rule over nature. To do this, Job must remain in an attitude of awe and attention and pay attention "to the wonders of God" which He shows in nature. If he is willing to hear, he will absorb God's wonders and his spirit will be filled with the reverence that is appropriate toward Him.

From verse 15, Elihu asks Job some questions intended to make him realize how ignorant he really is and how incapable he is of judging God in His dealings with him. In this light, it must become clear to him that it is absolutely out of place for him to call God to account. He knows nothing at all and God knows everything. This method of teaching in the form of asking questions is the one God also uses in His speech to Job in the following chapters. God will do nothing but ask Job the same kind of questions, only much more extensively and with the result that Job goes on his knees before Him.

Elihu's first question is about the ordering God has put into His works and through which He controls them (verse 15). Does Job have any idea of how God connects all of His works and how they relate to each other? Of course

he does not. He also has to answer the question of how God “makes the lightning of His cloud to shine”.

The next question to Job is whether he knows about the layers of the thick clouds (verse 16). Job does not know the answer. He had no knowledge of the laws of nature that man has discovered in the course of time. He can only look at them with silent amazement and wonder how clouds heavy with water float anyway. It cannot be other than through the mighty hand of God. But how He does it, cannot be explained. But with all our knowledge of physics do we know the answer? We don't know the answer either. We see the laws, but how those laws originated, we do not know without the revelation by God that He gives in His Word.

God, Who does all these wonders, is perfect in knowledge. Someone who is able to make such an ordering in nature and make the clouds float must know everything (1Sam 2:3b). He has perfect knowledge in Himself and of all His works, of all that is outside Him, of all creation, and of every human being, for everything has come forth out of Him. On the other hand, man is a completely ignorant creature.

The temperature is completely in God's hand. Does Job know how the temperature can rise so high that it warms him up and makes his clothes stick to his body (verse 17)? He knows that a south wind brings heat (Lk 12:55). But does he know how God makes the earth still and then lets that wind blow from the south?

And what can he do about it? Surely, he has not helped God to spread out the skies which during the heat are “strong as a molten mirror”, has he (verse 18)? God did that all alone (Isa 44:24b). Job cannot command clouds to temper the heat. Only God can. What can Job do other than endure the heat patiently? If things are as they are, what can such a weak, helpless and ignorant human being do against God when He acts with him?

Elihu is aware of his ignorance of the things he has told Job about God. But perhaps Job knows more and wants to tell him and everyone what they should say to God (verse 19). After all, Job has said to God that he wants to present his case before Him (Job 13:3,18-22). He would let God know that God was not acting well with him. Elihu feels himself in darkness when it comes to judging God and that will be felt by everyone who looks at

God in His rule over nature. Who dares to say that he can fathom God's actions? In what Elihu says here, there is a gentle admonition to Job.

Elihu knows that no one has to tell God what he (Elihu) has said (verse 20). For God has known everything already for a long time (Psa 139:4). If anyone thinks he has to do so with the thought that something has eluded Him and wants to correct Him, he will be "swallowed up". If such a person goes to God to inform Him, he will be overwhelmed by the awareness of His omniscience. When it comes to the judgment of God in His reign, everyone is well advised to keep silent: "Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD" (Zec 2:13a).

Apart from not being able to say anything about what God does, we also see nothing of it, we are blind to it (verse 21). About what God does, we lack light, it is hidden from us in the clouds. We see the clouds. What God is going to do with them escapes us. But the light shines in them, we may know that. And in His time He will drive away the clouds by the wind. Then the sky will be clear.

We can apply this to our lives. The clouds are a picture of trials and tribulations that may be present in our life. Then we don't see the light, but we know it's there. We know that He is beyond our difficulties, though it is difficult to see Him. When the time comes when He expels the clouds, the light becomes visible. We see Him. Maybe the troubles are not gone, but He shows us the purpose for which they serve.

When the heavens have been cleared by God, it turns out that gold has come with the wind from the north, the gold of the bright weather (verse 22). With these last words of Elihu, Job is, as it were, prepared for the gold of the speaking of God Himself. In the application to our lives we can say that it has not only become clear, but has also enriched. The purification of faith is more precious than the purification of gold (1Pet 1:7). We have been given a deeper impression of God's "awesome majesty" than we had before. He had and has control over everything and controls the clouds in our life.

Elihu finishes his closing words with a kind of conclusion. He points out that he and others cannot find "the Almighty" (verse 23). What he means by that is what he then says about God. God is incomparable to man and

immeasurable in His “power”. His “justice” is incorruptible. He never does anything that is contrary to the law, to the correctness of a matter with which He is concerned. The same goes for Job.

Furthermore, His “abundant righteousness” is in the use of His means. Abundant righteousness is literally ‘a multitude of righteousness’. In all the means at His disposal, His righteousness shines forth, He floods with it, it is His hallmark. This also means that “He will not do violence”. He uses all His perfect qualities in such a way that in His dealings with people all insensitive or barbaric hardness is lacking.

Because of these qualities which He uses for the benefit of men, they fear Him, that is, they have respect and awe for Him (verse 24; cf. *Psa 130:4*). It is a general fear of God when they see the revelation of His power (*Rev 15:4*). Those who have a stubborn heart are those who have their own opinion of God and want to tell Him how to rule. They lack the awe of Him. That is why He does not see them, He ignores them.

With this Elihu has said what he had on his heart. The three friends of Job believed that suffering is the result of God’s ‘tit for tat policy’. In judging suffering, they adhered to what we might call a ‘compensation theology’. This theology assumes that there is a connection between righteousness and prosperity, and between sinful conduct and misery. Elihu has shown how wrong this theology is.

Job questions the government of God in his life. But he already understands nothing of the government of God in nature. Elihu therefore admonishes Job to acknowledge God’s wisdom in both matters and to trust Him. Now that Elihu has spoken about the coming of the sun after the storm, the coming of God in His majesty (verse 22), the time has come for God Himself to teach Job in a wonderful way about His ways (cf. *Heb 1:1*). This is what the following chapters are about.

Job 38

Introduction

God is going to speak. He spoke to Adam and Eve and they hid. When He spoke to Moses, Moses had to remove his sandals from his feet. Elijah wrapped his face when he met God in the gentle blowing of a wind. The voice, perhaps more than the apparition, reveals the person. A lot has been said about God in the previous conversations by Job and the friends and Elihu, but His actual presence was not felt. Now that God Himself is showing Himself, Job is going to change. So it is with us.

In the speaking of God we will not hear an explanation of the problem with which Job has wrestled. The problem is not even mentioned. God does not defend Himself against Job's accusations of injustice. He does not come as the next Speaker to make a new attempt to convince Job, but He comes as the One Who speaks the last and decisive word in majesty. God comes simply as the Supreme.

God does not come with "new witnesses" (Job 10:17) to Job, of which he was so afraid. He also does not come in a storm to sweep away Job and no longer to hear him (Job 9:16-18). God does not come to make his suffering greater, but to provide pastoral care for Job in a very personal way. He does not show that to others. But when God has done His work, His care, to Job, He presents him to His friends as a changed Job. We see something similar in what the Lord Jesus did to Peter (1Cor 15:5a; Lk 24:34; Jn 21:15).

Job wanted to sue God for His role in the suffering that afflicted him. But when God appears to Job, the roles are reversed. God calls him to account. He asks Job more than seventy questions to which he has no answers at all. This proves that Job is incapable of understanding God's ways with nature, let alone having power over it. If he does not even know and understand the natural coherence of it, how could he expect to understand God's ways with man? Finally, this leads to Job being convinced and his breakdown. He retracts and repents in dust and ashes (Job 42:6).

God is known from His creation (Rom 1:20). He speaks of His wondrous works, not of the works of Job. No mention is made of Job's good works. God lets Job know by His appearance to him that He has not abandoned him. Nor does God blame Job for certain sins as the cause of his suffering. God only blames Job for the incongruous words he spoke in his bitterness during his suffering. This is exactly what Elihu did before, which proves that Elihu spoke according to God's will.

In their conversations, the three friends and Job discussed a difficult problem. Everywhere in creation it appears that everything is subject to fixed statutes and laws. If the Creator deals with the whole cosmos according to recognizable rules, why shouldn't there be such reliable rules in His dealings with people? God now shows how much man overestimates himself when he claims to understand His actions as Creator and Sustainer. And if he does not understand God's actions in natural things, how much less he does understand His ways with men.

Job 38:1-3 | God Answers Job

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

One of Job's closing words was: "Let the Almighty answer me!" (Job 31:35; cf. Job 9:35; 10:2; 13:3). The answer comes now (verse 1). But nothing of Job's intention to approach the Almighty "as a prince" (Job 31:37) comes to pass. The answer of "the LORD" comes "out of the whirlwind", not to crush Job by that whirlwind, but to answer him (cf. Job 9:17). God answers as "the LORD", the Name which is also used in Job 1-2 and which is characteristic of God's relationship with man. The LORD comes to him in an impressive way. Job must acknowledge with Whom he has to do. But He comes to restore him, not to destroy him. When Job was plunged into misery, He also spoke through a terrible storm. It killed all his children (Job 1:19).

The first words of God immediately make clear what He blames Job for (verse 2). God begins with the question: "Who is this?" Therein already resounds the great exaltation of God and the great nothingness of man, Job. They are not words of contempt or of wrath, but a reproach. They are words of indignation, for Job has had the audacity to darken God's counsel by misrepresenting His ways. This indignation of God is understandable when we remember that we do not appreciate it when things are said of us that are not true.

With his words, Job has darkened God's counsel, which is His government of the world, including the disasters that have struck him. God reigns in disasters and plagues, in which His hand is clearly visible. But His counsel is darkened by human approaches, explanations and reasoning about them. Job has also given his explanation. In doing so he has come to accuse God of injustice, and by doing so he has darkened God's counsel.

He has spoken "words without knowledge" about God because he misinterpreted God's actions. He believed he knew what God should have done, but did not do. We, too, must be careful not to assume that we know God's will and way about situations in which someone or we ourselves have ended up and which we do not understand. We do not know all the facts that God takes into account and uses in His actions.

God calls Job to gird his loins like a man (verse 3; Job 40:6-7; cf. 1Kgs 20:11). In this way God says to him, as it were: 'Brace yourself to listen to My questions and then give the right answer.' Job expressed powerful language about what he would say to God (Job 13:22; 23:4-5). God will test the power of his words by questioning him, by asking him a number of questions. God's questions will place the proportions in the right light.

They are not questions that a man cannot understand. They are not 'quiz questions' to test Job's knowledge, but educational questions. God's goal is not to deeply make Job aware of his ignorance and thereby sweep him away, which would be very simple, but to bring him to the true knowledge of himself and of God. To grow in that knowledge is to grow in the true knowledge. That God comes to Job in this way and speaks to him in this way shows His mercy toward Job.

Job 38:4-7 | The Foundations of the Earth

4 *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
 Tell [Me], if you have understanding,
 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know.
 Or who stretched the line on it?
 6 "On what were its bases sunk?
 Or who laid its cornerstone,
 7 When the morning stars sang together
 And all the sons of God shouted for joy?"*

In verse 4 God begins with the questions. Each question makes Job a bit smaller, until finally the last trace of pride is gone. The first subject God touches upon is the creation of the earth, the abode of man (verse 4). Job complained that God moves and reverses the mountains, makes the earth wobble, and eclipses the sun and the stars (Job 9:5-7). But in order to be able to answer questions about creation, he must have been a witness or be able to bring witnesses of the creation. Job believed he had knowledge of creation (Job 9:5-10). Can he also say where he was when God "laid the foundation of the earth?" 'Well, Job, say it, let Me know, "tell" Me. If you can, show that "you have understanding".'

But Job, of course, was nowhere to be found at the time of the creation of the earth; he didn't even exist. In this respect, Bildad was telling the truth when he said to Job: "For we are of yesterday and know nothing" (Job 8:9). Well, if someone has no knowledge of the way the earth is founded, he also lacks knowledge of the way the earth and life on it functions and is governed. Anyone who, despite this lack of knowledge, makes statements about it can only speculate and speak foolishness.

No one, not a human being, has been present at creation. By faith we know that the Son of God is the Creator (Heb 1:2; 11:3). Through Him all things exist (Col 1:16-17). When God speaks here of 'foundation' and in verse 5 of 'the line', it is of course imagery derived from everyday life. The earth is not literally founded on anything, and no literal line to measure has been used in the design and creation of the earth (cf. Job 26:7). God uses these concepts to make clear to us what He means.

The question in verse 5 connects to the previous one in which we hear the Creator and Sustainer of the universe talking about its design and construction. God asks Job who has set its measurements. Has He given God a hand in the design, or given Him a tip in setting its dimensions and proportions, so that all parts of creation can be perfectly harmoniously joined together by a proportional and balanced form and quantity? In addition to the fact that the earth functions, does he know how and why it functions? The words “measurements” and “line” mean that God works according to a perfect predetermined plan.

Let Job say it, for he “knows” how the earth functions. In any case, that is what he claimed. Or perhaps he helped to carry it out, that he held on the line when God was setting everything in its place? Job didn’t. He has not been able to give God any advice as to the dimensions and characteristics He would attribute to the parts of His creation. The lesson we can learn from this is that God alone sets the measurements of everything, whether it is creation or our days, our possessions, our gifts, or our suffering (Ecc 3:1-8).

In verse 6, God does not ask for a person, but for the way of functioning. It is about the durability of the work of creation. Can Job also say how God has worked to give the earth the stability it has? Can he make something that remains? Here too God uses imagery when He speaks of “its bases” and “its cornerstone”. Bases support a building and the cornerstone makes sure that the foundation is laid well. Through these pictures, God shows Job that everything He has built is solid and stable.

Those who were present at God’s creation works are the angels, who are called “morning stars” and “sons of God” (verse 7; Job 1:6; 2:1). Angels are sons of God – not by birth or adoption like New Testament believers, but – because of their creation by God. In the same sense, this is only said of Adam in the case of men (Lk 3:38). Angels were created before God created the visible universe. When God created creation out of nothing, that is, out of what is invisible to the eye, they saw it and cheered and shouted about it.

[N.B. The word “sang” (verse 7) is not a good translation. Angels do not sing. Neither did they in the fields of Ephrathah. Singing is reserved for

people who have been redeemed by God from their bondage and their sins. See for example Exodus 15, where we hear about singing for the first time in the Bible, and the book of Revelation, where singing is mentioned for the last time in the Bible (Exo 15:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3].

God did not create from nothing, but out of Himself. The angels had never seen anything of substance and everything that goes with it, such as form, color, and size. And suddenly it was there. They saw it because God called “into being that which does not exist” (Rom 4:17b), He had called it forth. This brought them to an exuberant expression of their admiration for the wisdom and power of God, their Creator.

Job 38:8-11 | The Limits of the Sea

8 *“Or [who] enclosed the sea with doors
When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;
9 When I made a cloud its garment
And thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 And I placed boundaries on it
And set a bolt and doors,
11 And I said, ‘Thus far you shall come, but no farther;
And here shall your proud waves stop’?*

In these verses, God is changing the subject. He goes from the earth to the sea and asks Job some questions about it. In those questions He shows that He is both the Maker and the Master of it. He dominates and controls the sea. The origin of the earth has been compared by God to building a house. For the origin of the sea He uses the picture of a birth (verse 8). Immediately at birth the sea shows its temperament of wildness and ferocity that must be controlled by God.

God does not ask Job any further questions about the sea, but describes His way of dealing with it. This shows His complete mastery of it and also His care for it. He even compares the sea to a newborn child who is completely dependent on His care (cf. Eze 16:2-4). He clothes the sea with “a cloud” and gives her “thick darkness” as “its swaddling band” (verse 9). This garment gives an appearance that increases the threat that has always

posed to man from the sea. It makes him even more aware of his powerlessness and nullity in the face of that power full of threat.

If God does not place boundaries on the sea and does not control it (verse 10), no one can prevent the sea from doing an all destructive work. Great floods by storms, tsunamis and spring tides are impressive proof of this. The water raged in the most terrible way when God used a worldwide flood to judge the earth (Gen 7:11; 8:2).

Is there a man who can tame or limit the sea? Man, with his abilities, can make all kinds of arrangements to prevent a flood disaster, such as the enormous Delta Works in the Netherlands, to protect its coasts. But a guarantee that a new flood disaster is out of the question cannot even be given by such masterly performances. Only God has the power to stop the water. He places boundaries, and sets a bolt and doors so that it will not go beyond the boundaries without His will (cf. Psa 104:9-10; Jer 5:22; Pro 8:29).

God never loses control of the sea (verse 11). He may occasionally allow the sea to break through those boundaries. Then He opens the doors to remind man of his total inability to exert any influence on the devastating mass and power of the water. Then He gathers the waters back into the storehouses designated by Him for that purpose (Psa 33:7) and brings them to rest.

God reigns over the sea simply because He "said" to the sea, that is, by His word. The waters obey the word of God (2Pet 3:5-6). He speaks to them as if they were a person who stands before Him, with their own rebellious will, and to whom He lets it be known what their boundary is to abide by it.

If God has complete control over the sea, what right does man, who did not create the sea and cannot control it, have to criticize God for the way He deals with it? We can apply this to the trials and sufferings that can affect the life of a believer. They do not happen by chance to him, but arise from 'the womb of God's counsel' for him. But God is and remains with us in the trials (Isa 43:2). He has set a boundary to need and misery so that the believer does not perish (1Cor 10:13). With His trials He keeps the pride of men in check, just as He keeps the pride of the waters in check.

There has been one moment in history when God has removed all bars and doors, bringing boundless misery upon Someone. That was when the Lord Jesus was made sin on the cross in the three hours of darkness. Then He cried out: “Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me” (Psa 42:7). There He was immersed in the wrath of God over sin. We cannot fathom what this meant to Him. But we will worship Him eternally for undergoing God’s wrath over sin in our stead.

Job 38:12-15 | Day and Night

12 *“Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,
[And] caused the dawn to know its place,
13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
And the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 “It is changed like clay [under] the seal;
And they stand forth like a garment.
15 “From the wicked their light is withheld,
And the uplifted arm is broken.*

After questions about the beginning of creation, the next topic on which God questions Job is the beginning of the day. Has Job, since he was alive, ever caused the day to dawn, that the morning began to shine, and the dawn to be seen (verse 12)? Has he been able to influence the alternation between day and night? Has he determined when and where that would happen? Also this question is not answered. God does not expect an answer either. All questions must lead Job to the only correct answer and that is that he no longer has any rebuttal to God’s government in his life. If he acknowledges God’s guidance, he doesn’t need answers.

Job and we too would never have come to that question. The rising and setting of the sun is so mundane, so self-evident, that we don’t even think about Who is behind it. Nor do we dwell on the fact that this process has been going on since creation, when God said: “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). No man can make it day, and no man can break through that daily recurring wonder. Day and night belong to God (Psa 74:16).

The dawn of the day also has an effect on the wicked (verse 13). When it becomes light, it is to “to take hold of the ends of the earth”. When the sun rises, the whole horizon is suddenly illuminated. This gives the picture that it is as if the light is taking hold of the earth like a tablecloth to shake the crumbs off. The wicked are then seen here as the crumbs being shaken off the earth.

Here we see the effect of light on those who love the works of darkness. They hate the light (Jn 3:19-20), for it reveals their evil works (Eph 5:13). As soon as it becomes light, they flee the light; they fear the light and are driven away by it (cf. Job 24:17). God asks Job if he has commanded them to do so at dawn.

Another consequence of the dawning of the day after night is that the form of all things becomes visible again (verse 14). In the night everything is dark and the outlines fade away. The earth then seems to be a shapeless and colorless piece of “clay”. But just as the impression of a seal in the soft clay changes the shape of the clay into something recognizable, so the dawn of the day changes the shape of the earth into something recognizable. The “garment” of the earth, where we can think, for example, of the trees and flowers that we do not see at night, is seen. In the morning light we see the whole structure and beauty of the earth.

Opposite the recognizability of God’s creation works in the light is the disappearance of the wicked (verse 15). The daylight breaks through, but they do not benefit from it. On the contrary, they do not want the light and crawl away from it. Because they do not want to see the light, but prefer darkness, they will never see the light. Their “uplifted arm”, a picture of their rebellion against God, will be broken forever (cf. Num 15:30; Psa 10:15; 37:17). In the realm of peace, when Christ has risen as the Sun of righteousness, He will wipe out all the wicked from the land every morning (Mal 4:2-3; Psa 101:8).

Job 38:16-18 | Unprecedented Depths and Widths

16 *“Have you entered into the springs of the sea
Or walked in the recesses of the deep?”*

17 *“Have the gates of death been revealed to you,*

Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

18 "Have you understood the expanse of the earth?

Tell [Me], if you know all this.

God asks Job if he knows anything of "the springs of the sea" and "the recesses of the deep" (verse 16). Has he seen and searched the recesses of the deep, so that he has discovered the springs from which the sea springs? And is he so at home at the recesses of the deep that he has walked there? The sea contains unprecedented depths where it is completely dark, where man cannot come, and if he could come there he could see nothing.

But to God these inaccessible depths hold no secrets. He walks there in perfectly familiar territory (Psa 77:19). Man lacks the knowledge of those depths, because he cannot get there. If he doesn't know the natural depths, what does he know about God's way in his life with the depths He sometimes leads him through? It may be enough that God knows his path of life and purpose, right through the sea and great waters of trials.

In verse 17 God asks Job about an even greater and darker depth than that of the sea, the depths of the realm of the dead. As long as someone is in the land of the living, it remains a mystery what exactly "the gates of death" are, how he should imagine them. He has no view or insight into them. By also speaking of "the gates of deep darkness" God adds to the state of death the aspect of darkness.

To be able to answer these questions, a person must first experience it. But once he has experienced it, he cannot go back to tell about it because he is dead. Man doesn't know from experience what death is or how he leaves life and how it feels. For God, however, death knows no secrets (Job 26:6). He knows exactly how death works.

The New Testament believer also does not know exactly how death works. What he is allowed to know is that death no longer has authority over him. It can happen that he dies. He doesn't know how it goes, but he does know where he is going, namely to his Lord and Savior in paradise (Lk 23:43; Phil 1:23). The believer belongs to the church of which the Lord Jesus said, "and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Mt 16:18b).

After the depths it is about the widths. God asks Job whether he has "understood the expanse of the earth" (verse 18). The meaning of the question

is whether Job gave special attention to the widths of the earth, i.e. the surface of the earth (as opposed to the sea), so that as a result he gained a thorough and extensive knowledge of them. Job had no knowledge of the fact that the earth is a globe and that the widest place on earth is the equator. For him the widths of the earth were what he saw around him. It should bring Job to understand that man's field of vision is limited to the horizon, but that God oversees everything.

God concludes this series of questions with an invitation, or perhaps more of a challenge, to Job to make it known to Him if he knows "all this". To Him it is not about the concrete answer to the individual questions, but about the answer to all questions, about their coherence, for all questions are interrelated. Job is silent and does not answer. In the light of what God asks of him, it begins to dawn on him that he has spoken "words without knowledge" (verse 2).

Job 38:19-21 | Where Does the Light Come From?

19 *"Where is the way to the dwelling of light?
And darkness, where is its place,
20 That you may take it to its territory
And that you may discern the paths to its home?"*
21 *"You know, for you were born then,
And the number of your days is great!"*

After an earlier question about the light (verse 12) God now asks Job if he knows where the light is when it retreats because of the incursion of darkness (verse 19). Where does the light dwell? Can he show the way that leads to that dwelling place? And can he also show the dwelling place of darkness? When it becomes light again, darkness retreats. If Job knows the abode, then he can guide the light to his area (verse 20).

God uses beautiful imagery here. He presents the light as on a journey. Light is always in motion and has no fixed abode, but is on its way. In contrast, darkness, the absence of light, is limited to one place, "its place". By the way God speaks about this, it becomes clear how impossible it is for man to point out where light abides when it is night and where darkness abides when it is day.

“But”, God says ironically to Job, “of course you know, for you were there when they were created (verse 21). After all, you have been on earth for so long that you remember that light and darkness were separated” (Gen 1:4). God thus says in a gentle and at the same time clear way that Job knows nothing about it at all. Here too we hear no reaction from Job. His silence tells a lot.

We know by faith that God is the source of light and that He created light and darkness (Gen 1:3-5). We know the difference between light and darkness through experience, through the laws we observe every day. But how one replaces the other, the cause of it, we do not know. That cause is God Himself, and He is unfathomable. That awareness leads us to adoration (Rom 11:33-36).

Job 38:22-30 | The Weather

22 *“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 Which I have reserved for the time of distress,
For the day of war and battle?
24 “Where is the way that the light is divided,
[Or] the east wind scattered on the earth?
25 “Who has cleft a channel for the flood,
Or a way for the thunderbolt,
26 To bring rain on a land without people,
[On] a desert without a man in it,
27 To satisfy the waste and desolate land
And to make the seeds of grass to sprout?
28 “Has the rain a father?
Or who has begotten the drops of dew?
29 “From whose womb has come the ice?
And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth?
30 “Water becomes hard like stone,
And the surface of the deep is imprisoned.*

God points out to Job “the storehouses of the snow” and “the storehouses of the hail” (verse 22). The storehouses are the clouds. There are no supplies of snow and hail in them, but there is the water vapor to form them.

God only has to direct the weather conditions to create snow and hail in the clouds. Has Job taken a look at them to see how they are made?

We now know physically how snow and hail originate, but do we know why the weather conditions are such that they can originate? Man already knows a lot about weather phenomena, but is still far from understanding all phenomena, let alone causing or preventing them.

God's use of natural forces is explained for Job in His use of hail. He informs him of the purpose He has with it (verse 23). That aspect is certainly not what a person thinks about. God says here that He reserves them in order to bring a "time of distress" over His people and thereby call them to repentance. Then He uses the hail as a disciplinary rod. He will also use the hail on "a day of war and battle" to judge the enemies of His people and deliver them. We have some examples of this in Scripture (Exo 9:23; Jos 10:11; Psa 18:12-13; Isa 28:17; Eze 13:13; Rev 16:21).

Can Job also say where the way is that the light is divided (verse 24)? When the day comes, the light will spread on earth. It seems to come from a gathering place in the east and then suddenly spreads over the earth. Can Job say anything about how this works? Does he know why in one season on one hemisphere of the earth the day is increasingly longer and in the same season on the other hemisphere the day is increasingly shorter? In fact, at the North Pole and the South Pole, it is alternately six months of day and six months of night. Man can observe this and, by studying the laws of nature, also indicate how the process proceeds, but the cause of this process is known only to God.

What applies to daylight also applies to the east wind. The east wind blows from the direction where the sun rises. It takes the sun's heat and spreads it across the earth. What causes the wind to blow can also be explained physically. This makes it reasonably predictable from which angle the wind will blow and with what force. The fact that this wind comes from the east says something about the direction of the wind, but not which way the wind takes. It remains a mystery how the wind will spread. No one knows of the wind "where it comes from and where it is going" (Jn 3:8).

In verse 25 God speaks of cleaving a channel for the flood. This is also beautiful imagery, in keeping with God's customary use of speech among

men. People dig trenches to direct a large amount of water to places where it is needed. But who digs that channel in the air to disperse the mass of water of the flood? No human can do that. But to God, that's a small thing. He "cleaves" the clouds, causing them to break. That's how He makes the flood come down in various places.

Does Job have any idea who cleaves a way for the light of thunder? God suggests that a path in the dark cloud is opened for lightning. Lightning suddenly seems to break through the dark cloud. As if the path has been cleared of obstacles, it follows a zigzag course down through the sky. The question is, who gives it freedom and has prepared its way, which it then goes. Who else could that be but the Almighty?

The breaking open of the clouds has a purpose. It is "to bring rain on a land without people, [on] a desert without a man in it" (verse 26). This may in our eyes be a senseless action, a waste of precious rain that is so desperately needed elsewhere. But such an assessment proves our short-sightedness. Then, like Job, we judge God. Like Job, we then speak "words without knowledge".

In verse 27 God explains why He does this. The realm where there is no man is a "waste and desolate land". This description indicates that it is an exceptionally desolate area, desolate of people, but not of God. If there are no people to cultivate that desolate area, He Himself takes care of it. He saturates it with water, for there is greenery rising up there. That greenery serves as food for the animals that are there (cf. Psa 104:13-14a). God not only cares for the people, but also for the animals in the desert.

God asks Job whether the rain has a father (verse 28). By this He means if Job knows what the origin of the rain is, who will make it rain. And does Job know who brings forth the countless drops of dew? Neither one nor the other is the work of man. Nor can people explain how they come into being. For faith it is simple. The God-fearing confesses as follows: "Are there any among the idols of the nations who give rain? Or can the heavens grant showers? Is it not You, O Lord our God? Therefore we hope in You, for You are the one who has done all these things" (Jer 14:22).

God is the Father or Progenitor of the rain, and He is also the mother of the drops of dew. In the same sense God also speaks of the origin of the

natural phenomena “ice” and “frost” (verse 29). Both are the counterparts of rain and dew. The hailstones are rain frozen in the air which fall to the ground. The frost comes from the freezing of dew, which causes the formation of ice crystals. This is a beautiful sight and produces beautiful pictures. But is anyone able to lay the frost on all the trees? It is the work of God alone. He presents it as if He were its mother. The ice comes out of His womb and He gives birth to the frost of heaven. The result is that “the water becomes hard like stone” and “the surface of the deep is imprisoned” (verse 30; Job 37:10).

We are so accustomed to the idea that ice comes on the water when the temperature falls below freezing, that the wonder of it escapes us, and even more so that we don’t think about Who does it. But isn’t it a great wonder that a liquid mass of water is hidden, “imprisoned”, under a layer of ice in a short time? What created power is capable of making such a big change without making any noise? This can only be done by an almighty Creator Who shows His power in an inaudible way. The water through which ships used to pass now becomes as hard as a stone allowing one to walk on it, even with heavy loads.

Job 38:31-33 | The Celestial Bodies

31 *“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,*

Or loose the cords of Orion?

32 *“Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,*

And guide the Bear with her satellites?

33 *“Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,*

Or fix their rule over the earth?

God directs Job’s gaze to the starry sky (verse 31). He places Job face to face with the vast universe. No one has ever been able to fathom the universe. With ever stronger telescopes one can look deeper and deeper into the universe. The numbers mentioned about the distances and sizes of stars and planets and the space of the universe are dizzying. We can’t comprehend it. And new galaxies are constantly being discovered. All those stars He created with His fingers and gave them a place in the universe. It determines man by the indescribable greatness of God and his own absolute nullity (Psa 8:3-4).

In his unbridled curiosity, man wonders where the boundary of the universe is. Many galaxies have already been mapped out, but, it is said, it is only a millionth part of the universe, at least of what they think the universe or cosmos is. And a boundary has never been discovered.

For faith, it is again simple. God created heaven and earth, the universe. He has covered the heavens with countless stars. He knows the name of every star (Psa 147:4-5; Isa 40:26). He mentions to Job the names of “the Pleiades” and “Orion” (cf. Job 9:9). To this He connects the question of whether Job can bind the chains of the one and loose the cords of the other. Can Job bind these celestial bodies so that they are stopped in their movement through the universe, or can he loose them so that they follow a path other than that prescribed to them by God?

Can Job cause “a constellation” to appear at the time appointed for him (verse 32)? Possibly it is southern stars who, when they appear, announce the summer. Or is he so powerful that he can “guide the Bear with her satellites”? That is a northern constellation of which the Bear is the brightest star and “her satellites” the less bright stars.

God has placed the constellations as “ordinances of the heavens” in the universe (verse 33). The ordinances are the laws He has instituted, the fixed location of the stars in relation to each other, and the fixed regularity with which the celestial bodies move in the universe (Psa 148:6; Jer 31:35-36). Does Job know these ordinances? Does he have insight into how they work?

When God created the stars, He said that they would be, among other things, “for seasons” (Gen 1:14). We can think of the seasons mentioned in Genesis 8 (Gen 8:22). This means that God determines His policy on earth through the ordinances of heaven. The appearance and disappearance (no longer being visible) of stars is also connected with the changing of the seasons. Can Job contribute to the execution of that policy established by God? Here, too, asking the question at the same time is the answer.

Job 38:34-38 | The Clouds and the Control Over Them

34 *“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
So that an abundance of water will cover you?”*

35 *"Can you send forth lightnings that they may go
And say to you, 'Here we are'?"*
36 *"Who has put wisdom in the innermost being
Or given understanding to the mind?"*
37 *"Who can count the clouds by wisdom,
Or tip the water jars of the heavens,*
38 *When the dust hardens into a mass
And the clods stick together?"*

In verse 34 God comes back to the weather, to the clouds and the rain. He asks Job if he can shout so loudly that the clouds hear him and obey him, so that a downpour comes over him. Of course Job cannot do that. He can shout as loudly and as long as he wants, but the clouds will continue their way impassive without dropping a drop of water. They only listen to the voice of God. If we want it to rain, we must ask Him (Zec 10:1; Jam 5:18).

Neither is Job involved in sending and commanding the flashes of lightning (verse 35). God alone has authority over this (Lev 10:2; Num 11:1; 16:35; 2Kgs 1:10,12). They go and come at His command and stand in His service.

All that a man can see of creation, all the wisdom he has about it, has been laid in his innermost being by God (verse 36). No one has any insight into the works of God other than through the insight that God puts into his heart. Man is naturally darkened in his mind (Eph 4:18). As a result, he is in the dark about the origin of creation. Only when God gives him wisdom and insight, he is able to see how everything was created and also how everything is maintained.

Despite the wisdom and insight God can give a man, man remains incapable of counting the clouds by wisdom (verse 37). Only God can count the number of clouds, so that there are enough to pour out somewhere an amount of rain determined by Him. Also, no man can "tip the water jars of the heavens", meaning that the clouds are like jars filled with water and they are tipped to let the water out (cf. Job 26:8).

What the rain does with the dust and the clods is and remains a miracle for man (verse 38). The incoherent dust clumps through the water, and when it dries up, it "hardens into a mass". Lumps that are hard become soft

through the water and stick together. Man cannot imitate this process as such. It has not been invented by man. God has incorporated that process into His creation.

As an application we can see here a loving act of God with man. It is He Who gives the rain. Man is dust (Gen 3:19; Job 30:19) and responds naturally with hardening (Eph 4:18) to the gift of God. God must first do a work in man; He must plow and prepare the ‘ground’ of his heart so that His word is accepted (cf. Mt 13:3-9,18-23). Job’s silence shows that God’s plow has already drawn deep furrows in his heart.

Job 38:39-41 | The Lions and the Raven

39 *“Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
40 When they crouch in [their] dens
[And] lie in wait in [their] lair?
41 “Who prepares for the raven its nourishment
When its young cry to God
And wander about without food?*

Until now God has spoken about different weather elements. From now on He is going to speak about His providential care for the animal world. From caring for and governing the innumerable celestial bodies in the immeasurable firmament, God now passes on to the world of animals. There, too, it appears that He cares for and controls everything in a way that cannot be copied by man.

Not only has He created the universe, He has also filled the earth with creatures that depend on Him in everything. They are found in all kinds of places, such as in the caves, in the field, in the mountains, in the sky and on a rock. God points Job to all kinds of animals. There are wild, ferocious, helpless, timorous, strong, bizarre, fast and fearless animals. God gives some examples and asks Job questions about them.

1. About the lions and the raven, He asks the question: How do they get food? (verses 39-41)
2. About the mountain goats and the deer He asks the question: How do they get young? (Job 39:1-4)

3. About the wild donkey and the swift donkey He asks the question: Why are they so free? (Job 39:5-8)
4. About the wild ox He asks the question: How can you tame it? (Job 39:9-12)
5. About the ostrich He asks the question: Why is she acting so strange? (Job 39:13-18)
6. About the horse He asks the question: Where does it get its might and fearlessness from and why does it serve man so selflessly? (Job 39:19-25)
7. About the hawk and the eagle He asks the question: How do they know where to fly? (Job 39:26-30)

These animals illustrate God's inimitable creativity and providential care. The animal world consists partly of species of which the reasons for their existence are unknown to us. This has to do with the fact that they are species that live in the wild. They are not directly subservient to man. Humans cannot explain why animals live as they do. This is another mystery that only God fully understands. It also says something about the selfishness of man who wants to perceive the usefulness of everything for himself and only then can appreciate its existence. God shows that He creates such creatures because He wants it, and they increase His glory, regardless of whether man has any use or appreciation for them.

God has equipped all these different animals with as many different qualities. In many cases, we don't know how or why He did it. He also cares for each species and gives each animal what it needs. In the same way God has created a great diversity in humanity. Every human being is different. Every human being has a different course of life and experiences different circumstances. Why this is so, we do not know in many cases. One thing we can be sure of is that "the only wise God" (Rom 16:27) controls everything in this way. Whoever acknowledges this can rest in it.

The animals that God mentions are characterized by independence. They are wild, unrestrained and decide for themselves what they do. Man cannot subjugate them to himself; he rules over the animals in so far as God entrusts him with the dominion over them. But God rules over them. It is the same with man. He feels autonomous in his thinking and acting and

yet he is completely in God's hand. And satan seems to enslave people arbitrarily, but he too can only go as far as God allows him. This thought will be continued in the coming part of the book.

He begins with the lions, the king of animals (verse 39). Can Job give "the lion" what he needs? If you see how he hunts, he cannot be imitated. Or is Job able to "fulfill the desire of the young lions"? These young lions are blind for the first few weeks. They are helpless and unable to hunt prey. They are in a hiding place lurking around them (verse 40; cf. Psa 10:8-9). There God cares for them in response to their cries to Him (Psa 104:21).

The question of who prepares nourishment for the raven is also meant to show both the inability of Job and the omnipotence in God's care (verse 41). Like the young lions, the young of the raven cry out to God for help (Psa 147:9). When they wander around without food and cannot find anything, God hears their cries as well as the cries of the young lions.

If man had to make sure that these animals got their food, they would die (Psa 104:27-28). Man is completely failing in this. He has no insight into what the animals need and he has no power and wisdom to provide for it if he knew. God possesses everything and gives the animals what they need. The Lord Jesus sets God's care for the ravens as an example for us not to worry about food and clothing (Lk 12:24). He cares for us even more than He cares for the animals. Therefore it is better not to criticize Him in His care for us when things are different in our lives than we think they should be.

Job 39

Job 39:1-4 | The Mountain Goats and the Deer

1 “Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?

Do you observe the calving of the deer?

2 “Can you count the months they fulfill,

Or do you know the time they give birth?

3 “They kneel down, they bring forth their young,

They get rid of their labor pains.

4 “Their offspring become strong, they grow up in the open field;

They leave and do not return to them.

God confronts Job in this section with the giving birth of young by the mountain goats and the deer. Can Job say at what time the mountain goats give birth (verse 1)? These animals live on rocks inaccessible to man, which they climb with the greatest ease. In an inimitable way they jump from one rock to another. How can a human being know when a mountain goat gives birth? That event escapes his perception. The same goes for the timorous deer, who stays as far away as possible from people and predators.

Job must also answer the question if he can “count the months they fulfill” (verse 2). And can he also say something about “the time they give birth”? He is incapable of either of them, for he cannot follow them. They move beyond his reach. But God knows exactly. He works it: “The voice of the LORD makes the deer to calve” (Psa 29:9a), where we can think of thunderstorms hastening the birth.

God has implanted in these animals how they get their young (verse 3). They adopt an outward attitude (“they kneel down”), getting rid of their labor pains, making it easier for them to eject their young. Inside there are contractions that drive the young out. This all happens outside the field of vision of man, but under the watchful eye of God. He has provided the animals with what they need to give birth to a young.

Once the young is born, God continues to take care of it (verse 4). He gives the young what they need to become strong. The open field is their natural

habitat. There they grow up. When they are independent and no longer need the care of their mother, they leave their mother forever and go their own way. They all do that without human help. Once they are independent, God continues to take care of them.

If God takes care of these animals and their young like that, won't He take care of His children? If we have no control over our children who go their own way, He will continue to take care of them.

Job 39:5-8 | The Wild Donkey and the Swift Donkey

5 *"Who sent out the wild donkey free?
And who loosed the bonds of the swift donkey,
6 To whom I gave the wilderness for a home
And the salt land for his dwelling place?
7 "He scorns the tumult of the city,
The shoutings of the driver he does not hear.
8 "He explores the mountains for his pasture
And searches after every green thing.*

The next question from God is about "the wild donkey" and "the swift donkey" (verse 5). Does Job know why he lives so freely? That he wanders around without bonds, untied? Who gave this creature this nature with a desire for freedom and the strength to maintain that freedom? God did. He has ensured that this animal has remained out of the hands of men and lives untamed. If it fell into the hands of men, it would be tamed (Jam 3:7).

In addition to ensuring the freedom of this animal, God also provides an environment in which he feels at home (verse 6). The wilderness fits his nature, where the wild donkey is at home (Jer 2:24). The salt land provides enough salty food for the animal's needs.

The free, untied donkey laughs at the tame donkey that is in the city amid the noise (verse 7). The wild donkey is free of that. He is in the wild and there enjoys peace and quiet. The tame donkey is a slave and must carry loads (Num 22:30). He must listen to the commands of the slavedriver and is hurried by him. The wild donkey has nothing to do with this. He does not hear that voice, for he is not caught.

He is at liberty in the mountains, where his pasture is (verse 8). There he searches for food. If there is anything green, he eats it with great contentment, without braying (Job 6:5). It is a new proof of God's greatness that He has also made such an animal that acts according to the nature He has given him.

Job 39:9-12 | The Wild Ox

9 *"Will the wild ox consent to serve you,
Or will he spend the night at your manger?*
10 *"Can you bind the wild ox in a furrow with ropes,
Or will he harrow the valleys after you?*
11 *"Will you trust him because his strength is great
And leave your labor to him?*
12 *"Will you have faith in him that he will return your grain
And gather [it from] your threshing floor?"*

The next animal God asks Job about is "the wild ox" (verse 9), an enormously strong animal. This animal is mentioned several times as a symbol of strength (Num 23:22; 24:8; Deu 33:17). God asks Job if that animal would want to serve him and if he could keep it as a pet. Job knows that this is impossible, because the wild ox is too strong to tame him. If he would let the animal spend the night in his manger next to the tame oxen, he would cause great devastation in his night lodging, because he would not let himself be tied up or locked up.

The great strength of the wild ox makes him excellently suited to tie him with a rope before the plough in order to draw furrows over his land (verse 10). God asks if Job would be able to do this. There is some irony in this question. Besides ploughing, the wild ox can of course also pull the harrow. But what he can do when it comes to his strength, he doesn't want to do. His whole nature rebels against it. That's why Job cannot rely on him, no matter how great his strength is (verse 11). He cannot let him do any work. He does not have to rely on the strength of the wild ox to bring his seed from the field to his barns and thresh it (verse 12).

The farmers do not benefit from the wild ox, but God wants him in His creation. This useless powerhouse was created by God to show His power.

Just as the wild ox does not make his power available to man, so God's power is not available to man at his command. If Job has no control over such creatures as the wild donkey and the wild ox to make them subservient to himself, how unsuitable is he then to rule the world or judge God's actions.

Job 39:13-18 | The Ostrich

13 *"The ostriches' wings flap joyously
With the pinion and plumage of love,
14 For she abandons her eggs to the earth
And warms them in the dust,
15 And she forgets that a foot may crush them,
Or that a wild beast may trample them.
16 "She treats her young cruelly, as if [they] were not hers;
Though her labor be in vain, [she] is unconcerned;
17 Because God has made her forget wisdom,
And has not given her a share of understanding.
18 "When she lifts herself on high,
She laughs at the horse and his rider.*

Another animal that God presents to Job is the ostrich (verse 13). God does not question Job about this animal, but He describes it. Although God does not ask questions, the description may raise the question of why God created the ostrich. It is the largest bird living today. Weighing up to one hundred and fifty kilograms, the ostrich is unable to fly. With her impressive height of up to two and a half meters, she also has difficulty hiding. While the stork ["love" can also be translated with "a stork"] has pinion and plumage with which it can fly long distances as a migratory bird, the ostrich has only rough haired, blunt wings. But that's not what she's concerned about. God has adapted her well to her lifestyle.

With the wings she has, she can't fly, but she can joyously flap with them. Other birds can also use their feathers to flap their wings. They can also fly with them, but the ostrich can only make noise with them. The fact that of the other birds the stork is called by name is not for nothing, but indicates a contrast made by God Himself. We read of the stork: "Even the stork in the sky knows her seasons" (Jer 8:7a). God gives birds a certain understanding

or He withholds it from birds. The latter is the case with the ostrich (verse 17).

Verse 14 begins with “for”, which indicates a contrast with the foregoing, the other birds that can lift themselves up from the ground with their wings. The ostrich only runs over the ground. She goes through life without worrying about anything and also without any sense of responsibility for her young. This is evidenced by the lack of care for her eggs. Other birds sit on it to breed, but also to protect the eggs. The ostrich is easy to lure away from her nest.

She forgets – God speaks here of the animals as if they were humans – that the eggs are unsafe that way. This is a gross lack of parental affection. There is no care for the offspring. She doesn’t care that anyone can step on the eggs with his foot (verse 15). It can also happen that the animals of the field trample them.

It does not mean that she has forgotten the place where she left her eggs. That turns out when the eggs hatch and she has the young. The way she deals with her young connects to the lack of parental feelings she already showed with the eggs she laid. “She treats her young cruelly, as if [they] were not hers” (verse 16; cf. Lam 4:3). She does not worry about what will become of her young.

It will be clear that there are important, warning lessons for the education in the ostrich’s behavior. This is not the place to go into that further. However, we would advise the reader to look for it in this section and ask the Lord to help him or her not to behave toward his or her children as the ostrich does toward her young.

The ostrich’s indifference and cruelty is because God “has made her forget wisdom, and has not given her a share of understanding” (verse 17). God has not given her wisdom and a share of understanding He has given to other animals. He is free in what He does and does not give to animals. There is a wise intent behind this action. The fact that we do not always understand it does not change the wisdom of God. It should make us realize that God acts according to His will, without us always seeing the reason or getting the explanation.

God has not given the ostrich wisdom, but He has given her the ability to run very fast. She does not use her wings and feathers to protect her young, but to flee as soon as she sees danger. At a time of danger, “she lifts herself on high”, that is, she stands, and makes a run that even a horse cannot keep up with (verse 18). The strength of her legs is enormous. Her top speed is at seventy kilometers per hour. She laughs at the horse and his rider.

The lesson is that God, if He wants to, makes creatures who are stupid, who pretend to be crazy and make a strange impression on us. Here we see a bird that can’t fly. Although the animal has wings, it can run faster than a horse. Job could not understand what God was doing in his life. God tells him that the created world is sometimes just as difficult to explain. The ostrich is a stupid animal, yet God takes care of her, as He takes care of her young that she has forgotten or against whom she is being hard on. The question has not been asked, but is locked up in it: Is Job able to explain the deviant behavior of this animal?

Job 39:19-25 | The Horse

19 *“Do you give the horse [his] might?
Do you clothe his neck with a mane?*
20 *“Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrible.*
21 *“He paws in the valley, and rejoices in [his] strength;
He goes out to meet the weapons.*
22 *“He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
And he does not turn back from the sword.*
23 *“The quiver rattles against him,
The flashing spear and javelin.*
24 *“With shaking and rage he races over the ground,
And he does not stand still at the voice of the trumpet.*
25 *“As often as the trumpet [sounds] he says, ‘Aha!’
And he scents the battle from afar,
And the thunder of the captains and the war cry.*

God continues with the horse about which He again expresses Himself in question form to Job. The horse here is the warhorse. It is the only animal

of all the animals God mentions that is in the service of man and is used by him. The aforementioned wild animals that proudly enjoy their freedom and strength are beyond the control of Job. But even a creature tamed by man can exhibit a frightening behavior from which we can get excited. The warhorse is such a creature. Characteristic is his fearlessness. Without any fear, he runs toward the enemy.

Where does the horse's strength, with which he plunges into battle, come from (verse 19)? Did Job give it to him? No, God has equipped the horse like this. And who clothed his neck with a mane? Did Job? No, not Job, but God. The neck is connected with will-power. The willpower of the horse is adorned with a robe of manes. It gives the running horse an impressive appearance.

His neck with manes also has a symbolic meaning. The neck is in many Scriptures a picture of one's own will (Deu 31:27; 2Kgs 17:14; Neh 9:16; Job 15:26; Jer 7:26). The covering with long hair or a veil speaks of a higher authority being acknowledged (Gen 24:65; Num 6:5; 1Cor 11:15). God created the horse in such a way that he does not use his strength for himself, but puts it at the service of his master.

In addition to running, the horse can leap over obstacles (verse 20). He does so like a locust. He also looks like a locust (Rev 9:7a; cf. Joel 2:4). Locusts are also sometimes called 'little horses'. When the horse plunges into battle, he lets hear a snort that is full of majesty and spreads horror around him.

Before the horse rushes forward, he scrapes his paws in the valley, as it were to drop off and then gets out of the starting blocks (verse 21). He enjoys storming into the battleground. He knows his strength and despises the enemy. So "he goes out to meet the weapons", without fear of them, because he trusts in his strength and is therefore certain of victory.

He does not know fear, he laughs at it and is not dismayed (verse 22). The clatter of weapons doesn't upset him, it doesn't upset him or confuse him. There is no turning back because the enemy has drawn the sword. Fearless the horse rushes on, sword or no sword. With true contempt for death, he goes toward the sword.

While he is running, the quiver of arrows hanging at his body rattles against him (verse 23). Other weapons it carries also rattle as he gallops forward. When he is at full speed, it is as if he is flying over the earth, so fast the legs go back and forth. While galloping, the horse trembles and roars (verse 24). Like an arrow he took off when the trumpet sounded. He was unstoppable.

Every time the horse hears the sound of the trumpet, it responds with an excitement (verse 25). He feels that it is about to take part in a battle. There is nothing more beautiful for a warhorse. He scents the battle from afar and hears the thunder of the enemy's captains and the cries of the enemy armies. It doesn't matter. It only stimulates the horse more to get into battle.

Job 39:26-30 | The Hawk and the Eagle

26 *"Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars,
Stretching his wings toward the south?*

27 *"Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
And makes his nest on high?*

28 *"On the cliff he dwells and lodges,
Upon the rocky crag, an inaccessible place.*

29 *"From there he spies out food;
His eyes see [it] from afar.*

30 *"His young ones also suck up blood;
And where the slain are, there is he."*

The last two animals that God asks Job about are birds of prey: the hawk and the eagle. God points out to Job the wonder of the hawk's migrating instinct. Did Job give this bird the instinct to spread its wings and soar toward the south at a certain time (verse 26)? The migratory instinct is still today a miracle that man looks at with amazement. The navigation of migratory birds is astonishing. They know exactly where to go and what route to follow. Who other than God has given the migratory birds this insight and equipped them with such a navigation system?

For the eagle – or probably better: vulture – the same applies. The astonishing thing about the eagle is not a migratory instinct, but its ability to rise to

great heights and make a nest on high (verse 27). Does Job command the eagle to fly high up and make a nest there? He lives and spends the night at that height inaccessible to man (verse 28). No one can reach him there or disturb him. His dwelling on the tip of a rock offers the security of a fortress.

For his food supply he can rely on his phenomenal eyesight (verse 29). As soon as he sees prey from his place in the distance, he flies toward it like a thunderbolt. With the prey in his beak, he returns to his nest. There he gives his prey to his young who suck up its blood (verse 30). His food also consists of “the slain”, i.e. animals that are so badly injured that they no longer have the strength to bring themselves to safety. They may also be people who have been so badly injured in war that they are dying on the battlefield. The eagle awaits the moment when it can feast on them.

Job 40

Job 40:1-5 | Job Humbles Himself

*1 Then the LORD said to Job,
2 "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who reproves God answer it."
3 Then Job answered the LORD and said,
4 "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
5 "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;
Even twice, and I will add nothing more."*

God has pointed out to Job the wonders of His creation. It has been shown that only He knows, understands and constantly cares for and maintains everything in all their depths, in their details and in their coherence. Man has only a very limited understanding of God's actions and then becomes small. It has become apparent that Job has made no contribution whatsoever to God's actions and could never and never will be able to do so. God is so great and he is so small.

Before God presents the conclusion in the form of a question to Job in verse 2, we are first reminded that God is in the process of speaking to or answering Job (verse 1; Job 38:1). God's answer after His speech is a challenge to Job. Job is contending with Him, "the Almighty" (verse 2; Job 13:3,15). After all, he has accused God of injustice, because He makes him suffer while he is innocent. He wanted to call God to account for this.

'Well', says God, 'here I am. But first prove that you are capable of this lawsuit by teaching Me and answering Me all the questions I have put to you in the preceding chapters.' God challenges Job to teach or correct Him with respect to His rule of the universe. By doing so, he would prove that he is an equal party for God and thus able to contend with God. Whoever criticizes God, as if he knows things better than He does, must be able to answer these questions from God, otherwise he must keep his mouth shut.

God does expect an answer to this question, He even demands that Job answers (“let him ... answer”). Because it has turned out that Job is completely ignorant about the course of events in creation, he must now choose. The choices are: Trust God in the awareness that He rules the world with wisdom, or persist in his accusation against God by which he exalts himself above God. What will Job do: trust Him or persist in accusing Him? The word is up to Job.

Then Job answers the LORD (verse 3). He acknowledges that he is too little, too insignificant (cf. Gen 32:10) to say anything against that great, exalted God and answer Him (verse 4). Seeing God in His creation and the care He spends on it, he puts his hand on his mouth, indicating that he is silencing himself. God has humbled him. He acknowledges that it is inappropriate to speak against God. He has done this again and again, but he will not do it again (verse 5). No further defense comes out of his mouth. Here the goal of God seems to have been achieved.

Yet God will speak further with him, for His goal has not yet been achieved. Job does stop accusing, but that is because he recognizes that this is inappropriate toward Someone infinitely greater and more powerful than he is. However, he has not yet confessed this as sin. Job’s answer is too poor to God. Job wouldn’t say a bad word about God’s policy anymore, but could always have his own thoughts about it. That is why God continues His work on Job in grace, because Job still has to come to repentance. Only when that has happened God will have reached His goal.

God has spoken to Job once, but He sees the need to speak to him a second time. We will hear this in the following verses and chapters.

The LORD speaks in His first speech to Job about His care for His creation and His creatures (Job 38-39). In His second speech He points out the control He has over all creatures that man cannot control (Job 40-41). As an extreme example, He points to two creatures that man is completely powerless and defenseless against. They are types or examples of the irresistible power and pride that control man by nature and against which he is utterly powerless and defenseless. The two beasts that God presents to Job point above themselves to “the spiritual [forces] of wickedness” (Eph

6:12), especially to the power of satan. These “rulers” and “powers” are also subject to the authority of the Creator (Col 1:16).

The intention here goes far beyond showing Job that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the world of nature. He does this in His first speech. In His second speech it is about convincing Job that God is also Lord of the evil spiritual powers that turn His good order upside down and overthrow it. In a way Job has been their mouthpiece by objecting to God’s government, because he felt that God did not take the right attitude toward evil (cf. Mt 16:22-23).

In the introduction to the second speech (Job 40:6-14), God talks about His power and His ability to crush evil. He looks down upon every proud power to humble and subdue it. In the two beasts that symbolize evil, we see that God is Lord and Master of evil, and deals with it as He wills and not as Job sees fit. When Job is convinced of the wrong of his criticism of God’s government, this time his answer is a response of profound repentance (Job 42:1-6).

Job 40:6-14 | God Continues With Job

6 *Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said,*
 7 *“Now gird up your loins like a man;*
I will ask you, and you instruct Me.
 8 *“Will you really annul My judgment?*
Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?
 9 *“Or do you have an arm like God,*
And can you thunder with a voice like His?
 10 *“Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity,*
And clothe yourself with honor and majesty.
 11 *“Pour out the overflowings of your anger,*
And look on everyone who is proud, and make him low.
 12 *“Look on everyone who is proud, [and] humble him,*
And tread down the wicked where they stand.
 13 *“Hide them in the dust together;*
Bind them in the hidden [place].
 14 *“Then I will also confess to you,*
That your own right hand can save you.

After Job's answer to the first speech, the LORD begins His second speech. As said, this is necessary because Job has not yet taken the place before the LORD that suits him. A deeper work has yet to be done in him. It is a proof of God's grace that He does not lose His patience with Job, but continues to answer with him (verse 6; Job 38:1). God's aim is not to crush and destroy Job, but to teach and persuade him, for which He is lovingly bending down to him.

Like His first speech, the LORD answers Job "out of the storm" (cf. Job 38:1). Also the challenge with which God turns to Job in verse 7 is similar to His challenge with which He began His first speech (Job 38:3). Again He advises Job to gird up his loins like a man. Job must gather new strength and position himself in his masculine power, for God will continue to "ask" him. After all, Job himself has challenged God with the words "call, and I will answer" (Job 13:22). There will be new issues that will demand all his attention. He will have to listen carefully and then answer.

God has also asked him questions in the previous chapters. But the tone in which He now speaks to Job is stricter. This is necessary to reach the depths of Job's heart. We already see this in the first question God asks (verse 8). In the previous chapter God said that Job darkened His counsel by words without knowledge (Job 38:2). Now God is pointing out to Job that things are even worse for him, because he wants to annul His judgment, i.e. to declare it invalid. Job has said that God turns things around by not punishing the wicked who deserve punishment and punishing him who does not deserve punishment.

Job has declared God guilty of committing injustice, bending the law (Job 27:2). For God has punished him, an innocent one. Job has made this accusation because he sees himself as a righteous one. According to his conviction there is nothing wrong with him and despite that, God is punishing him anyway. Then there is something wrong with God. He accuses God in order to prove himself right. God is going to make it clear to Job that he considers himself to be righteous, which neither is his right nor true. Someone who is righteous gives everyone what is due to him and above all to God. That is where Job went wrong. Only he still has to see this for himself, and that is what God is doing.

God cannot simply ignore this serious accusation. However, He does not confront Job with his erroneous statements, but with Himself, with His power and omnipotence (verse 9). If Job thinks he has to take the floor against Him, he must first prove that he is His equal, that he is a match for Him. Let him show his arm. The arm of God symbolizes His power in salvation and in judgment (Psa 44:3; 89:13; Isa 59:16; Eze 20:33-34). What does the “arm of the flesh” (2Chr 32:8) of Job mean? Is he as strong as God? If so, then Job can be a judge, because power is needed to do justice.

And what about the voice of Job? Can he thunder with his voice like God (Job 37:4-5)? When God speaks, creation vibrates. In His voice “the thunder of His power” sounds (Job 26:14). And what happens when Job speaks? Nothing at all. Both his physical strength and the power of his words vanish into nothingness compared to the power of God’s deeds and words.

Let Job stand up as a judge and adorn himself “with eminence and dignity”, so that everyone can see that he is above the matter with which he must concern himself (verse 10). He should act like God and, like God, clothe himself “with honor and majesty” (Psa 104:1). Then he can sit on the throne and show that he can rule the world better than God.

When he is adorned and clothed with such excellences, he can act against evil and “pour out the overflowings” of his anger (verse 11). Then he can do what God fails to do. After all, God makes nothing of it. His government is no good. This is evident from the way He treats Job. Well, Job has to show that he can eradicate all injustice in the world. If he knows so well what to do with the proud, let him “look on everyone who is proud” and humble them by his gaze, without overlooking one.

The word “look” means to look harshly and threateningly, so that the one who is looked on realizes that the judge knows him through and through and that he cannot hide anything from him. God can. This humbles the proud one. He has nothing left to hold on to, nothing he can boast about or hide behind, because the Judge sees through him. With this God points to one of the many examples of His power and asks Job to imitate Him in this.

Job must not only look on and make low everyone who is proud, he must also look on everyone who is proud and humble or subdue him (verse 12; cf. Isa 2:11-12). Making low takes away from him in his pride. Hum-

bling him means compelling him to do his will. Job must also deal with the wicked. He must tread them down “where they stand”. This means judgment without delay. Wherever they are, it must be done so that they can no longer commit any wickedness. Isn’t that what Job expects God to do, but what He doesn’t do? Then he must show it himself.

After the execution of judgment Job must ensure that the proud and wicked are hidden “in the dust” of the earth together (verse 13). They must disappear completely out of sight. To underline the definitiveness of their judgment, Job must bind them, or: their faces, in the hidden. In this way he places a double darkness on these criminals. They are already hidden in the dust, and now a blindfold is added. In this way they are no longer seen by anyone, and they can no longer see anyone. Someone whose face is wrapped, sees nothing anymore. It happens to those sentenced to death (Est 7:8).

‘Look Job’, God says, ‘if you can do this with the wicked, I will confess to you (verse 14) that you are the powerful man who can turn his words into deeds. Your own right hand has so much power that you have saved yourself from the wicked and from all kinds of difficult situations. You don’t need help from anyone. Then it is proved that you are equal to Me and that you can sue Me for a lawsuit.’

We can summarize the message of this introduction in such a way that Job cannot be saved by his own right hand, but only by God’s right hand, and that he is absolutely no match for God, for he is not equal to God. Job must acknowledge God not only as Creator, but also as Savior. God is the only One worthy of all praise, not Job.

Job 40:15-24 | Behemoth

15 *“Behold now, Behemoth, which I made as well as you;
He eats grass like an ox.*

16 *“Behold now, his strength in his loins
And his power in the muscles of his belly.*

17 *“He bends his tail like a cedar;
The sinews of his thighs are knit together.*

18 *“His bones are tubes of bronze;*

His limbs are like bars of iron.

19 *"He is the first of the ways of God;*

Let his maker bring near his sword.

20 *"Surely the mountains bring him food,*

And all the beasts of the field play there.

21 *"Under the lotus plants he lies down,*

In the covert of the reeds and the marsh.

22 *"The lotus plants cover him with shade;*

The willows of the brook surround him.

23 *"If a river rages, he is not alarmed;*

He is confident, though the Jordan rushes to his mouth.

24 *"Can anyone capture him when he is on watch,*

With barbs can anyone pierce [his] nose?

There is, of course, no response from Job to what God said to him in the previous verses. He can practice nothing, nothing at all, of what God has told him. God is the only One Who can do everything to which He has called Job. Job is not God. He is only a creature, while God is sovereign and omnipotent.

God is going to demonstrate that sovereignty and omnipotence even further by presenting two of His greatest works of creation to Job:

1. Behemoth, a beast that lives mainly on the land, and
2. Leviathan, a beast that lives more in the sea.

They show His power and majesty like no other of His works of creation.

God reminds Job of the first beast: "Behold now, Behemoth", that mighty beast (verse 15). It is not clear what kind of beast it was. It cannot be compared to any beast we know. It has been assumed that it was an elephant or a rhino. But if we read the description, it takes some imagination to recognize either beast in it. The most plausible explanation is that it concerns a certain kind of dinosaur, which we know were enormous beasts. We don't know those beasts, but apparently Job does, because God can point them out to him.

In any case, God made that beast, which in size and power far surpasses Job. That beast is a creature of Him, just like Job is: "Which I made as well

as you.” That enormous beast and Job both emerged from His hand on the same day of creation, the sixth, and are constantly in His hand. God is their Lord, He is above them.

Then God is going to describe the characteristics of this beast. He begins with the food. Behemoth is an herbivore, for “he eats grass like an ox”. The meaning of his name also points to this. The Hebrew word *behemoth* is the plural of *behema* and means ‘cattle’. The plural form is used here to emphasize size and importance. This indicates that ‘cattle’ should be understood as ‘giant cattle’.

The fact that his vegetable food is mentioned as a special characteristic seems to mean that this would not be expected of such a giant monster. It does not mean that we have a sweet little beast in front of us, but that we see God’s creative wisdom in this. God created this beast in such a way that it eats grass “like an ox”, just like the cattle from which its name is derived.

From the further description we can conclude that the power of that beast far surpasses that of man. Job should take a look at his loins (verse 16). What a strength they radiate. And then the muscles of his belly, what a power. The beast is also able to make his tail, that usually will drag over the ground, like a cedar, turning it into a kind of battering ram (verse 17). This characteristic also makes it clear that this cannot be a rhino, as some Bible translations suggest by translating the word ‘behemoth’ with rhino. Surely we cannot say that the short, blunt tail of a rhino looks like a cedar tree.

The sinews of its thighs resemble braided cables. The sinews connect the muscles to the bones. His individual bones resemble tubes of bronze and the whole of his bones resemble a skeleton of bars of iron (verse 18). The beast has a metal frame.

What God tells Job about this beast must make him deeply impressed by the Creator of it. God has given this beast this unparalleled massiveness, strength and size. What man can measure up to such a beast? Who is capable of subjugating such a beast? It was already impossible with almost all the beasts mentioned in the previous chapters. But here it is totally excluded. Only God has power over this beast.

In the middle of the description of the beast the testimony sounds: “He is the first of the ways of God” (verse 19). Of all the beasts that God has made, Behemoth is the largest and most impressive. A comparison with two remarkable passages in the Bible may help to understand the meaning of “the first of the ways of God”. In Isaiah 14 the judgment is announced on the king of Babylon and in Ezekiel 28 on the city of Tyre (Isa 14:1-12; Eze 28:1-10). In both cases, the message of judgment begins with the reference to real places and people, just like many other judgments in the chapters before and after.

But then the description suddenly goes far beyond earthly relations (Isa 14:12-15; Eze 28:11-19). Clearly, in both cases, God refers to the driving force behind the self-satisfied, proud, and ungodly systems and which this power uses. God refers directly to satan.

We can assume, with due caution, that satan is the creature rightly titled “the first of the ways of God”. The invincibility of Behemoth by man is therefore a picture of the much stronger adversary satan, who can also use beasts for carrying out his intentions (cf. Gen 3:1-5).

But the deadly power, the sword, God Himself has given to the beast, while He still has complete control over it. The first two chapters of Job clearly show that satan can go no further in his destructive acts than God allows him.

When He made Behemoth, God also provided him with “his sword”. This means one of the fingers of his paw that looks like a sword. He finds his food on the mountains, where all the beasts of the field play (verse 20). That conjures up a lovely scene. There seems to be no threat emanating from this beast.

On the contrary, the colossal beast radiates calmness. The colossus looks for a place where he finds protection from the burning sun and lies down to sleep under shady trees (verses 21-22). He looks for “the covert of the reeds and the marsh”, which is an area rich in water. When the weather turns and the river Jordan becomes wild, you will not see him tremble (verse 23). He is not impressed by rushing water, but remains calm. The mention of the river Jordan is interesting, because it is a further indication

that the land of Uz where Job lived (Job 1:1) was in the area of the later Edom.

Although there seems to be no direct threat from this giant beast, no one will dare attempt to capture it (verse 24). "Capture him when he is on watch" means to catch him while he is looking, not sleeping. Nobody can pierce his nose with barbs to take him away. His strength is so great that no one dares come near him.

The overall impression of this mighty creature is that he is full of power and afraid of no one. The greatest violence of nature does not bother him. At the same time, he seems to mean no harm. This makes him a striking picture of satan as "an angel of light" (2Cor 11:14). Satan was created by God as the chief angel. He "had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Eze 28:12b). But he abused what God gave him for himself and became satan.

Behind the kind face satan can show a devastating and destructive force is hidden. He is the "friendly" liar, who is out to murder, for he is also the murderer of men from the beginning (Jn 8:44). His destructive power is presented in the next beast, Leviathan. None of mankind fathoms satan, and no one is able to tame him or bind him. Only God has complete authority over satan.

Also the believers who live in fellowship with God and have His Word as a guideline for their life, see through him, because they are not ignorant of his schemes (2Cor 2:11). But they are no match for him either. The only safe place to be preserved from the deceptions of satan is Christ. Christ has bound satan, "the strong one", in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11; 12:29) and has overcome him on the cross (Heb 2:14-15).

Job 41

Job 41:1-9 | Leviathan

1 *"Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?
Or press down his tongue with a cord?*
2 *"Can you put a rope in his nose
Or pierce his jaw with a hook?*
3 *"Will he make many supplications to you,
Or will he speak to you soft words?*
4 *"Will he make a covenant with you?
Will you take him for a servant forever?*
5 *"Will you play with him as with a bird,
Or will you bind him for your maidens?*
6 *"Will the traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him among the merchants?*
7 *"Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
Or his head with fishing spears?*
8 *"Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle; you will not do it again!*
9 *"Behold, your expectation is false;
Will you be laid low even at the sight of him?*

The second beast that God presents to Job is Leviathan, a sea creature also made by Him (Psa 104:26). The description shows a beast that has a very different character from the previous beast. It is not an herbivore, like Behemoth, but a predator. The first beast shows the soft, peaceful, feminine side, the second beast shows the brute, ferocious side and is out to destroy. Neither of them can be conquered by humans.

The sea in which this beast lives is a picture of rebellious, wicked powers in general and of raging nations in particular (Isa 17:12-13; 57:20; Psa 65:7; Rev 17:15). Therefore there is no more sea on the new earth (Rev 21:1). But now it is still so that satan rages therein and makes her boil (Job 41:31). We see in Leviathan the character of satan as a "roaring lion" (1Pet 5:8). He is

completely insensitive and unapproachable, because his heart is “hard as a stone” (verse 24). God will crush him completely (Psa 74:14; cf. Rom 16:20).

God begins by asking Job if he could draw this great beast out of the water with a fishhook, as if it were a fish that you could easily catch with a fishing rod (verse 1). The question of God indicates the impossibility for Job to catch that beast. What Job cannot do, God can do (cf. Eze 29:3-4; 38:3-4; Isa 37:29).

Then God points Job to the tongue in the mouth of the beast. Is Job able to press down his tongue with a cord, i.e. tie it to the lower jaw? The tongue is used to taste and swallow food. When the tongue is tamed, the beast can no longer swallow. But is Job able to control the tongue? That too is impossible for Job. He can’t even catch it and drag it toward him, let alone get so close that he could grab it by his mouth to bind his tongue. By the way, it would be his end, for the beast would devour him.

It is remarkable that the tongue is explicitly mentioned here. Satan is the “father of lies” (Jn 8:44), and he incites the tongues of men to speak evil (cf. Jam 3:6). “But no one can tame the tongue; it [is a] restless evil [and] full of deadly poison” (Jam 3:8). But who can? The Lord Jesus! He will finally bring every tongue under His authority. Even the tongue of satan will swear by Him (Isa 45:23) and confess Him as Lord (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:11).

God continues to tell Job if he can show by any act that he is in control of Leviathan. Is Job able to put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook (verse 2)? These too are actions that require great courage and strength, because they require him to get close to the beast. Job will not dare, for it will result in certain death. He has no power to curb this evil power, which is a picture of satan. Only God has that power.

Also here we see that God uses the picture of Leviathan for satan and also for anti-godly powers (e.g. Egypt and Assyria) and persons (e.g. Pharaoh, Gog and Sennacherib) used by satan, as He does more often in the Bible. We see that God does exactly what He asks of Job here:

“Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, ... I will put hooks in your jaws” (Eze 29:3-4);

“Behold, I am against you, O Gog, ... I will ... put hooks into your jaws” (Eze 38:3-4);

Sennacherib king of Assyria ... I will put My hook in your nose” (Isa 37:21,29).

In verse 3 God points out the character of the beast. Does Job think that the beast is willing to beg him not to kill him and to speak sweet, soft words because he recognizes his boss in Job? God here speaks about the beast in a human way, but it makes the intention clear. This beast will never surrender to man and will never be willing to make a covenant with him (verse 4). Job will never succeed in employing him “for a servant forever”.

This situation is the consequence of the Fall. Then man lost the dominion that God had given him over the beasts (Gen 1:28) and became a slave to satan with all that he had dominion over. Satan is now “the ruler of the world” (Jn 14:30) and “the god of this age” (2Cor 4:4). We therefore see behind this beast the picture of satan looming up, who will never make a deal with man. He knows that he has man in his power. Only God is above him, as is everyone who is in Christ.

Leviathan, a picture of satan, does not allow to be played with like birds that are captured (verse 5). He is not a toy for little girls, not even if Job would tie him up so that he cannot leave. This is an important warning. Even today there are many people who playfully use evil powers through occult practices (such as turning a glass, commuting, soothsaying) and are fascinated by them. They should know that satan never puts his power at the service of man as entertainment, but pursues his own goals.

He is also not a merchandise for traders, from which profit can be made by several merchants because it is such an enormous beast with many parts of its body (verse 6). He cannot be caught, killed, cut up and sold in parts. He does not let himself be pushed around. When people make large profits with the help of the power of satan and earn their living with it (Acts 16:16), they make themselves dependent on him, a dependence that will usually cost them their souls.

Job should also take a good look at the skin of the beast (verse 7). Can he fill it with harpoons and spears, so that the beast will be killed? He cannot,

for his skin is a scaly armor (Job 41:16). The same goes for his head. You won't get a fish harpoon through that.

The last suggestion to Job that he can show that he is the master of this monster is to put his hand on him (verse 8). No fishhook, no rope, no spears, no fish harpoon, but his hand. Does Job have so much power in his hand, that he can hold the beast under it and make it feel that he is the boss? Job has to think of the (short) battle the beast would have with him, after which he would be devoured. He would never do it again, because he would never be able to do it.

Any expectation to overpower this monster is a vain expectation, a lie (verse 9). Just when you see that beast, you are nothing. Your courage sinks, you are caught by fear and you collapse. With this God's presentation to Job of Leviathan ends. It has become clear that Job is no match for this monster and that his power is nothing compared to that of this beast. He can in no way exercise any authority over this creature of God. All he can do is look upon it with awe and trembling and stay at a safe distance from it.

God here shows Job how hopeless a dispute with the Almighty is for him. Man trembles and loses his courage by the mere sight of one of God's creatures. Overwhelmed by fear, he withdraws from that power and runs away. How, then, can he presume to enter into a dispute with God? What hope can he have of a lawsuit with Him (cf. Job 13:3; 23:3)?

In the next section God speaks further about Leviathan, but then in connection with the power He has over this mighty beast. Then it becomes clear how powerful He is.

Job 41:10-34 | Leviathan (continued)

10 *"No one is so fierce that he dares to arouse him;
Who then is he that can stand before Me?*
11 *"Who has given to Me that I should repay [him]?
[Whatever] is under the whole heaven is Mine.*
12 *"I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
Or his mighty strength, or his orderly frame.*
13 *"Who can strip off his outer armor?
Who can come within his double mail?*

14 *"Who can open the doors of his face?
Around his teeth there is terror.*

15 *"[His] strong scales are [his] pride,
Shut up [as with] a tight seal.*

16 *"One is so near to another
That no air can come between them.*

17 *"They are joined one to another;
They clasp each other and cannot be separated.*

18 *"His sneezes flash forth light,
And his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.*

19 *"Out of his mouth go burning torches;
Sparks of fire leap forth.*

20 *"Out of his nostrils smoke goes forth
As [from] a boiling pot and [burning] rushes.*

21 *"His breath kindles coals,
And a flame goes forth from his mouth.*

22 *"In his neck lodges strength,
And dismay leaps before him.*

23 *"The folds of his flesh are joined together,
Firm on him and immovable.*

24 *"His heart is as hard as a stone,
Even as hard as a lower millstone.*

25 *"When he raises himself up, the mighty fear;
Because of the crashing they are bewildered.*

26 *"The sword that reaches him cannot avail,
Nor the spear, the dart or the javelin.*

27 *"He regards iron as straw,
Bronze as rotten wood.*

28 *"The arrow cannot make him flee;
Slingstones are turned into stubble for him.*

29 *"Clubs are regarded as stubble;
He laughs at the rattling of the javelin.*

30 *"His underparts are [like] sharp potsherds;
He spreads out [like] a threshing sledge on the mire.*

31 *"He makes the depths boil like a pot;
He makes the sea like a jar of ointment.*

32 *"Behind him he makes a wake to shine;
One would think the deep to be gray-haired.*

33 *"Nothing on earth is like him,
One made without fear.*

34 *"He looks on everything that is high;
He is king over all the sons of pride."*

God continues to speak to Job about Leviathan, but He changes the form of address. He no longer speaks in questioning form, but in descriptive form. The previous section deals with the relationship of this beast to Job. In this section it is about the relationship of this beast to God. God gives an impressive description of the beast. He points Job to different parts of the body. The intention is to make it extra clear Who He is in comparison with this mighty, dangerous beast. He is the only One Who has complete control over it. After the inability of man in the face of this monster has been demonstrated, here follows the climax in the complete authority of God over him.

There is no one, neither Job nor any other man, who dares to come near Leviathan to awaken him (verse 10). The meaning is clear. God says here: If one of My creatures is so formidable that man does not dare to challenge him, how can man enter into battle with the great Creator? In this we can hear a rebuke to Job. After all, Job said that he wanted to submit his case to God so that God would justify him.

If the creature is so impressive, for whom no one can stand, who can stand before its Creator (cf. Psa 76:7)? This is even more daring and dangerous than defying Leviathan. Can Job, who said he would come to meet God "as a prince" if he had the chance (verse 11; Job 31:37)? If man is unable to catch a creature of the Almighty by surprise and submit to serve him, how can he expect to force the Creator to grant him the favors he requests?

And would God repay him for what he has done, as if God were in his debt (cf. Rom 11:35)? With one mighty word God silences anyone who takes up the word against Him: "What is under all heaven is mine" (cf. Psa 24:1; 50:10-12). God says here: 'Everything belongs to Me, everything is subject to Me. I dispose of it according to My pleasure. No one can claim anything as his own. No one can deprive Me of anything.' This claim to the owner-

ship of all things created is made here to show Job that no one can exercise control over Someone Who is so exalted. It is therefore Job's duty to submit to Him without any complaint and to receive with gratitude from Him what He chooses to give.

After this interlude about His exaltation, God continues with the description of Leviathan. It will be a more detailed description than in the previous chapter. There it is a general description and the beast is presented as a great power. God is now going to describe the various "limbs" of the beast that confirm the general impression (verse 12). As a result, the listener will be even more deeply impressed by it and, as a consequence, by its Creator. The description of the limbs includes in particular his beak, his teeth, his skin ("outer armor"), his eyelids, his nose, his neck, and his heart.

God does not remain silent about this. He wants to emphatically draw our attention to this. He does so by talking about it, through which we get His view, the right view, on this beast. He will speak "of his mighty strength", and "his orderly frame". God knows what He is talking about. Everything that characterizes this beast, He has given him. That is about his strength and his form, the right proportions of all the limbs. In it the creativity and skill of the Creator can be admired. It isn't the admiration of the beast but the admiration of the Creator Who is capable of such a work of art.

What is visible first is "his outer armor", that is his skin (verse 13). Is there anyone who would dare to "strip off" his garment, that is to say to strip him of his skin and make him defenseless? No one has the courage to do that. Nobody dares to approach him, because his skin is a "double mail". The scales are so layered that they form a double armor. The beast is truly an unapproachable and impregnable walking fortress. With regard to satan, of whom this beast is a picture, only the Lord Jesus is the Stronger. He has taken away from this strong satan, invincible to man, "all his armor on which he had relied" (Lk 11:22) and completely "disarmed" him (Col 2:15).

And then his mouth, his mighty jaws, which here poetically are called "the doors of his face" (verse 14; cf. Psa 141:3). Who can force the beast to open his huge beak, whose jaws look like gate doors? No one shall dare to do so; for whoever does it shall be devoured by him. When he opens his jaws,

teeth appear which are an utter terror. What once is caught between those awfully big teeth is irreversibly grinded.

In verses 15-17, the strong scales with which the beast is covered are exposed. The scales are “[his] pride”. They look like strong shields. Each scale is attached to the skin as a tight seal. They are so tightly connected and are so close together, “that no air can come between them”. They lie on the beast like tiles on a house. It gives the impression of a solid whole in which there is not a single weak spot, not a single hole. It has been laid like an artistic mosaic by God on this beast. The scales are glued together and interlock in a way that makes separation between the scales impossible. There is no gap and no gap can be forced.

A sneeze from the beast is impressive. In verses 18-21, God describes in poetic language what becomes visible during a sneeze, whereby we can probably best think of a sneeze in the sunlight. A sneeze can be caused by a stimulation of the nose as a result of looking in the sun. When the beast sneezes (verse 18), numerous drops, moisture particles, come out of its nose and mouth. In this beast, this is an enormous bundle of water particles, which in sunlight looks like an enormous bundle of light spreading light. During the sneeze, the eyes light up, reflecting the glistening of the dawning day, and they become like “the eyelids of the morning”.

A similar effect can be seen in the moisture particles coming out of his mouth (verse 19). They look like torches in the sunlight from which fiery sparks leap forth. The vapor coming out of his nostrils is reminiscent of smoke, just as it comes from “a boiling pot and [burning] rushes” (verse 20). The breath coming out of his mouth seems to set the whole environment on fire as if it were coal (verse 21). The mass of water that comes out of his mouth when he sneezes, looks like the flame of a fire-breathing mountain in the sunlight.

In the book of Revelation, beasts, horses in that case, are described of which it is said, “and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone” (Rev 9:17). They are symbols of demonic powers connected to hell. The symbolic description of the manifestations of Leviathan as torches, fiery sparks, smoke, fire and flame indicates once again that this beast represents a demonic power with a relationship to hell. Incidentally,

it may be that God really did make this monster spit fire. A sea dragon could have had an explosion-producing mechanism to make it a real fire breathing dragon. [http://creationwiki.org/Fire_breathing_dragon]

His enormous neck is the seat of his strength (verse 22). Wherever he goes, dismay leaps before him. Everything and everyone flees, for fear of being grabbed and devoured by him. The beast is one great mass of flesh (verse 23). But every softness and weakness are lacking. It is a solid, contiguous whole. There is no movement in it. If you try to push your finger into it, it feels like steel.

The beast is totally insensitive to what it does to others. God indicates this by saying of this beast that his heart is “hard as stone” (verse 24). He emphasizes the hardness of his heart by adding that his heart is as hard “as a stone, even as hard as a lower millstone”. The lower millstone is the hardest of the two millstones and is also immovable. Everything that needs to be grinded is placed on it.

Here again God speaks in human language about this beast, a beast that knows no fear. It again makes it clear that this monster has a symbolic meaning and that he represents satan. Satan also has a heart of stone. He is a ruthless and unparalleled monster who is only out to devour and destroy.

So is Leviathan. As the beast raises himself up and moves, it immediately becomes dangerous (verse 25). This terrifying monster inspires fear. The strong, those who are otherwise fearless, are overwhelmed by fear. When he crashes the protection behind which the strong believe they are safe, they are completely upset and do not know where to go from fear. They flee in all directions.

There is no fighting against him (verse 26). Any attempt by a man with any weapon to subdue this monstrous apparition is futile. Nothing bothers him. He considers sword, spear, lance or arrow as straw (verse 27). Whoever is given the chance to strike him with the sword, stands the next moment unarmed, for the sword has been smashed upon him. You might as well hit him with a straw, because the effect of both is the same, namely none. Using a weapon of bronze against him to defeat him is equivalent to using “rotten wood”. He doesn’t bother, he doesn’t care.

He is not impressed by distance weapons used as an arrow and slingstones (verse 28). For an arrow pointed at him, he does not flee. Stones thrown at him hit him as if they were stubble. The same goes for clubs that would be used against him (verse 29). The javelin that vibrates in the hand of the thrower to be thrown at him is a joke to him. That weapon can't hurt him either, let alone kill him. This beast is afraid of nothing and no one. He is inviolable and cannot be intimidated.

The parallel with satan is obvious, because no one can stand up to satan. But the Lord Jesus can. He has come to him and conquered him (Lk 11:22). Just as satan cannot be conquered by a mortal, the flesh in the believer cannot be tamed by himself (Rom 8:7). Only through the Spirit of life is it possible to give the flesh no chance to assert itself (Gal 5:16; Rom 8:13b).

The underparts of Leviathan's are sharp points that are compared to "sharp potsherds" (verse 30). When he lies in the mud and moves on his belly, the trace he leaves looks as if a threshing sledge has been pulled over it. In the depths of the sea he rages so wildly that he makes the sea "boil like a pot" (verse 31). It is a jar in which various ointments is brought to a boil.

In his course through the water, he draws a trail behind him that is, as it were, a shining path on the dark surface of the sea (verse 32). The white foam, which we also see behind the propeller of a boat, resembles silvery-white hair. The comparison with gray-haired also brings up the thought of enforcing respect (cf. Lev 19:32).

With this, God ends His description of this dreadful, frightening and awe-inspiring creature. He states that "nothing on earth is like him" (verse 33). This beast towers high above all His works of creation. At the same time, we are reminded that this beast was "made" by Him, though with the curious characteristic of being "without fear". He is and remains only a creature. But also this creature was created by God with a purpose, as shown in the following verses.

It is a beast that is characterized by a special pride. He stands above all that is high and looks down upon it as subordinate (verse 34). It points both to the huge stature of the beast through which it stands above every other creature and to its proud, arrogant attitude toward every other creature.

“He is king”, the most proud, the most important, of all the proud beasts. He is at the head of all God’s creative works.

Here, too, the parallel with satan is obvious. We see in this monstrous creature the power of God to create a covering cherub who becomes arrogant and therefore becomes satan, the adversary of God (Eze 28:12-17). This is not to instill fear in us of satan, but of God Himself. The greatest hostile power in the universe is nothing but a creature of God, a creature that He dominates and controls and uses for His purpose (cf. Rom 9:17). He is God.

This takes nothing away from the responsibility of satan who, as the most important, privileged angel, has rebelled against God. God will judge him for that. God is always and in all things perfect Lord and Master. Nothing ever gets out of hand with Him. And not only that. He also never has to adjust anything, because otherwise things are in danger of going wrong. He has everything perfectly under control. Everything serves His purpose, even though we do not always understand the path He chooses to reach that goal.

God has spoken to Job severely, but never mocked him. By ‘meeting’ with the two most impressive beasts God has created, Job must learn that he is utterly powerless to judge an evildoer. God also wants to teach him that His actions sometimes go beyond human logic and that man cannot explain everything He does. If Job is so incapable of constructing, maintaining, or subjugating some of God’s works of creation, it is unthinkable that he can accuse the Creator of them of maladministration.

Job 42

Job 42:1-6 | Job Retracts and Repents

*1 Then Job answered the LORD and said,
2 "I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."
4 'Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.'
5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;
6 Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes."*

When the LORD has finished speaking, Job answers Him again (verse 1). His answer testifies of a profound work of God's Spirit in him. He has understood the message that it is only about what God wants and that He carries out that will, without giving an account of it to man. Job submits to the government of God and comes to the confession which the psalmist will express centuries later: "I know, LORD, that your judgments are just" (Psa 119:75a).

Job has acknowledged in his first answer that he is insignificant (Job 40:4); now in his second answer he acknowledges God's omnipotence, that He can do whatever He purposes (verse 2). He acknowledges that God not only cares for all creation and controls the world, but also does so in his life. God has a plan for each of His own. He carries out that plan for their benefit. This is apparent from the life of Job. If He deems oppression necessary, He brings it into the life of His own. If His purpose is achieved by oppression, He takes it away.

In verse 3 Job repeats what God said to him in Job 38:2, who he is, that he darkens or hides His counsel. This repetition means that Job confesses

his sin. Confessing sin means repeating God's judgment of that sin and agreeing that His judgment on it is righteous. Job acknowledges that he has confessed more than he understood (cf. Psa 131:1). He has made a judgment about things that are too wonderful for him and that he does not know (cf. Psa 73:21-22).

He acknowledges that he has taken an inappropriate attitude toward God by commanding Him to listen to him, for he would tell Him something (verse 4; Job 13:22). He would interrogate God and then God would have to answer him. Job had called God to account and of course he was not allowed to do that.

Job comes to complete surrender to God. After hearing God speak in His first speech, he has come to the understanding that he should not contradict God (Job 40:5). That is all well and good, but it is not enough, because he has contradicted God and he has yet to confess that. He does so in response to God's second speech. In it he has seen God in His works and how He controls everything (verse 5). That breaks him. He despises himself and repents "in dust and ashes" (verse 6), that is, sitting in literal dust and ashes which at the same time serve as symbols of mourning (Job 2:8; Jer 6:26; 25:34; Jona 3:6). What he says now, he did not say in the days of his prosperity.

Job 42:7-9 | The Prayer of Job for His Friends

7 It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. 8 Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you [according to your] folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has." 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite [and] Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job.

When Job is where he should be, the LORD turns to Job's friends in burning wrath (verse 7). He turns to Eliphaz, who is most likely the oldest of the

friends, and first took up the word against Job. It says remarkably that this happens “after the LORD had spoken these words to Job” and not ‘after Job had retracted and repented in dust and ashes’. Job is where he should be, but God has brought him there by speaking to him and showing Himself to him. Now He also wants to bring His friends to confess their sins.

Toward them God justifies Job, whom He calls, as in the beginning of this book, “My servant” (Job 1:8; 2:3). Job has also been His servant during his suffering. God tells Eliphaz that Job has spoken of Him what is “right” and that he and his two friends have not done so. Surely Job has said things about God that are not right. But God protects Job against his friends. He sees that even during Job’s wrong statements about Him, his heart was focused on Him. This enables Him to pass by the sinful words Job spoke about Him.

This attitude of Job toward God was lacking with friends. Their hearts were not turned toward God, but toward Job. They presented to Job a God Who judges evil in strict righteousness and does so by bringing disasters upon people. Without having any proof of sins Job would have committed, they said to him that God was acting in this way because he had sinned. As a result, they have not spoken of God what is right and presented a completely wrong image of Him to Job and the bystanders. They did not do wrong in the first place to Job, but to God. That is why His wrath was kindled against them.

God also wants to be good to the friends and reconcile them with Himself and with Job. His wrath can only be appeased in the way He indicates and that is by bringing burnt offerings to Him and by intercession of Job for them (verse 8). The friends must go to Job with “seven bulls and seven rams”. That is a great sacrifice (Num 23:1; Eze 45:22-23). It must be a great sacrifice because their sin is great and because they are distinguished men with an exemplary role.

In the presence of Job, they must sacrifice these burnt offerings for themselves to God. By doing so they acknowledge that they can only exist before God on the basis of the burnt offering. We know that God sees in it the sacrifice of His Son, Who offered Himself to God as a burnt offering.

The Innocent died in the place of the guilty. That is how the friends came to terms with God.

Now between them and Job things has to be made right. Job is asked to pray for them. Their asking Job to do so is a confession of their sins to him. When Job prays for them, it means that he accepts their confession and forgives them. God adds that the prayer of Job is the condition for Him not to do with them according to their foolishness. He repeats that they have deserved His wrath because they did not speak of Him what is right, "as My servant Job has". Bringing burnt offerings is therefore not enough if something also needs to be put right with another person. God does not forgive until things are made right with all concerned.

The three friends, who are now mentioned separately with their names, humble themselves (verse 9). Someone may be chiefly responsible, such as Eliphaz, whose name is only mentioned (verse 7), but he cannot offer an offering for the guilt others have brought upon themselves. Everyone has to do this personally. The three friends obey God's command and bow under His judgment. By doing so they prove that they love God more than their own prestige and that is a great joy for God. That they have brought the offerings prescribed by God is not mentioned, but is enclosed in the words that they "did as the LORD told them".

Nothing else is said about the acceptance of the offering by the LORD. That is not a question. Of course He accepted it. What is said, however, is that the LORD accepted the prayer of Job. That puts a special emphasis on the prayer of Job for his friends. When Job has prayed, everything is all right between the friends and God and between the friends and Job.

The fact that God accepts the prayer of Job also means that Job has been fully restored in his relationship with God, although in his outer circumstances nothing has changed yet. Job can be an intercessor. His sins have been forgiven him, allowing him to pray a powerful prayer as a righteous one (Jam 5:16). He is again fit to do a service for other believers. We also see this service of intercession for example with Abraham (Gen 20:7,17), Moses (Exo 32:30-32; Num 11:2; 21:7) and Samuel (1Sam 12:19,23). Above all, Job here is a type of the Lord Jesus as the intercessor (Rom 8:34).

Job 42:10-17 | The Blessed End of Job

10 The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold. 11 Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold. 12 The LORD blessed the latter [days] of Job more than his beginning; and he had 14,000 sheep and 6,000 camels and 1,000 yoke of oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. 13 He had seven sons and three daughters. 14 He named the first Jemimah, and the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. 15 In all the land no women were found so fair as Job's daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. 16 After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations. 17 And Job died, an old man and full of days.

When Job is free in his heart from the accusations of his friends, and he has prayed for them and thereby proved his forgiveness to them, God starts to bless him (verse 10). God gives him twice as much as he has lost (cf. Isa 40:2; 61:7; Zec 9:12).

Are the friends then proven right that prosperity is the result of piety? Or even worse, is satan proven right in asserting that serving God is very rewarding? The answer to these questions is that none of them are proven right. Job did not expect this and certainly did not strive for it. He does not get his prosperity because of a God-fearing life, but because of an unexpected goodness from God. Satan is certainly not right, because Job did not say goodbye to God when He took away from him everything, which satan had suggested.

God is sovereign to take away blessing, but can give it again with the same sovereignty. James writes of the blessing that Job receives: "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and [is] merciful" (Jam 5:11). The end of the Lord is the blessing He gives Job. God humbles us and puts us to the test in order "to do good for you at the end" (Deu 8:16). He wants us to say: "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Psa 119:71).

When the LORD has brought a turn in Job's life fate "all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before" come to him (verse 11). There appears to be no resentment with Job; there are no bitter feelings that they abandoned him during his trial (Job 19:14-19), for "they ate bread with him in his house". When he suffered deeply, they gave him a wide berth, but now they are coming to see him again. And Job receives them with the same hospitality as before (Job 31:31-32).

As they sit with him at the table, they express their deepest sympathy to him and comfort him "for all the adversities that the LORD had brought on him". They also know that the adversities that had afflicted him had been brought on him by the LORD. The piece of money and the ring of gold that each of them brought may simply have been gifts as proofs of compassion. They may also have served as 'starting capital' for his new fortune.

Job receives from the LORD more abundance than he had before everything was taken away from him (verse 12; cf. Job 8:6-7). Thus God always works. If He takes something away from us, it is to give us more in return. Grace always gives us much more than we have lost through sin. We have lost paradise because of our sin. Grace gives us back the whole of creation over which we may reign together with the Lord Jesus. That is all because of His sacrifice. We have a part in it because by grace we were allowed to accept His sacrifice.

When we see in Job 1:3 what Job used to own in cattle, we see that he is now blessed by the LORD with the double. He also gets double in children (verse 13). He had seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2). They died, but he did not lose them. He lost his cattle, not his children. They went ahead of him. He gets seven more sons and three more daughters.

Of his children only the names of his three daughters are mentioned which Job has given them (verse 14). That means we can learn something from these names. The first daughter he gives the name "Jemimah". It is a name with different meanings, such as 'the [bright] day', 'dove', 'happy'. It speaks of the bright day after the dark days of trial, the new peace, the new happiness. He gives the second daughter the name "Keziah". That name is derived from the fragrant spice cassia. A fragrant scent emanates from

Job's life. The third daughter he calls "Keren-happuch", which means "horn of the beautiful colors". That horn contained the colors with which the women dressed up. Not only did a good smell of Job go out through his daughters, but everything was pleasant to look at as well.

It is said of the daughters of Job that such fair women as they were, could not be found in all the land (verse 15). We see here that what emerges from the trial surpasses everything else in beauty and loveliness. Job can say that the old is over and everything has become new, and that the new completely outshines the old. This also applies to us in our new nature.

Job is a good father to his daughters. He not only gives them names, but also "inheritance among their brothers". There is no question of women being disadvantaged compared to men. The very fact that only their names are mentioned, and only of them is mentioned that they also get inheritance among their brothers, shows the high place they have in the thoughts of Job and of God. Peter mentions in his first letter that women are "a fellow heir of the grace of life" with their husbands (1Pet 3:7).

Job lives for 140 years after the turning point in his life's fate (verse 16). If the same is true here as for his possessions, it means that he was 70 when the disasters struck him and that he lived to be 210 years old. He sees his offspring into the fourth generation. That is a great blessing and must have been a great pleasure for him.

Then follows the news of Job's death (verse 17). He has grown old. He can look back on an eventful life in which he has seen the hand of the LORD both in his suffering and in his prosperity. He has become old and full of days. The fact that he is full of days does not mean that he is tired of life, but that he has enjoyed all that God had given him on earth. He can die in peace and go to the place of complete peace and happiness. But his history does not die ...

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