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THE POLYPHONIC VOICES OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB: A DIALOGUE ON GOD'S RELATION TO THE SUFFERING

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THE POLYPHONIC VOICES OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB:
A DIALOGUE ON GOD'S RELATION TO THE SUFFERING

MASTER'S THESIS

PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
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BY

REBECCA R. CLARK

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THESIS COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

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ABSTRACT

Suffering is an experience that can lead one to question the goodness of God. Such an experience is exemplified in the narrative of Job. It is the argument of this thesis that the dialogue in Job ultimately reveals God's character as good even in the midst of one's suffering. This argument is supported through an examination of the polyphonic voices of the book of Job. The voice of Job demonstrates the tension of the sufferer, as a perceived absence of God seems contrary to His character. And yet, Job affirms God's goodness. The voice of "the satan" demonstrates an awareness of God's power, in which the sufferer can take comfort. The voices of the friends ironically clarify how God does not interpret suffering. The voice of God offers a theological benchmark for what each of the characters have spoken of Him in Job's time of suffering. Finally, a praxis is presented based on the dialogue in Job for how to speak of/about God in times of suffering.

Dedication

To the reader whose suffering has seemed to speak louder than God's voice.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Thesis and the Task

There is a popular saying, in which one says, “God is good,” anticipating the response from others to be, “All the time.” Then, the opposite is proclaimed, “And all the time, God is good!” This declaration, usually made with much confidence, can be difficult to say in times of suffering. To the sufferer who perceives God’s goodness as dependent upon Him granting a pain-free life, there needs to be an asterisk for the phrase “all the time,” denoting that God may not in fact be considered good in times of suffering. Equating God’s goodness to one’s pain-free existence, the sufferer may begin to view God as absent, cruel, or completely non-existent. And yet, Scripture repeatedly indicates that God is perfect, right, and good. This creates tension between the accuracy of God’s goodness and the present reality of the sufferer in a world of rampant suffering.

For the sufferer, the pain can speak volumes against the goodness of God. And yet, as C.S. Lewis challenges, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”¹ With this in mind, it is apparent that one’s pain and the state of God’s goodness is often interpreted or shaped through the voices to which the sufferer listens, whether it be their own, the voice of those around them, or even the voice of God. This is certainly the case for a man named Job in the biblical narrative who questions why God would allow him to endure suffering if he is blameless. The narrative is comprised of dialogue that expresses various interpretations of why God is allowing Job to suffer. Thus, it is the task of this paper to examine what the polyphonic voices in the narrative of

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962), 74.

Job reveal about God's understanding of and relation to human suffering. In turn, this paper intends to show how such dialogue reveals God's character as good even in the midst of one's suffering, while also providing a praxis for how to speak of/about God in times of suffering.

Structure and Flow of the Argument

The voices to be examined include Job, the "friends" (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar), "the satan," and God. Each presents a particular theology of suffering. Therefore, the author will identify key themes present in the dialogue of each of these voices, in relation to how they understand God's interpretation of Job's suffering. The ultimate standard of accuracy for these voices will be God's voice. Therefore, each voice will be critiqued through the cross-reference of God's voice in the narrative. Additionally, the interpretation of each of these voices will be offered through the examination of various biblical commentators. Finally, the commentary of these voices will undergo a theological evaluation, comparing their theologies to well-known Christian voices that offer a scholarly response to God and suffering, including Christopher J. H. Wright, Timothy Keller, and C.S. Lewis. Such an evaluation will offer a critique of the voices in the narrative, as well as a framework for the praxis to be applied.

For the sake of this thesis, the narrative will be interpreted in its "final form," in accordance with Brevard Child's approach.² This approach affirms a canonical reading of the Bible.³ Thus, this thesis affirms the narrative of Job as a whole, complete unit that belongs within the biblical canon, functioning as a means of God's revelation to His people.⁴ The narrative is interpreted with the post-resurrection reality and hope of Christ presented in the biblical canon. Because this thesis views the Book of Job in its final form, the character of God, will be

² Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 75-77.

³ Childs, *Old Testament*, 75-77.

⁴ Childs, *Old Testament*, 75-77.

interpreted as synonymous with the God of the Israelites. To support this view, the first time that Job speaks about God in 1:21, he uses the title *Y^hōvâ*, noted as the proper name of the God of Israel.⁵

There are a few research limitations that are important to mention. First of all, the author did not read the text in Hebrew. While some research was done on specific words, the author is not privy to the significance of certain grammar or tone that is conveyed in the original language. Additionally, not all of the voices in the narrative were included in this study. Thus, there is still more dialogue to explore in relation to a theology of suffering in the book of Job. Finally, in choosing resources, the author did not look at various cultural perspectives/voices. Thus, further research is indeed required to cross-reference theological perspectives and explore more of the dialogue.

⁵ Richard Whitaker et al., *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Logos Research Edition (Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906).

CHAPTER TWO

THE VOICE OF JOB

Introduction

Within the book of Job, Job's voice is featured in at least 23 of the 42 chapters (it is uncertain as to who is speaking in chapter 28). A brief overview of Job's expressions demonstrates that he expresses in various forms of lament, including questioning and complaint. However, also within Job's discourse, there are moments of confession and reverence. These are common human responses in times of suffering. It is because of this that Nicholas List writes, "In the midst of crisis, whether personal or cosmic, many have found solidarity in the voice of Job."⁶

Job's Initial Response

In Job 1, Job experiences the tragic losses of his servants, livestock, and children. His physical response indicates mourning: tearing his garments and shaving his head (v. 20).⁷ Job's initial verbal response is striking: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (1:21).⁸ Clines proposes that what Job has expressed here is "a sentiment entirely in tune with the generalizations of pessimistic 'wisdom.'"⁹ It is "pessimistic" in the sense that Job is identifying with the dead, perhaps already feeling "as good as dead," after experiencing such extreme loss.¹⁰ He quotes a "wise" saying, perhaps saying it as a mere platitude. It is impossible to know the exact tone in which Job expressed this saying, whether it was said out of shock, numbness, or

⁶ Nicholas List, "Receptions of Job and Theologies of Suffering," *Stimulus* 27, no. 2 (2020): 71.

⁷ David J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 34.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced, are in the *New International Version*.

⁹ Clines, *Job*, 36.

¹⁰ Clines, *Job*, 36.

much fervor. What is important, however, is that such aphorisms are indeed theological statements.¹¹ Job's response describes his view of God.

Analyzing Job's initial statement provides a framework for not only Job's general view of God but of how God relates to his suffering. Hartley recognizes that Job 1:21 is a means of Job acknowledging, "God's sovereignty over his entire life, both for good and for ill."¹² Indeed, this is a declaration directly about God's sovereignty, with Job using God's name three times, making no mistake as to whom he is referring.¹³ This also reveals Job's interpretation of the cause of his immense suffering. Although Job 1:13-18 describes the source of Job's losses as natural disasters and human enemies, the Sabceans and Chaldeans, Job's statement demonstrates that Job looks directly to God as the One who "took away." Clines says, "He sees his human enemies and natural forces as secondary to the one who must be ultimately responsible."¹⁴ In other words, Job's vocalization credits God as the source of His suffering. In turn, Job understands that in speaking of his suffering, it is only fitting to address God.

Job meets his wife's temptation to "curse God" with a strong rebuke (2:9). Hartley notes that Job's rebuke of his wife as foolish, he uses the strongest Hebrew word for "fool."¹⁵ In doing so, Job leaves no room for her counsel to be considered as worthy. This scene with Job's wife ultimately "vocalizes the crux of the test" proposed by the satan that Job will ultimately, "curse God" (2:9).¹⁶ Job's response to his wife's outlandish proposal is one of "rebuke and resignation."¹⁷ With such a response, the narrator informs that Job "did not sin with his lips"

¹¹ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 78.

¹² Hartley.

¹³ Hartley.

¹⁴ Clines, *Job*, 37.

¹⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 84.

¹⁶ Hawley, *Book of Job*, 460.

¹⁷ Hawley, *Book of Job*, 460.

(2:10).¹⁸ Hawley writes “Job’s words as the means by which one might judge Job’s faithfulness.”¹⁹

While Job’s response was one of rebuke and resignation, it is similar to his initial response in chapter 1. Job responds with an aphorism to his wife, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” (2:10b).²⁰ Hartley explains that “The verb accept (Heb. *quibbēl*) describes an active, positive participation in what God decrees, not mere passive reception.”²¹ While Job’s wife urges him to curse God, he is urged to submit to God.

Job’s Voice of Lament

Much of Job’s verbal expression is characterized by lament. Mark Vroegop explains, “Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God’s goodness.”²² Job’s lamenting, provides a clear understanding of his theology. Vroegop writes: “...lament is rooted in what we believe. It is a prayer loaded with theology. Christians affirm the world is broken, God is powerful, and he will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise.”²³ It is no surprise, then that the book of Job, a book of immense suffering, is filled with lament.

The trajectory of Job’s lament is important. Job is speaking to God, not only *about* God. This is distinct from his friends who have a lot to say about God, yet who do not intercede on Job’s behalf. One speech in which Job expresses lament is found in Job 6 and 7. Hartley identifies “self-lament” as dominating much of this speech.²⁴ Hartley summarizes the following

¹⁸ Hawley, *Book of Job*, 460.

¹⁹ Hawley, *Book of Job*, 460.

²⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 84.

²¹ Hartley, *Job*, 84.

²² Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 26.

²³ Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, 26.

²⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 130.

lament elements: “a vivid description of one’s suffering (6:2-4; 7:3-6), the expression of distress at the behavior of one’s friends (6:14-30), anticipation of death (6:11-13; 7:8-10), and accusations against God (6:4; 7:11-16).”²⁵ In Job’s lament, his friends take the place of the enemy that typically is described in a psalm of lament.²⁶ Thus, Job expresses that even those who are supposed to be his friends are treating him like an enemy, causing him much agony.

Job’s lament also claims that God has strategically attacked him. Job uses the analogies of God striking him with arrows or marshaling orders against him (6:4). It appears that Job feels objectified by his relationship with God. Hartley writes, “He feels that he is no longer in an I-Thou relationship with God, but in an I-it relationship. God acts toward him as though he were merely a practice target.”²⁷ He thus views the trial as an indication that something changed in his relationship with God. He does not take into consideration that such a trial could have occurred without God’s spite or anger.

In chapter 10, Job asks three questions in which he aims to uncover God’s motives in allowing him to suffer. First, he asks, “Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the plans of the wicked?” (10:3). Interestingly, this is the only time in the Old Testament that God functions as the subject of the verb “oppress.”²⁸ Job wonders if God is somehow gaining from oppressing His creation.²⁹ Job’s strong language indicates that he is upset, that he feels rejected, that it would be typical for a creator to care for their creation. Job thus accuses God of smiling on the plans of the wicked; God provides a special blessing to the wicked.³⁰ And yet, the biblical narrative makes it evident that the ways of the wicked are in

²⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 130.

²⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 130.

²⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 132.

²⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 184.

²⁹ Clines, *Job*, 245.

³⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 184.

opposition to the righteous way that is pleasing to God. Thus, for Job, "...God appears to be acting in a way that would deny his very nature and discourage all moral action."³¹ Therefore, Job has begun to have a skewed theology.

Next, Job asks God, "Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees?" (10:4) This question, once again, undermines God's nature and character. In asking this question, he accuses God of having the sight of a mortal, "...which is necessarily short-sighted and may see error where there is none, or take a small error for a large."³² Thus, Job questioned if God made an error, putting himself in the position of judging God's character, actions, and ability. Job continues doing so by asking, "Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a strong man, that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin—though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand?" (10:5-7) Such a question likens God to a human, undermining His immortality.³³ If he does not intend to doubt God's immortality, then, Job is perhaps proposing that God is unnecessarily applying painful pressure on him since he should not need to use such intense methods to know Job.³⁴ By asking questions that would arouse strong negative answers, Job demonstrates his confidence in God knowledge of Job's innocence.³⁵

The doctrine of retribution is an important part of the narrative. This doctrine is summarized by Eliphaz in 4:8: "As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it."³⁶ Essentially, this doctrine associates one's behavior with what they deserve. Many of Job's questions in chapter 21 are directed at this doctrine. He asks, "Why do the wicked

³¹ Hartley, *Job*, 184.

³² B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob erklärt* (KHC; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1897), quoted in David J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 245.

³³ Clines, *Job*, 246.

³⁴ Clines, *Job*, 246.

³⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 185.

³⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 107.

live on, growing old and increasing in power?” (v. 7). Hartley identifies such a question as one that “...strikes at the center of the doctrine of retribution...”³⁷ The word Job uses for “live,” is associated with “a full, prosperous life.”³⁸ With the doctrine of retribution at the forefront of Job and his friend’s interpretation of suffering, Job takes issue with the inconsistency of the wicked prospering and retributive justice.

Job makes it clear that he does not agree with his friend’s understanding of the doctrine of retribution. Job critiques the prosperity of the wicked saying, “But their prosperity is not in their own hands, so I stand aloof from the plans of the wicked.” (21:16). And so, Job challenged the position of his friends on two fronts—asking about the prosperity of the wicked and rejecting the wicked’s means of prosperity.³⁹ Hartley explains that because Job rejects the wicked’s thoughts of prosperity being in their own hands, “...he cannot categorically be identified with them.”⁴⁰ Job also recognizes that one’s prosperity lies in the hands of God, causing him to turn to God for the One behind his own prosperity or suffering.

Featured throughout Job’s speeches are his complaints toward this God who allows such suffering. Job expresses such a complaint in 7:11-21. He opens his complaint by saying, “Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (7:11). His suffering has reached the depths of his being.⁴¹ Clines proposes that “...even if he speaks in an unaccustomed mode to God...” speaking in such anguish and complaint, he is speaking out of the sense that he has nothing to lose.⁴² Thus, in

³⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 313.

³⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 313.

³⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 315.

⁴⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 315.

⁴¹ Hartley, *Job*, 149.

⁴² Clines, *Job*, 188.

verse 12, he boldly expresses that he feels as though God has treated him like he's a monster enemy, while the doctrine of retribution would say that he did not deserve to be treated as such.⁴³

Job asks God why he has set a guard over him as if he were God's opponent.⁴⁴ In expressing such a complaint, in which God does not appear to be listening, Job conveys that he hopes that at least his couch would ease, or receive his complaint (7:13). He seems to find more comfort in the couch's ability to bear his complaint versus God's ability.⁴⁵ Even when he tries to rest and sleep, however, he has frightening dreams that he assumes are another form of attack from God, "to render him impotent before his divine opponent."⁴⁶ Enduring such unbearable affliction, Job longs for death, asks God to leave him alone, and asserts that his life has no meaning (vv. 15-16). Throughout his speeches, Job expresses that God is the ultimate source of life, and yet his suffering has so afflicted him that it detracts from his core theological understanding as he assumes that his own life has no meaning.⁴⁷ He doubts that God can make anything of his pain.

Job's complaining, "parodies two hymnic lines in praise of God's exaltation of humanity."⁴⁸ This is important, as, in his suffering, Job is moved to mock such meditative truths. Whereas the psalmist marveled at the idea that God paid attention to humanity, thus demonstrating that He values them (Ps. 8:5-6; 144:3-4), Job's despair moved him to mock such a sentiment. Job asks, "What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, that you examine them every morning and test

⁴³ Clines, *Job*, 188.

⁴⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 149.

⁴⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 149.

⁴⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 149.

⁴⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 150.

⁴⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 151.

them every moment?” (7:17-18). And so, Job makes the accusation that God has become so concerned with Job, that God perceives Job as a threat.⁴⁹

At the root of Job’s complaining is the idea that Job’s suffering has no meaning. In 9:16-17, Job complains/speculates that “Even if I summoned him and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason.” Job assumes he knows exactly how God will respond to his summoning. In this way, Job puts himself in a position of comprehending the all-knowing and all-powerful One. Specifically, Job claims that God is multiplying his wounds for “no reason.” And so, Job is complaining and questioning the justice and goodness of God.⁵⁰

Job also complains in Job 19. Although this complaint is directed at Job’s friends, it demonstrates his frustration with not being able to encounter God during his suffering. In response to his friends’ speeches, Job asks, “How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me” (vv. 2-3). Here, Job uses the plural forms of “you,” indicating that he is complaining against all of his friends.⁵¹ Hartley surmises that Job is complaining that their insults undermine his desire to encounter God in his pain, confusing his desperation for rebellion.⁵² Job pushes back saying, “If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me” (vv. 5-6). The Hebrew word translated as, “wronged,” (*’iwwēṭ*) means literally, “bend, make crooked.”⁵³ In legal terminology, this phrase “refers to an unjust, prejudicial decision that denies a defendant his rightful due (cf. Ps. 119:78; Lam. 3:36).”⁵⁴ Job

⁴⁹ Clines, *Job*, 192.

⁵⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 175.

⁵¹ Hartley, *Job*, 282.

⁵² Hartley, *Job*, 282.

⁵³ Hartley, *Job*, 284.

⁵⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 284.

complains that it is not he who has wronged God but rather God who has wronged him. With this accusation, Job also comes against Bildad's assertion that God does not pervert justice (8:3).⁵⁵

This is a major theological statement, proposing that God could do wrong or sin against a human.

While Job proposed that God could do wrong, he insists on his own innocence. This comes after undergoing many accusations and rebukes from his pious friends. In chapter 27:2-6, Job speaks to his friends for the final time and makes a vow of innocence.⁵⁶ Hartley observes this is a "complex oath" made by Job, as "it opens with an oath formula (v. 2a, c), expanded by an accusation against God contained in a relative clause (v. 2b-2d), plus a parenthetical statement that God is the source of life (v. 3), and then the oath proper asserting that he has not lied at all in his affirmations of innocence (v. 4).⁵⁷ Furthermore, Job makes two complaints against God after the opening formula: that God has denied Job of his right and that He has made his soul bitter.⁵⁸ It is the very God whom Job complains about, however, that He has sworn by.⁵⁹ This is important, as if what he has sworn ends up being false, then God would curse Job.⁶⁰ Thus, in his suffering, Job wrestles between what he will put his sworn confidence in: his own innocence or in the God that he serves. Based on what he has sworn and the ramifications at stake, however, he is clearly confident in his innocence and makes this vow in desperation.⁶¹

Job's Theological Statements of Confession and Praise

In all of Job's questioning and complaints toward God, he also makes some profound theological statements. For example, in chapter 12, Job recognizes that God is the ultimate source of everything. Hartley explains that 12:12-25 "...laud God as the ultimate source of everything,

⁵⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 284.

⁵⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 368.

⁵⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 369.

⁵⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 369.

⁵⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 369.

⁶⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 369.

⁶¹ Hartley, *Job*, 369.

light and darkness, good and evil, peace and calamity.”⁶² So, while Job had contended for his own wisdom, God is ultimately superior in wisdom.⁶³ Yet, the description he provides demonstrates “God’s destructive ability,” and thus, shows that Job truly believes that his troubles are traced back to God.⁶⁴ This theology conflicts with that of the friends whose version of “God” functions based on the doctrine of retribution.⁶⁵ Because of this, Job recognizes that his complaints are not to be settled with the “God” of his friends but with the God who allows for suffering seemingly unprovoked.⁶⁶

Although much of Job’s speech is complaining, he is also moved to confession, praise, and adoration. Job offers both confessions regarding who God is and what he feels he has done wrong. In chapter 23, after lamenting God’s lack of presence, Job confesses with conviction:

But he [God] knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread. (23:10-12).

Job is sure that God knows that he is innocent and that this trial is unmerited. He is deeply convinced that having so treasured God’s word, he has been kept from the way of sinning (see Ps. 119:11).⁶⁷ Hartley notes that, Job was combating Eliphaz’s exhortation for him to place God’s word in his heart (see 22:22), as Job confesses that he has not neglected to do so.⁶⁸

In this same chapter, Job offers a theological confession regarding God’s character. Job proclaims that God “stands alone” (23:13), or that God is one.⁶⁹ While Hartley notes that such a

⁶² Hartley, *Job*, 212.

⁶³ Hartley, *Job*, 212.

⁶⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 212.

⁶⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 212.

⁶⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 212.

⁶⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 341.

⁶⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 341.

⁶⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 341.

confession certainly alludes to the *Shema*, Job is simply saying that there is no other God.⁷⁰

While this is a profound and seemingly positive confession, it suggests Job's fear in God is not held accountable, and thus, he fears what God may carry out against him.⁷¹ It is here, then, that Job's testing causes his confidence and fear in God to be at odds.⁷²

Job also offers a confession in chapter 31:1-34, 38-40b. Rather than offering a confession of sin, however, he continues to confess his lack of sin. He offers a "negative confession" of the following fourteen sins:

1. Lust (vv. 1-4)
2. Falsehood (vv.5-6)
3. Covetousness (vv. 7-8)
4. Adultery (vv. 9-12)
5. Mistreatment of one's servants (vv. 13-15)
6. Lack of concern for the poor (vv. 16-18)
7. Failure to clothe the poor (vv. 19-20)
8. Perversion of justice against the weak (vv. 21-23)
9. Trust in wealth (vv. 24-25)
10. Worship of the heavenly bodies (vv. 26-28)
11. Satisfaction at a foe's misfortune (vv. 29-30)
12. Failure to extend hospitality to a sojourner (vv. 31-32)
13. Concealment of a sin without confession (vv. 33-34)
14. Abuse of the land (vv. 38-40b)⁷³

With such a comprehensive list of sins, Job aims to emphasize that he is void of any wrongdoing.⁷⁴ In negatively confessing these sins, he positively confesses that he has lived justly.⁷⁵ It is important to note that throughout his speeches, Job never confesses to the sin of which his friends accuse him. Knowing that he is in fact innocent, he avoids the temptation to

⁷⁰ Hartley. *Job*, 341.

⁷¹ Hartley. *Job*, 342.

⁷² Hartley. *Job*, 342.

⁷³ Hartley. *Job*, 408-409.

⁷⁴ Hartley. *Job*, 409.

⁷⁵ Hartley. *Job*, 424.

relent to the advice of his friends which motivates him to make a false confession of sin for the sake of reprieve.

Finally, Job ceases to persist in confessing his own innocence. Rather, he makes a confession about God, in that He can do all things, and thus, Job has accepted God's reply (42:2).⁷⁶ While throughout his speeches Job has persistently proclaimed that God is all-powerful, he has also repeatedly questioned God's "execution of justice."⁷⁷ After listening to God's reply, Job is reassured of God's ability to govern wisely His creation.⁷⁸ By stating that "...no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (43:2b), Job acknowledges that all that has taken place, God has permitted by His wisdom.⁷⁹ He also concedes that he cannot grasp or understand the ways of the Almighty. And so, Job confesses that "he has approached the sin of hubris by claiming to have better insight than God into matters on earth."⁸⁰ This, of course, is distinct from any sort of sin that would have led to his suffering.⁸¹ But it is here that Job humbles himself before God, rather than trying to continue pressing his case for innocence—a case that was only wrong not because Job was guilty, but because he made claims about that which is beyond human knowledge.⁸² Being humble before God, Job proves God right—in that he serves God not for his own benefit, but out of true reverence.⁸³

The last words recorded of Job are the following in 42:4-6. After longing for God's reply, and then receiving it, Job expresses that he has indeed heard His reply. In verse 5, Job explains he heard of God, whether through the teachings of others, even his friends, but now he has encountered and seen God for himself (42:5). Whereas his friends made many theological accusations explaining God's interpretation of his suffering, Job heard from God Himself. Thus, he no longer questions what God says

⁷⁶ Hartley. *Job*, 535.

⁷⁷ Hartley. *Job*, 536.

⁷⁸ Hartley. *Job*, 535.

⁷⁹ Hartley. *Job*, 536.

⁸⁰ Hartley. *Job*, 535.

⁸¹ Hartley. *Job*, 536.

⁸² Hartley. *Job*, 536.

⁸³ Hartley. *Job*, 535.

about his suffering. Habel writes, “The vision of Yahweh overwhelms him, filling him with a sense of wonder and awe and reducing all his complaints to insignificance.”⁸⁴

Job is given a heavenly perspective on earthly suffering, allowing him to realign his concerns with those of God. Although Job was innocent, in verse 6 he repents because he is a human before a holy God.⁸⁵ Job reaches the point of surrendering his fate to the One who is holy, all-knowing, and truly just. For all that Job said about God, God’s response ultimately moves him to silence. Job’s encounter shows what happens when one allows their suffering to be cast in comparison to God.

Summary

In summary, the sufferer can surely relate to the tension Job experiences as a result of his pain persisting while knowing that it was within God’s power to stop the suffering. Job searches for the origin of his suffering, insisting that his innocence leaves no reason for suffering. Job’s frustrations increase as his punishment appears undeserved, while the wicked prosper. Panged by God’s perceived absence and his friend’s rebukes, Job laments. Throughout his complaints, Job comes to the prideful conclusion that God has misjudged his situation. And yet, when he finally hears the voice of God, Job realizes that only God can fully understand the inner-workings of creation—even his own suffering. Job’s voice is one that moves from defense to surrender in the midst of suffering.

⁸⁴ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), quoted in John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 537.

⁸⁵ Hartley. *Job*, 537.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VOICE OF THE SATAN

Introduction

Christian tradition has long taught about the danger of the voice of Satan. Thus, it may seem strange to think that much could be learned from his voice in the story of Job. A close study of the text reveals, that however, even this character offers a strong theological understanding of who God is in times of suffering. While one may anticipate that Satan would have only accusations and lies, when such speech appears in the book of Job, it is ultimately subject to clarifying who God truly is. It will be observed that the voice of “the satan” in the book of Job is consistently exposed as subservient to God.

It is important to define how this particular character is understood within the context of the book of Job. Hartley reveals that within this book, the Hebrew word *haśśāṭān* has an article.⁸⁶ Accordingly, this character can be referred to as “the satan.” For the purpose of this paper, it will not be debated whether this character is distinct from the serpent that appears in Genesis 3 or Satan in New Testament narratives. Examining the root of the Hebrew title reveals the satan’s role in the book of Job. The Hebrew root *śṭn* means “to oppose the law.”⁸⁷ Interpreting this narrative within the framework of a divine courtroom, some scholars, identify the satan as “the prosecuting attorney of the heavenly council.”⁸⁸ The satan’s voice, then, is ultimately used to help uncover the hearts of humans.⁸⁹ It may be debated, however, that the Satan oversteps this role in the story of Job.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Hartley. *Job*, 71.

⁸⁷ Hartley. *Job*, 71.

⁸⁸ Hartley. *Job*, 71-72.

⁸⁹ Hartley. *Job*, 72.

⁹⁰ Hartley. *Job*, 72.

The satan's dialogue is featured in the opening chapters of the book of Job in the setting of the heavenly council. Scholars disagree whether or not the satan was considered a "gatecrasher" to this council.⁹¹ Some interpreted God's question of "Where have you come from?" (Job 1:7) as hostile, thus implying God viewed him as an intruder.⁹² Such a tone is not easily identified and the question could also have simply been an invitation for a report as a member of the council who came with the angels (Job 1:6).⁹³ It is unclear, therefore, whether or not the satan's voice was one that was regularly welcomed in the heavenly council. Furthermore, it is unclear how God then interprets the satan's voice. In fact, God engages in conversation with him, even asking him whether he has considered his servant Job (1:8). This seems to suggest God thinks the satan's voice may have something to offer in this particular narrative.

The Satan's Theocentric Theology

Much is gleaned from this discourse between the satan and God. First, this dialogue points to a theology that is "non-anthropocentric."⁹⁴ The very idea that this particular "wager" made between the satan and God involves the "innocent suffering" of Job, may seem harsh.⁹⁵ After all, this is how Job interprets his suffering. Robert Moses claims that it is evident in this dialogue that "God owes nothing to anyone."⁹⁶ Job 41 clarifies that indeed, everything belongs to God (41:11)⁹⁷ Regardless of any ulterior motives, the satan knows this to be true. The satan knows that humans are not to be the center of the universe, leading to the very accusations he expresses against Job. In doing so, the satan implies a theocentric theology. Even though the satan has not

⁹¹ Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 34.

⁹² Ash, *Job*, 34.

⁹³ Ash, *Job*, 34.

⁹⁴ Robert Moses, "The Satan' in Light of the Creation Theology of Job," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34, no. 1 (2012): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187122012X602558>.

⁹⁵ Moses, "The Satan," 25.

⁹⁶ Moses, "The Satan," 25.

⁹⁷ Moses, "The Satan," 25.

submitted to this theology in his own practice, his tactics are still subject to this reality. Thus, the satan speaks to the idea that the purpose of suffering is not to be viewed through an anthropocentric lens. This also demonstrates that the goodness of God is not determined through the lens of human experience or understanding.

As the satan's dialogue with God ultimately reveals a theocentric theology, this also reveals that the satan admits that he, much like Job, is subservient to God. In Job 1:11, the satan instructs God to "...strike out *your* hand and strike everything he has..." It is in this first scene between God and the satan that God replies to the satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." (1:12). This conversation reveals that it is indeed God who has to permit the satan to be able to afflict Job. While the satan will prove prideful in regard to his knowledge of Job, here the satan seems to understand that it is ultimately up to God to be able to afflict Job.⁹⁸ This theological understanding, ironically, is one of "pure monotheism," in which it is understood that "God is ultimately responsible for all that happens."⁹⁹ It is the satan's recognition that he needs God's permission that is affirmed by God's own voice in Job 40, in which He explains that all creatures are subservient to Him.¹⁰⁰

The Tension of The Satan's Claims and Praxis

In spite of having the knowledge of the proper place of humanity, the satan's dialogue suggests he overestimates his own power and authority. For instance, in presenting a case against Job, he claims he knows the true state of Job's heart. The satan says to God, "But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (1:12). Even more, the satan claims to know how Job will react. Moses critiques such claims, "...by

⁹⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 74.

⁹⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 74.

¹⁰⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 522.

placing the verdict before the evidence ‘the satan’ declares that he fully knows humans, an insight solely reserved for God, and thereby puts himself in the position of God...’the satan’ has failed to discern his own place within the created order...”¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in this scene, the satan speaks to God as if God is not omniscient. The satan seeks to educate the all-knowing God about God’s very own human creation. 1 Kings 8:39 reveals that it is God *alone* who knows the hearts of humans. Thus, the satan’s claims present a misconstrued theology of who God is, including who He is in the midst of suffering. The satan’s claim presents a case that God’s interactions with humanity, including their suffering, are aimless at best as if God does not already know one’s heart.

Interestingly, the satan expresses how he thinks God views what could be defined as the “prosperity gospel.” The prosperity gospel promises “faith, wealth, health, and victory” to those who are in right relationship with God.¹⁰² This is apparent in the satan’s specific claims against Job. Ash explains, “The satan insinuates that Job’s prosperity is the only cause of his piety.”¹⁰³ Addressing God the Satan highlights that Job is protected and blessed by God (1:9-10). The Satan’s argument is “He is pious not because he actually loves God, honors God, or believes God is worthy of worship; he is pious because piety results in prosperity.”¹⁰⁴ With this logic, the satan concludes it would be sinful to only worship God because of prosperity. Additionally, the Satan implies that God is, in fact, worthy of worship, even when one is not experiencing prosperity.

In the second scene of dialogue between God and the satan, a broader picture of the satan’s theological views and praxis are reinforced. The scene in Job 2:1-6 is almost identical to

¹⁰¹ Moses, “‘The Satan,’” 27.

¹⁰² Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

¹⁰³ Ash, *Job*, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Ash, *Job*, 37.

the first.¹⁰⁵ Much like in the first conversation, it is the Satan who provides God with “an accounting of his ways.”¹⁰⁶ Vocal reporting demonstrates that the satan acknowledges, or at least obliges, to being ultimately accountable to God even though the satan appears to challenge this.¹⁰⁷ God reports to the satan that Job passed the test and that his insistence upon “Job’s trial had proved to be without cause.”¹⁰⁸ In spite of this, the satan denies the accuracy of God’s examination and insists God’s method of testing was insufficient to prove the state of Job’s heart.¹⁰⁹ Such a statement implies the satan thinks his own knowledge and ways are superior to God’s.

The Echoes of the Satan

While the satan’s voice is clearly represented in Job 1 and 2, and he does not appear again in the book, commentators insist that the Satan is not silenced. His voice is echoed through Job’s friends. Ash states, “The substance of satan’s challenge in chapters 1, 2 is that no human being on earth is genuinely in the right with God.”¹¹⁰

Through the lens of the New Covenant, God’s ultimate plan is to provide vindication for humanity through Christ so they may be right before Him.¹¹¹ Job and his friends do not understand this, and so they are convinced of the hopeless view consistent with the satan: none can be made right before God.¹¹² Job echoes this view by asking “...But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God?” (9:2) and “Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!” (14:4).¹¹³ Eliphaz asks, “What are mortals that they could be pure, or those born of woman,

¹⁰⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

¹⁰⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 80.

¹¹⁰ Ash, *Job*, 86.

¹¹¹ Ash, *Job*, 48.

¹¹² Ash, *Job*, 86.

¹¹³ Ash, *Job*, 86.

that they could be righteous?” (15:4).¹¹⁴ Finally, Bildad asks, “How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?” (25:4).¹¹⁵ Ash proposes, “This is the answer of human religion. But it is also the satan’s answer.”¹¹⁶ Unbeknownst to Job’s friends, in aiming to proclaim the truth about God, they are spokesmen of the satan.¹¹⁷ Although the satan is not present in the remainder of the narrative, he continues to be voiced.

The voice of the satan is echoed throughout the narrative in the presentation of retributive justice/theology. Mare writes, “...the satan shows himself to be quite knowledgeable about retribution theology and he says to God that the only reason for Job’s faithful service is the fact that he has prospered as a result of his service to God.”¹¹⁸ Essentially, the satan proposed that “human beings are totally self-serving in their worship of God.”¹¹⁹ Therefore, Job’s friend’s advice reinforces such behavior based on their understanding of retribution.¹²⁰ Job’s friends advise him to repent of his supposed sin so that he can be free of his suffering and enjoy God’s blessing once again.¹²¹ This communicates the very concept proposed by the satan: that Job should worship God for the sake of his own well-being.¹²² Thus, the friends unknowingly state the satan’s case.

Summary

The satan’s expressions represent much of Job’s dilemma in responding to God in his time of suffering. The crux of the satan’s argument is temptation of Job:, that his suffering will be

¹¹⁴ Ash, *Job*, 86.

¹¹⁵ Ash, *Job*, 86.

¹¹⁶ Ash, *Job*, 86.

¹¹⁷ Ash, *Job*, 86.

¹¹⁸ Robert Mare, “The God of Job,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 33, no. 1 (2012): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v33i1.681>.

¹¹⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 48-9.

¹²⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 48.

¹²¹ Hartley, *Job*, 48.

¹²² Hartley, *Job*, 48.

perceived as the removal of God's hand from his life, tempting Job to curse God. Much of the satan's arguments prove theologically sound—in that God is worthy of worship, whether or not he brings blessing or prosperity. While the satan critiques the prosperity gospel, he inevitably fuels the retribution theology that will be echoed by Job's friends. Additionally, while the satan appeals to God's divinity, he also undermines it by insisting he knows Job's true motives. Fittingly, the satan's voice becomes one that proclaims half-truths about God in regard to Job's suffering.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VOICES OF THE FRIENDS

Introduction

In times of suffering, people often look to their friends for support and comfort. In the story of Job, three friends by the names Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, decide to go to Job in an attempt to comfort him (see Job 2:11-13) These friends truly thought their presence and their insight would be helpful to Job in his time of suffering. While their initial vocal reactions were weeping and silence, this does not last long. As these men break their silence, they reveal their understanding of God amidst Job's suffering.

Holding Tightly to the Doctrine of Retribution

Scholars agree that the doctrine of retribution shapes the friends' interpretation of Job's suffering. The friends view God as one who uses suffering as a means of punishment. Schmidt and Nel state, "It is important to realise that both Job and his friends place themselves wholly under the doctrine of retribution, as some religious belief practiced by God according to the retributive principle of moral order."¹²³ Indeed, it is not that Job disagrees with the doctrine of his friends, rather there is a discrepancy, as Job believes that because of his uprightness he should not have reaped suffering, whereas, the friends assume that his suffering must mean that he has sown sin.

While Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar uphold the doctrine of retribution, they each present a different understanding of God's relation to Job in his suffering. Eliphaz appears to "understand discipline or reproof as an intermediate step in the doctrine of

¹²³ Nicolaas Fryer Schmidt and Philip J. Nel, "Divine Darkness in the Human Discourses of Job," *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 2 (2016): 134.

retribution.”¹²⁴ In other words, retributive punishment, is a tool used by God to serve as a means to ultimately restore Job to a right relationship.¹²⁵ Hartley writes, “Misfortune is God’s rod of discipline; it reveals his loving character for humanity in that he does not let a person go to the grave without exerting great effort to make that person aware of the consequences of his sinful acts.”¹²⁶ This limits pain for the devout to God as a means of instruction.¹²⁷ Eliphaz’ view of God leads him to have little patience for Job’s laments, as he interprets Job as simply rejecting God’s loving rebuke.¹²⁸

Eliphaz leaves no room for considering Job’s innocence, as his understanding of the doctrine of retribution leaves him convinced that Job has sinned. During Eliphaz’s first speech, he does not accuse Job of any blatant sin but rather appeals to the idea that all are sinful.¹²⁹ Thus, he urges Job to confess and seek God’s mercy as a means to regain his blessings (3:13, 26).¹³⁰ This notion supports both the doctrine of retribution and the prosperity gospel. It suggests that God “is willing and able to reverse one’s plight.”¹³¹ Thus, it is quite evident that Eliphaz understands God to be in control of one’s suffering and while He may be able to remove it, He may choose not to.

Bildad’s understanding of the doctrine of retribution shapes his high view of God’s justice. Clines writes, “The moral universe, in Bildad’s theology, is founded upon the principle of retribution.”¹³² Bildad asks the rhetorical questions: “Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?” (8:3). According to Bildad, it is unreasonable for Job to

¹²⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 125.

¹²⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 125.

¹²⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 125.

¹²⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 125.

¹²⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 125.

¹²⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 129.

¹³⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 129.

¹³¹ Hartley, *Job*, 129.

¹³² Clines, *Job*, 202.

question his situation. What Job is experiencing is his due justice, inflicted by God who knows what is truly just. Furthermore, Bildad rejects Job's protests of his innocence (6:10) and his complaints about how God has treated him (7:12, 17-18, 20).¹³³

Zophar also finds himself influenced by the doctrine of retribution in his interpretation of Job's suffering and who God is. Clines writes the following:

So locked into the retributionist dogma is Zophar that he cannot see Job as a sufferer but only as a guilty man. His language to describe what is happening to Job is legal because he has moved instantly from his perception of Job's distress to a theological interpretation of that distress as divine judgment.¹³⁴

Zophar's understanding of this doctrine prevents him from considering Job's situation with compassion, let alone considering whether God is compassionate toward Job's suffering. Zophar only focuses on the "negative tenant of the doctrine of retribution, the certain punishment of the wicked."¹³⁵ His intense view portrays God as eager to "pronounce the final sentence against the evildoer."¹³⁶

The Theses of the Friends

An overview of the speeches from the friends reveals each of their own theses, or central arguments. Hartley notes that "Eliphaz's central premise is that everyone is guilty of error."¹³⁷ Such a premise emphasizes his understanding of the law of retribution, in which "the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer hardship in this life and face a premature death (4:7-21)."¹³⁸ Eliphaz also emphasizes that God, out of his compassion, is willing to rescue those who repent from their sufferings, blessing them abundantly instead (5:9-

¹³³ Clines, *Job*, 202.

¹³⁴ Clines, *Job*, 264.

¹³⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 309.

¹³⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 309.

¹³⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 104.

¹³⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 104.

26).¹³⁹ With this understanding, Eliphaz views suffering as a tool used by God to redirect those astray to repentance.¹⁴⁰

The central thesis of Bildad's speeches are identified in 8:3 in which he asks, "Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right?" His central argument "...is that all God's ways are just."¹⁴¹ Hartley notes that Bildad appeals to "the teaching of the fathers (vv. 8-10) and on the ways of nature (vv. 11-29)."¹⁴² Bildad's theology is one that has been shaped by seeing things in a very clear-cut manner.¹⁴³ For Bildad this means, that "Without any exceptions, the righteous are blessed and the wicked are punished."¹⁴⁴ Because God is just, and His justice will not be perverted, God will bless or punish accordingly. Bildad believes God is aware of Job's current suffering and acted in accordance with what Job's behavior deserves. With this theological framework, Bildad is left to conclude that because "whoever experiences calamity has sinned," surely Job has sinned.¹⁴⁵

In spite of a strong stance on God's just acts, Bildad leaves room for Job to be spared from his suffering in accordance with God's mercy. Bildad upholds that if Job is "truly pure," as he insists, then God is sure to be faithful to answer his petitions for mercy.¹⁴⁶ He appeals to "the positive side of retribution," in which if Job would just seek God, he will be rewarded with prosperity (8:7).¹⁴⁷ While Bildad appears to acknowledge that God is indeed merciful, even to those who suffer, his theological views are also

¹³⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 104.

¹⁴⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 104.

¹⁴¹ Hartley, *Job*, 153.

¹⁴² Hartley, *Job*, 153.

¹⁴³ Hartley, *Job*, 153.

¹⁴⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 153.

¹⁴⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 156.

¹⁴⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 156.

¹⁴⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 157.

reminiscent of the prosperity gospel. In 8:6, Bildad insists that “if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your prosperous state.” Hartley explains that such a promise associates Job’s estate and holding to the state of his righteousness.¹⁴⁸ This is reminiscent of the satan’s accusation that Job only worshipped God for his blessings (1:9-10). Little does Bildad recognize, that he is encouraging Job to seek God for the sake of blessing, rather than simply because God is worthy to be worshipped.

Hartley insists that Zophar’s thesis is that God appoints the “portion,” or “fate” of the wicked.¹⁴⁹ The Hebrew term for “fate,” *hēleq*, means “a person’s rightful share of something.”¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Zophar insists God does not neglect to punish the wicked. Even though Job complains that the wicked prosper, Zophar aims to remind Job that such prosperity will come to an end.¹⁵¹

An examination of each of these friend’s interpretation of Job’s suffering demonstrates they believe Job is suffering because he is a sinner.¹⁵² Clines explains:

For Zophar, Job’s suffering is nothing but deserved suffering. Both Eliphaz and Bildad set the suffering of their friend in a particular context: Eliphaz in the context of Job’s evidently near-blameless life, Bildad in the context of the fate of Job’s children. From either perspective, Job’s suffering is qualified and thus—to the satisfaction of the first two friends—suitably mollified.¹⁵³

This leaves no room for considering suffering as a *general* result of the sufferer residing in a sinful world, rather than a *direct* result of specific sinful actions of the sufferer.

The Friends’ Tones

¹⁴⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 156.

¹⁴⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 308.

¹⁵⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 308-9.

¹⁵¹ Hartley, *Job*, 309.

¹⁵² Clines, *Job*, 258.

¹⁵³ Clines, *Job*, 258.

A key to examining the voices of these friends is evaluating their specific tones when relating to Job and God. Clines observes their tones are shaped by their interpretation of the role that God bestowed upon them to play in the midst of Job's grief. Clines explains, "Whereas Eliphaz professed himself hesitant to intrude upon Job's grief, and Bildad had gone no further than to pronounce himself affronted, on God's behalf, by Job's tempestuous speech, Zophar judges it his moral duty to silence Job."¹⁵⁴ Thus, they are aiming to relate to Job in a way that either honors God or acts on God's behalf.

Eliphaz's tone is noted as "the most conciliatory" among the three friends.¹⁵⁵ Clines observes that Eliphaz typically begins his speeches with a rhetorical question.¹⁵⁶ This means that Eliphaz does not expect Job to answer, demonstrating sensitivity to his current emotional state.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, Eliphaz seeks to remind Job that while he must be suffering from some of his faults, because he has a track record of goodness, surely, his suffering will not last long (4:3-6).¹⁵⁸ In other words, he aims to cushion this inevitable retributive justice with the hope that it will eventually come to an end. Bildad's tone, on the other hand, is understood as being harsh, based upon Job's response.¹⁵⁹ In Job's complaint against the friends, he asks, "How long will you torment me and crush me with your words?" (19:2) Hartley proposes that the words "how long" allude to Bildad's speeches, which use the same opening phrase.¹⁶⁰ Bildad's unabashedly identifies Job with the wicked, which is crushing to one convinced of their innocence.

Zophar is noted as the least sympathetic of the three friends. Clines writes, "Zophar believes he owes it to God to take up the cudgels on God's behalf and to defend God's integrity.

¹⁵⁴ Clines, *Job*, 259.

¹⁵⁵ Clines, *Job*, 121.

¹⁵⁶ Clines, *Job*, 121.

¹⁵⁷ Clines, *Job*, 121.

¹⁵⁸ Clines, *Job*, 137.

¹⁵⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 282.

¹⁶⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 282.

The impropriety of Job’s arguments against God convinces Zophar of the propriety of his speech against Job.”¹⁶¹ He is motivated by his effort to uphold “theological correctness” and prevent Job from continuing in what he perceives as blasphemy.¹⁶² In 11:3, Zophar expresses that he believes someone needs to rebuke Job.¹⁶³ Furthermore, Zophar states, “Oh, how I wish that God would speak and that he would open his lips against you.” (11:4). Zophar claims to serve the all-knowing God, yet, implies he knows better than God in how He should be dealing with Job’s complaints. Zophar’s indignation, thus, is debatably righteous.

Zophar appears passionately motivated by his theology. Clines suggests that “Zophar is the most original theologian of the three friends of Job, and has been saved up by his creator (the author of the book) for the third and climactic position in the speech cycle because of his wider-ranging theological formation...”¹⁶⁴ Such originality need not be confused with accuracy.¹⁶⁵ While Zophar correctly identifies Job’s suffering as something that is a part of the mystery of God, in accordance to the divine speeches of Job 38-41, he confines God’s mystery to “how he mixes justice and mercy in his dealings with humans.”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, Zophar’s advice to Job is rooted in the “wisdom theology” notion that “sin is not something to be covered up or cleansed or forgiven, but to be avoided from, departed from, disassociated from.”¹⁶⁷

The Tension of Distortion and Reverence

Another interesting stance in the friend’s perception of suffering is in how they view Job’s physical ailments with which he has been afflicted. Job 2:7-8 says, “So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown

¹⁶¹ Clines, *Job*, 260.

¹⁶² Clines, *Job*, 260.

¹⁶³ Clines, *Job*, 260.

¹⁶⁴ Clines, *Job*, 262.

¹⁶⁵ Clines, *Job*, 262.

¹⁶⁶ Clines, *Job*, 262.

¹⁶⁷ Clines, *Job*, 268.

of his head.” Bildad offers his theological understanding of Job’s physical suffering in Job 18:13, in which he describes the fate of an evildoer: “It eats away parts of his skin; death’s firstborn devours his limbs.”¹⁶⁸ Since Job is experiencing such symptoms, Hartley summarizes Bildad in the following way: “For Bildad, Job’s emaciated body is the convicting evidence of his wrongdoing.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, Bildad is convinced that God inflicts physical suffering as a means to punish sin. Jesus provides a theological critique to this concept of sickness always being directly correlated with sin (see Jn. 9:1-3). Thus, it appears that Bildad has a misconstrued understanding of why God would allow Job to be afflicted with such ailments.

While at times the friends have a distorted understanding of God, there are other instances in which they demonstrate reverence and understanding that will be affirmed by God’s voice later on in the book. For example, Bildad expresses a strong view of God’s sovereignty (see 25:1-6; 27:13-23).¹⁷⁰ Hartley observes that “Bildad affirms God’s sovereign rule and every creature’s frailty and unworthiness before him.”¹⁷¹ In doing so, Bildad corrects Job’s concerns that God rules unjustly (24:1-17).¹⁷² Bildad’s theological understanding of God’s sovereignty is affirmed by God’s speeches in Job 38-41. In this way, Bildad presents accurately portrays God as sovereign both over suffering and the sufferer.

Bildad clearly demonstrates that God has orderly control over the cosmos and thus, is not to be accused of wrongdoing.¹⁷³ Ash proposes, however, that Bildad fails to consider how the perfect order of God’s creation is disturbed by mankind’s sin and disobedience.¹⁷⁴ In such a world impacted by sin, even those who are not wicked feel the “aftershocks” of the “earthquake

¹⁶⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 278.

¹⁶⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 279.

¹⁷⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 355.

¹⁷¹ Hartley, *Job*, 355.

¹⁷² Hartley, *Job*, 355.

¹⁷³ Ash, *Job*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ Ash, *Job*, 165-6.

of man's disobedience."¹⁷⁵ Such accusations by Bildad deny that Job is "blameless and upright," both of which were characteristics affirmed by God (Job 1:8; 2:3). Bildad, along with his friends, neglects to recognize that in the present broken world in which Job resides, sometimes the wicked prosper and sometimes those who are "blameless" suffer.¹⁷⁶

In 42:7, the Lord says to Eliphaz, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has." This is crucial, as it demonstrates that the theological concepts presented by the three friends are not complete truth.¹⁷⁷ This may be confusing, since, at times the friends do express basic truths about God with much reverence. Ash provides the following helpful commentary: "We find ourselves agreeing with many parts of their speeches. If it were total rubbish that would be much easier. It is always like that with false teaching; it is dangerous because it is nearly true."¹⁷⁸ Thus, God is not pleased when one speaks what is *nearly* true about Him. The friends misrepresented God to Job in his time of suffering. Furthermore, the anger God expresses about this shows it is important to the heart of God how people minister to others and represent Him in times of suffering.

Summary

Originally intending to provide Job with comfort, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar exasperate Job's pain with their speeches. Each clearly influenced by retribution theology, they conclude that Job's suffering must be a result of sin. Urging Job to repent for the sake of being freed from his suffering, they unknowingly tempt Job to do that which will prove the satan correct—only pursue God's blessing. While each of the friends presents strong theological knowledge, much of

¹⁷⁵ Ash, *Job*, 166.

¹⁷⁶ Ash, *Job*, 166-7.

¹⁷⁷ Ash, *Job*, 73.

¹⁷⁸ Ash, *Job*, 73.

which is technically correct about God and his justice, they fail to consider that humans may not easily know why suffering occurs. Furthermore, where they speak much about God, they do little in their praxis to support their friend who is suffering. Thus, their voices which had the potential to bring hope and comfort, only add to Job's misery.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VOICE OF GOD

Introduction

The voice of God in the book of Job becomes the benchmark for the accuracy of the other voices in how they interpret God and suffering. Each of the voices has passionately spoken of why God is allowing Job to suffer and what God wants Job to do in response. And it is through God's self-disclosure and His address to these voices that these ideas are corrected. It is through God's voice that Job is able to see an accurate portrayal of how God has related to him in his time of suffering, as opposed to what he has been told about God from others.

God's Expression of Joy for His Creation

In his article, *God's Joy in Creation in the Book of Job*, Eric Ortlund provides a unique perspective that while the book of Job tends to be associated with suffering, it also ironically presents much about joy.¹⁷⁹ Ortlund speaks primarily on the joy expressed by God in how He speaks of His creation, including Job.¹⁸⁰ This perspective provides a helpful interpretive lens for how God associates with Job, the sufferer. This also combats the perspective of the friends in which God inflicted suffering upon Job due to his displeasure. It becomes an interesting idea that God would allow suffering for those with who he is pleased with. This allows for consideration of the idea that God uses suffering not solely for punishment but as a loving means to aid in a grander purpose.

According to Ortlund, the notion of God's joy with His creation is evident in the prologue.¹⁸¹ This is first seen in God's characterization of Job in 1:8, in which He not only

¹⁷⁹ Eric Ortlund, "God's Joy in Creation in the Book of Job," *Presbyterion* 47, no. 1 (2012): 6.

¹⁸⁰ Ortlund, "God's Joy," 6.

¹⁸¹ Ortlund, "God's Joy," 6.

affirms the narrator's description of Job as "blameless and upright" and as one who "feared God and shunned evil" (see 1:1).¹⁸² Ortlund notes that God adds to the original description of Job provided by the narrator by referring to Job as "my servant" and stating that "there is no one on earth like him."¹⁸³ Such descriptive language in the mouth of God is in contrast to the accusations made against Job by the satan or his friends.

Whereas the satan and Job's friends have questioned Job's character, God provides a proper character assessment. God endorses "the author's characterization of Job" (1:1).¹⁸⁴ Such reiteration of the author's point of view, demonstrates to the reader that God's assessment is indeed accurate, as the author has access to the full story.¹⁸⁵ This is to "dispel any shadow of doubt that Job's piety may be only seeming and to have the God from whom Job's afflictions will stem affirm his own cognizance of Job's character."¹⁸⁶ Thus, this reiteration not only authenticates Job's piety but also authenticates God's omniscience.

God's Dialogue with the Satan

In chapter one, God clearly initiates the dialogue with the satan.¹⁸⁷ God asks the satan, "Where have you come from?" (1:7) Clines suggests that such a question from God does not suggest that God did not already know the answer.¹⁸⁸ Rather, such a question "has a dramatic function" that shows the satan as a "significant member" and this also serves a "role-establishing function in making Yahweh the initiator of the conversation and the action that follows."¹⁸⁹ In verse 8, it is

¹⁸² Ortlund, "God's Joy," 8-9.

¹⁸³ Ortlund, "God's Joy," 9.

¹⁸⁴ Clines, *Job*, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Clines, *Job*, 24.

¹⁸⁶ Clines, *Job*, 24.

¹⁸⁷ Clines, *Job*, 23.

¹⁸⁸ Clines, *Job*, 23.

¹⁸⁹ Clines, *Job*, 23.

God who brings Job to the satan's attention.¹⁹⁰ This scene suggests that God was the initiator of Job's plight.

The dialogue that led to the testing of Job reveals "a pure monotheism," in which God is cast as responsible for all events, including Job's trials.¹⁹¹ It is important to clarify that although God agrees to this challenge by the satan, it need not be interpreted as God making a wager.¹⁹² Hartley writes, "...no sum was set to be handed over to the winner. The single issue at stake was the motivation for Job's upright behavior and his fear of God."¹⁹³ Rather, such a "challenge" speaks to the confidence that God has in knowing Job's heart.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the dialogue allows the reader to "make a proper assessment of Job's complaint" and understand "God's attitude toward Job and his direction of the events that will befall Job."¹⁹⁵

The second scene between God and the satan also begins with God initiating the conversation about Job. Hartley proposes, "Since Yahweh initiated the subject, he obviously was delighted that Job, his servant, had proved that his worship was genuine."¹⁹⁶ God was eager to address the results of Job's testing, accentuating the reality that His character assessment of Job was correct. This is further emphasized by God restating "...the full fourfold description of Job's moral excellence..." while also adding that Job had maintained his integrity.¹⁹⁷ God then addresses the satan, "...you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason" (2:3). The Hebrew word for "incite," means "to allure or stir someone to a course of action he would not normally take."¹⁹⁸ Hartley suggests that this means that Yahweh conceded to having been

¹⁹⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 73.

¹⁹¹ Clines, *Job*, 74.

¹⁹² Clines, *Job*, 74.

¹⁹³ Clines, *Job*, 74.

¹⁹⁴ Clines, *Job*, 74.

¹⁹⁵ Clines, *Job*, 74.

¹⁹⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

¹⁹⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

¹⁹⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 79.

persuaded, yet by doing so, accepts full responsibility for what has happened to Job.”¹⁹⁹ Based upon this, Hartley also proposes then, that in this particular scenario of suffering, God does not view Job as battling against the satan.²⁰⁰

God’s statement in Job 2:3 also affirms the validity of Job’s worship. It was the satan in 1:9, who had asked, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” And yet, God reveals that the *testing* was *for nothing*, “...without any reason.” (2:3).²⁰¹ Thus, God’s response to the satan here may be viewed as a rebuke.²⁰² Hartley explains,

...the test has proved that the satan’s accusations against Job were ‘without cause’ or had no inherent worth, and that Job feared God ‘without cause’—Job trusted God with a pure heart filled with love for God, not the benefits God had bestowed upon him. The satan’s skepticism about Job’s character had proved to be completely wrong.²⁰³

So far, God has repeatedly affirmed Job’s blamelessness. Clines makes the observation that Job’s uprightness is indeed, only voiced by God, rather than the satan.²⁰⁴ Thus, such repetition need not be interpreted as God discovering new knowledge.

With God repeatedly expressing that Job is blameless and that the first test was without cause, it is interesting that He again agrees for Job to undergo more testing. Upon the satan’s insistence that if Job’s body was afflicted, he would curse God, God responds, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life” (2:6). Hartley argues, “This concession reveals the full extent of God’s confidence in Job, namely, that Job’s basic commitment is to God alone. Thus, God’s testing of Job has less to do with His curiosity and more to do with His confidence.

¹⁹⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 80.

²⁰⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 80.

²⁰¹ Hartley, *Job*, 80.

²⁰² Hartley, *Job*, 80.

²⁰³ Hartley, *Job*, 80.

²⁰⁴ Clines, *Job*, 42.

God's dialogue with the satan reveals to the reader what will not be revealed to Job: "that his suffering had a particular cause and that it subserved a purpose."²⁰⁵ God did not choose to reveal the dialogue between Him and the satan to Job. Nor did God choose to explain the full purpose of His suffering. Clines writes, "Job's ignorance of the causes behind his suffering is not swallowed up in our knowledge of those causes; if anything, Job's suffering in ignorance seems more meaningful to us than our knowledge negating his ignorance."²⁰⁶ As the reader relates to Job, they may rest assured that times of God's silence does not negate the meaning of their circumstances. Much like the reader is privy to the perspective of the divine council addressing the life of Job, there is a divine council that the reader is not aware of in regard to their own life.

God's Responses to Job

In examining God's voice throughout the Joban narrative, a notable aspect is His silence in the midst of Job's persistent suffering. Upon the satan following through on Job's second round of testing, Clines notes "...that from this critical moment onward heaven is sealed off and silent; God himself will not speak again before there have been thirty-four chapters of human speech..."²⁰⁷ That God does, however, choose to speak to Job signifies that the words He speaks are of importance.²⁰⁸ Ash notes that words spoken directly by God, are of utmost importance.²⁰⁹ The divine speeches call for careful listening and heeding in understanding what is expected for Job's response to his suffering.

It is important to note that in the opening verse, in which the divine speech is being introduced, the author uses the term, "the LORD," God's covenant name used on Mount Sinai

²⁰⁵ Clines, *Job*, 17.

²⁰⁶ Clines, *Job*, 18.

²⁰⁷ Clines, *Job*, 46.

²⁰⁸ Ash, *Job*, 304.

²⁰⁹ Ash, *Job*, 304.

(see Ex. 20:2, 19).²¹⁰ Ash views this as a means to communicate to the reader that the same God who is speaking and dealing with Job in his suffering, is the same covenant God of redemption who dealt with the Israelites.²¹¹ Ash writes, “In this way the drama Job, although historically not set in Israel’s story, is tied to the great story of the whole Bible with its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.”²¹² What the reader of the biblical narrative knows about “the LORD,” can be contextualized as God’s words within the character He consistently displays. Furthermore, this name is “inextricably tied to the OT theophanic tradition.”²¹³ The use of God’s covenant name is an unmistakable reminder of His presence with the sufferer.

God’s willingness to speak to Job demonstrates His willingness to interact with His suffering creation. It is evident in 38:1 that God is speaking directly “to Job.” It is in this instance that “God speaks directly and personally to one man.”²¹⁴ The God who oversees the entire order of the universe, as made evident in the divine speeches, chooses to speak to Job and address his specific situation and pain. Such a willingness demonstrates not only intentionality but also God’s acute awareness of the exact pain and suffering of individuals. Ash finds significance in not only whom God speaks to but the number of times God speaks. He theorizes that God speaks to Job twice as a means to “parallel the two times he spoke in the parallel heaven scenes.”²¹⁵ This could also demonstrate God’s redemptive qualities, in addressing Job for each instance he has been impacted by affliction.

Chapter 38:1 announces “Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm...” Earlier in the narrative, Job predicts that God will harm with a storm, “Even if I summoned him and he

²¹⁰ Ash, *Job*, 304.

²¹¹ Ash, *Job*, 304.

²¹² Ash, *Job*, 304.

²¹³ Hartley, *Job*, 490.

²¹⁴ Ash, *Job*, 305.

²¹⁵ Ash, *Job*, 305.

responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing. He would crush me with a storm” (9:16-17). Contrary to Job’s prediction, God chooses to respond and speak to Him through a storm.²¹⁶ Hartley records that throughout Scripture, a theophany is usually accompanied by natural phenomena that display power, such as thunder (Ps. 77:18-19), dark clouds (Ps. 18:10-13), an earthquake (Judg. 5:4), or fire (Isa. 30:27).²¹⁷ For, “This panorama of natural phenomena witnesses that Yahweh, the holy God, is actually present.”²¹⁸ In speaking out of the storm, God displays to Job that He is truly present and powerful. The longing that Job had for God’s presence is realized in the tangible storm.

God’s willingness to speak to Job is shocking, as His friends may have anticipated that God would instantly kill or condemn Job for his complaints.²¹⁹ God aims to instead teach rather than punish Job, confirming that Job does not need to be punished. Furthermore, by coming to correct Job through teaching, it can be surmised that Job has spoken not out of wickedness but ignorance.²²⁰ In beginning his instruction, God asks Job, “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?” (38:2). Ortlund writes, “The mere fact that God asks questions instead of making direct statements softens their force somewhat...”²²¹ One must also observe the content of such questions. God asks Job who has such “unlimited knowledge of creation.” With such questions, it may be concluded that God’s aim is to redirect Job’s attention to the idea that God is a *good Creator* who is trustworthy and able to oversee the care of all that is in the world.²²²

²¹⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 175.

²¹⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 489.

²¹⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 489.

²¹⁹ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 478.

²²⁰ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 478.

²²¹ Ortlund, “God’s Joy,” 12.

²²² Ortlund, “God’s Joy,” 12.

God speaks firmly to Job, “Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.” (38:3) Ash explains that while such a command may be sarcastic, it also could be viewed as an affirmation in which, “God is affirming Job the believer as one who can stand tall and engage in this vigorous thinking with God.”²²³ And while Job longed to question God, ironically, God questions Job.²²⁴ God’s answer is, in fact, questions, rather than explaining the heavenly scenes that led to Job’s suffering.²²⁵ God may have withheld plain answers and explanations, as a means of God’s mercy to Job.²²⁶

God also addresses how Job and his friends have characterized Him.²²⁷ It becomes evident that in correcting their theology, God pays close attention to the words of Job and his friends.²²⁸ God understands their theology is a result of how they view His character. Their interpretation of God’s character was the lens through which they understand suffering. God rebukes Job for viewing Him as one who would govern unjustly.²²⁹

God also commends Job for directly addressing him.²³⁰ This is surprising, as one may question if Job’s speeches demonstrate reverence. Hawley concludes that God appreciates being addressed, based on how He confronts the friends, in comparison to Job.²³¹ According to the Septuagint, God’s words in Job 42:7 can be translated as, “you have not spoken before me anything true.”²³² With such wording, it may be understood that God is not only concerned with the validity of what is spoken but also with speaking in His presence.²³³ There is a stark contrast,

²²³ Ash, *Job*, 306.

²²⁴ Ash, *Job*, 306.

²²⁵ Ash, *Job*, 306.

²²⁶ Ash, *Job*, 306.

²²⁷ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 476.

²²⁸ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 476.

²²⁹ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 476.

²³⁰ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³¹ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³² Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³³ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

however, between Job and his friends in that while Job directly addresses God, the friends never do.²³⁴ This is particularly concerning as Job longed for an intercessor (9:33, 16:18-19, 19:23-25), yet the friends never speak to God on His behalf.²³⁵ Not only this but the words that the friends do speak about God are considered “deceitful” speech (13:7).²³⁶ Thus, based on God’s evaluation, it appears that God values honest speech in the midst of suffering versus false piety and submission.²³⁷

God reveals who He is and His character through His own speeches. In these speeches, God declares Himself as Creator and Lord. Hartley provides the following breakdown:

As Creator, Yahweh established the earth securely on its foundation (38:4-7), bounded the sea (38: 8-11), and created the light (38:12-15). As Creator he knows the rules of the farthest recesses: the deep (38:16-18); the distant horizons, the residence of light and darkness (38:19-21); the height, the storehouse of snow and hail (38:22-24). As Lord, Yahweh judiciously manages all the elements in heaven (38:25-38) and all creatures on earth (38:39-39:30).²³⁸

Not only does God reveal Himself as Creator and Lord but, in doing so, He never mentions anything about human beings.²³⁹ Hartley surmises that this is done intentionally as a means for Job to discern that if God functions as Creator and Lord over other creatures/creation, then surely, He functions as Creator and Lord over humans, with even more vigilance.²⁴⁰ If God is able to care for and oversee the created order well, then surely He is able to oversee the lives of human beings, including Job.

In these speeches God questions Job on the structure of the world (38:4-24) and on the maintenance of the world (38:4-24).²⁴¹ In doing so, God questions Job on whether he has the

²³⁴ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³⁵ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³⁶ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³⁷ Hawley, “Book of Job,” 477.

²³⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 488.

²³⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 488.

²⁴⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 488-9.

²⁴¹ Hartley, *Job*, 493.

ability to know fully (*yāda* ‘ *bînâ*) the creation of the earth’s foundations (38:4).²⁴² The Hebrew term *bînâ* “refers to both the faculty of understanding and the object knowledge.”²⁴³ In this case, since it is the object of the verb *yāda* ‘, “know,” it means “endued with understanding.”²⁴⁴ Thus, God is questioning Job as if he were the one who was present during the initial stages of the creation of the world.²⁴⁵ This serves as a reminder to Job that he lacks the foundational knowledge to be able to dispute with God.²⁴⁶

In a similar fashion, God moves to using architectural language to confront Job as to whether or not he understands God’s creative works. He asks Job. “Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—” (3:5-6). Such imagery demonstrates that such construction of the earth was done with precision, “according to Yahweh’s blueprints.”²⁴⁷ With this, God reminds Job that the created order corresponds to His plans.²⁴⁸ Job was not present for the creation of the world, and thus, cannot expect to understand the inner-workings of creation, including that of the pain and suffering in the world. God, however, can be trusted as understanding the created order that He crafted.

Next, God confronts Job’s complaint that the wicked prosper without repercussions (Job 21, 24).²⁴⁹ God presents Job with the concept that the wicked are ultimately subject to His oversight of creation.²⁵⁰ Chapter 38:12-15 serves as a reminder that the light of the day is subject

²⁴² Hartley, *Job*, 494.

²⁴³ Hartley, *Job*, 494.

²⁴⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 494.

²⁴⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 494-5.

²⁴⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 495.

²⁴⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 495.

²⁴⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 495.

²⁴⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 497.

²⁵⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 497.

to God's control, and it is such light that restricts the work of the wicked.²⁵¹ Thus, the wicked are not as free from restraint as it appears. Rather, they are already limited by God's created order. Although humans have "a measure of freedom," they are ultimately subject to the sovereignty of God.²⁵² Job need not be offended by the freedom the wicked have.

Furthermore, God reiterates that light and darkness are both under his control. He questions Job. "What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings?" (38:19-20). Ash proposes that in this case, "Light and darkness are more than physical descriptors; they speak of goodness and evil, of order and disorder, of joy and gloom."²⁵³ The obvious answer to God's rhetorical questions is that Job does not know the dwelling places of "light" and "darkness," and that he is unable to conduct them, ultimately meaning that he is not sovereign over them.²⁵⁴ For if Job knew the paths of light and darkness, he would be able to control them.²⁵⁵ This reality also means that darkness in this world is indeed a mystery to Job.²⁵⁶ Job cannot expect to be able to completely comprehend the good and evil that coexist in the world in the way that God understands.

God provides additional examples of how He cares for various creatures in Job 39. He inquires about Job's knowledge of the unique qualities and abilities of these animals. God's intentionality with the animals demonstrates His character. Job 39 serves as a foreshadow of the example that Christ provides in how God cares for His creation, in that if God provides what earthly creatures need to survive, He will surely provide for humanity (Matt. 6:25-30).

²⁵¹ Hartley, *Job*, 497.

²⁵² Hartley, *Job*, 497.

²⁵³ Ash, *Job*, 312.

²⁵⁴ Ash, *Job*, 312.

²⁵⁵ Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 499.

²⁵⁶ Ash, *Job*, 312.

Therefore, it is the consistent character of God, to care for and govern His creation. His provision and oversight over the created order serve as a reminder that humanity's daily cares and suffering are within His scope.

God provides the intriguing and humorous example of the ostrich. He explains to Job, "The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, though they cannot compare with the wings and feathers of the stork...for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider" (39:13, 17-18). Such a description "testifies to the divine humor" in which the ostrich, a huge bird, cannot fly, yet can outrun a horse.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, He has equipped other birds with the keen wisdom and abilities that they need to survive and be secure (39:26-30). The wild animals also have God as their authority, are submitted to Him and function according to the beautiful world order He has created.²⁵⁸ As God is able to oversee the creatures that reside in remote places beyond human interference, so He surely has the wisdom to care for and control the order of humanity.²⁵⁹

Hartley makes the argument that God's example of His governance of the ostrich, emphasizes that Job's integrity took precedence over other aspects of his well-being.²⁶⁰ If this is true, then it is God's way of affirming that suffering may serve a purpose in which it fosters one relationship with God, something more important than one's comfort and well-being.²⁶¹ This also affirms that God was not looking for Job to simply confess of a sin he had not committed for the sake of finding relief. This would have been compromising his integrity for personal gain, something of which the satan had been accusing Job of.

²⁵⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 516.

²⁵⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 516.

²⁵⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 516.

²⁶⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 516-7.

²⁶¹ Hartley, *Job*, 517.

In providing such a thorough response to His governance over the created order, Hartley suggests that God is aiming to move Job to consider how gracious He is.²⁶² Indeed, Hartley views this as a direct means to “...temper the bitter strains of Job’s lament...”²⁶³ It is not that God condemns Job’s laments but rather invites Job to a place of gratitude in the midst of his bitterness. Furthermore, an invitation to such contemplation also helps bring correction to Job’s false perceptions of how God fails to provide proper judgment or governance.²⁶⁴ It is God’s intention for Job to turn to Him in his time of suffering, for the alternative would be for Job to trust in himself, and he cannot even comprehend creation, let alone his own suffering.

In chapter 40 God invites Job to respond. He directly questions Job’s complaint.²⁶⁵ God asks, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!” (40:2). Such a question, “pinpoints the implication of his complaint.”²⁶⁶ God addresses that Job has implied that God needs to be corrected.²⁶⁷ God gives Job the opportunity to voice his correction, and yet, Job remains silent, accepting that God needs no correction.²⁶⁸

It may seem contradictory that God rebukes Job, and yet also affirms that Job has spoken rightly about Him (42:7).²⁶⁹ This can be understood as God clarifying that Job has failed to correctly understand God’s judicious counsel, in spite of having a sincere heart. Furthermore, in seeking reprieve from his suffering, Job pressed God based on the conviction that he was innocent.²⁷⁰ Hartley explains, “Nevertheless, a danger inherent in basing his self-defense on his own personal integrity is that pride may arise and pervert his thinking. It is to thwart any undue

²⁶² Hartley, *Job*, 487-8.

²⁶³ Hartley, *Job*, 488.

²⁶⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 488.

²⁶⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 515.

²⁶⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 515.

²⁶⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 515.

²⁶⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 515.

²⁶⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 491.

²⁷⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 492.

pride in Job that Yahweh opens with a rebuke, for such pride will prevent Job from yielding his avowal of innocence in order to be reconciled with Yahweh.”²⁷¹ In this sense, Job was relying too much on his own innocence, his own judgment of his piety, rather than relying on the perfect judgment of God. Thus, it was imperative that God remind Job that He is the only One who sees all to judge correctly.

God’s response, in comparison to the friends, is not only a critique of their theologies but of their praxis. Reviewing the content of the friend’s speeches shows their theology was not completely skewed. For instance, Bildad insisted God does not pervert justice (8:3), which is confirmed by God Himself in 40:6-7. And so in trying to understand why God affirms Job but not His friends in how they have spoken of Him, it is helpful to understand their relationship to Him. Ash proposes the following:

It seems to me that God’s affirmation applies somehow to not only to what Job has said but to who Job is. The answer would seem to be this: the friends have a theological scheme, a tidy system, well-swept, well-defined, and entirely satisfying to them. But they have no relationship with the God behind their formulas. There is no wonder, no awe, no longing, no yearning, and no prayer to meet and speak with and hear and see the God of their formulas. They are content with the rules of “The System” they have invented. But Job does speak rightly. We have seen that one of the great motifs of Job’s laments is that he longs to bring his perplexity to God himself. Job cannot be satisfied with any system: he must know God and speak to the living God. He must, for nothing else will satisfy him.²⁷²

In other words, God is not impressed by theological jargon or knowledge. He is not impressed by mere platitudes that state what is “right” without fostering a genuine relationship. Rather, God appreciates Job’s honest lament and questioning that fosters his longing for God to meet him in his suffering. Clearly, God did not need Job to be “tidy” in his suffering.

²⁷¹ Hartley, *Job*, 492.

²⁷² Ash, *Job*, 349.

In 40:9-14, God challenges Job to try to take His place as ruling and judging over creation. Such terminology used in this passage, such as “arm like God’s” or “voice” is consistent with other Old Testament allusions to God’s power and authority.²⁷³ For instance, throughout the Old Testament narrative, “God’s outstretched arm” refers to His interference with earthly affairs to bring about His justice and purpose.²⁷⁴ In this way, God is challenging Job to assert such power and authority over the world.²⁷⁵ Where Job has questioned God’s governance over the world, God presents him with the opportunity to take up His position to oversee things for himself. Ash clarifies that God “...is not saying that he is doing his best and Job mustn’t complain if he doesn’t get it right all the time. Not at all.”²⁷⁶ Rather, God is putting things into perspective for Job, who is now realizing that he is not as equipped to oversee creation as he thought. Furthermore, there is much irony in this particular point, in that if Job could fulfill God’s role, then he would not need God, and therefore would not need to plead to God to vindicate him.²⁷⁷ Thus, it is Job’s pleading to God in his misery that confirms he is not knowledgeable or powerful to oversee the world and its suffering. Therefore, Job is beckoned to submit to God’s Lordship over his own world of suffering.²⁷⁸

God, once again, asks Job to consider creatures, namely Behemoth and Leviathan. In ancient thought, these creatures were symbols of cosmic powers.²⁷⁹ Thus, in using these creatures as an example, God presents the “cosmic dimensions of Job’s affliction.”²⁸⁰ God challenges Job to show that he can defeat these creatures.²⁸¹ Much like the rest of God’s

²⁷³ Hartley, *Job*, 520.

²⁷⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 520.

²⁷⁵ Hartley, *Job*, 520.

²⁷⁶ Ash, *Job*, 332.

²⁷⁷ Hartley, *Job*, 521.

²⁷⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 521.

²⁷⁹ Hartley, *Job*, 518.

²⁸⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 522.

²⁸¹ Hartley, *Job*, 518.

questioning or challenging, Job will admit that he is insufficient, and “will have to abandon his complaint.”²⁸² In this way, God reminds Job that He alone is, the master over such forces in the world.²⁸³ And therefore, He is the master over the forces that inflict suffering in the world.

Furthermore, using the example of creatures viewed as cosmic forces may be God’s means of providing commentary about the satan’s involvement in Job’s plight. Job is not aware of the satan’s conversation with God in the prologue, nor does he ever seem to complain against the satan. Yet, here God invites Job to consider his control over cosmic forces. Hartley states,

The author employs this imagery [i.e., Leviathan] to address in the speeches the transcendent dimension of Job’s conflict, the dimension that the role of the satan provides in the prologue. Like the satan these creatures are totally subservient to Yahweh. This is the ancient way of affirming that Yahweh is the Master of whatever force might lie behind Job’s ordeal.²⁸⁴

God is sovereign over that which Job is unable to identify as contributing to his suffering.

Additionally, God makes it evident that such a cosmic force, such as the satan, was only able to afflict Job within the His power.

Finally, by addressing the topic of Leviathan and Behemoth, God is foreshadowing the gospel reality that evil and death will ultimately be defeated. Ash proposes that Leviathan and Behemoth represent the power of death, or more specifically the satan. In leading Job to realize that such creatures are ultimately subject to His control, God reveals that the satan, death, and suffering are subject to Him.²⁸⁵ In the grand irony of the gospel, the redemptive suffering of Christ on the Cross, will defeat the ultimate suffering of death.²⁸⁶ Though Job is nearsighted and is not privy to what contributes to unexplainable suffering, God speaks of a hope that is secure.

²⁸² Hartley, *Job*, 518.

²⁸³ Hartley, *Job*, 518.

²⁸⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 522.

²⁸⁵ Ash, *Job*, 344.

²⁸⁶ Ash, *Job*, 343.

While much of the dialogue in Job is centered around the idea of retributive justice, God consistently rejects this concept. Job insists that he does not deserve to suffer because he has not sinned. The friends insist that he must have had a secret sin, and if not a secret sin, then the words that he has spoken in his suffering were sinful.²⁸⁷ God, on the other hand, is fully aware of Job's words, and labels his words as both ignorant (38:2) and right (42:7).²⁸⁸ This shows that God rejected the notion that there is a "retributive relationship between accusatory protest and condemnation."²⁸⁹ In fact, in making a seemingly contradictory statement that Job's words are both ignorant and right, God displays that His understanding is higher. And it is in God's righteousness, that He provides a means of resolution. In His righteousness, God holds the friends accountable for how they spoke wrongly by instructing them to make atonement through offering sacrifices and having Job pray for them.²⁹⁰ Hartley writes, "God's instructions both authenticate Job and provide a way for the reconciliation of Job and his friends."²⁹¹ Thus, where suffering involves theological distortion and dissension, God longs to bring right theological understanding and right relationship. Job was right in his theological understanding of God as a redeemer, and it is here that God redeems what had been distorted and destroyed. Such redemption continues as God blesses Job, doubling his estate and providing him with a long, full life.²⁹²

Indeed, God instructing the friends to offer sacrifices demonstrates they need forgiveness for their actions toward Job.²⁹³ Ironically, the very friends who have accused Job of sin, ended up

²⁸⁷ Hawley, "Book of Job," 459.

²⁸⁸ Hawley, "Book of Job," 459.

²⁸⁹ Hawley, "Book of Job," 459.

²⁹⁰ Hartley, *Job*, 46.

²⁹¹ Hartley, *Job*, 46.

²⁹² Hartley, *Job*, 46.

²⁹³ Hartley, *Job*, 50.

sinning in how they interpret Job’s suffering. By instructing Job to intercede for his friends in chapter 42, God bestows authority onto Job—an indicator that he was faithful and obedient to God throughout his affliction.²⁹⁴ It appears as though God frequently employs irony, as this continues to be true in these instructions. Ash says the following:

...in an ironic reversal the friends are told that Job will pray for them. If we had been Job’s friends, we would have been stunned, for we would have expected God to take us to one side and say, ‘I want you three, because you are righteous and the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects [James 5:16], to pray for that sinner Job.’²⁹⁵

God does the opposite of this, however, by commanding Job to pray for them. God’s spoken instructions, thus, provide a framework for how He viewed the interaction between Job and his friends. Finally, it also points to the abundant mercy that God provides to the suffering, as God does not intend for Job to “harbor any ill feelings toward his friends for their failure to comfort him.”²⁹⁶ God longs for all to be brought back in right relationship with Him on the other side of navigating Job’s suffering.

It is evident in chapter 42, that God vindicates Job. Not only did He declare Job right (42:7), He also refers to Job as “my servant” (42:7,8). This is the same title God used for Job in chapters 1 and 2, prior to Job’s affliction.²⁹⁷ This means that God’s view of Job’s relationship to Him did not change by Job’s reaction to suffering or, if it had changed, God accepted Job’s recantation.²⁹⁸ This is the same title God bestowed upon Moses and the prophets.²⁹⁹ Although Job had been brought to utter humility and desperation in his suffering, God bestows dignity upon him by using such a title. Rather, than destroying Job in his suffering, God dignifies him.

²⁹⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 50.

²⁹⁵ Ash, *Job*, 351.

²⁹⁶ Hartley, *Job*, 50.

²⁹⁷ Ash, *Job*, 351.

²⁹⁸ Hartley, *Job*, 539.

²⁹⁹ Ash, *Job*, 351.

In examining the Lord's response, or "answer" to Job, many debate whether it is much of an answer at all. Job's question was essentially, "Why do I, Job, who do not deserve it, suffer as I do?"³⁰⁰ And yet, God responds by inviting Job to consider His creation and how He is both the "creator and sustainer of life."³⁰¹ While this appears to dodge Job's question, Ash argues this can be seen as an answer in that it reminds Job that he can trust God with his life and unanswered questions.³⁰²

At the end of the story, Job is blessed by God. Although God does not speak in this section, the narrator reveals that Job's restoration is indeed bestowed by God. Job 42:10 says, "After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before." Furthermore, 42:12 says, "The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part..." It is surmised by Hartley that this double, abundant blessing was the means to symbolize God's full acceptance of Job.³⁰³ This shows the redemptive aspect of God. Hartley writes:

The doubling of Job's estate does not mean that he received a bountiful reward for the endurance of undeserved affliction, but rather that Yahweh freely and abundantly blessed him. The blessing proves that Yahweh is a life-giving God, not a capricious deity who takes pleasure in the suffering of those who fear him.³⁰⁴

In blessing Job, God speaks to the reality that He intends to ultimately bring about healing and restoration for those who suffer. And once again, although the LORD does not speak in this passage, the narrator says that Job was comforted and consoled for "...all the trouble the LORD had brought on him..." (42:11) It is thus, confirmed that it was in fact God who had allowed Job to experience trouble.

³⁰⁰ Ash, *Job*, 328.

³⁰¹ Ash, *Job*, 328.

³⁰² Ash, *Job*, 328.

³⁰³ Hartley, *Job*, 540.

³⁰⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 540

Summary

The voice of God ultimately serves as the sounding board for the validity of the other voices in the text. God challenges and corrects each of these voices—expressing His confidence that Job will pass the test incited by the satan, reminding Job that He lacks omniscience, and rebuking the friends for how they have spoken of Him. In this narrative centered around suffering, God’s voice is intentional, clearly aware of Job’s specific pain and complaints. In the end, God offers Job that which the sufferer needs—not clear answers for why they are suffering but rather an invitation to accept there is only One who can understand such things. This is God’s mercy to the sufferer, that they do not have to take the position of God.

CHAPTER SIX

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND PRAXIS

Introduction

The previous chapters detailed the theologies of the polyphonic voices in the book of Job. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theological evaluation of such presentations through the theological perspectives of well-known Christian writers. These writers provide an explanation as to why God permits suffering, much like in the story of Job, and why He can still be called good in spite of this. This evaluation will include the insights of Christopher J. H. Wright, Timothy Keller, and C.S. Lewis. As a result of this evaluation, a praxis will be presented based upon what is applied from the voices in the Joban narrative.

The Voice of Wright

Wright does not shy away from the reality that evil and suffering present a true dilemma for the Christian.³⁰⁵ Whereas polytheism allows for the tension of good and evil, biblical theism presents the One true God, “the creator of the whole universe, who is personal, good, loving, omnipotent, and sovereign over all that happens.”³⁰⁶ This creates the tension of why an omnipotent God who is able to prevent suffering would not, as if He were not loving.³⁰⁷ Wright contends, however, that God is not as passive when it comes to evil and suffering as He may appear.

Wright considers the overarching view of the biblical narrative, in which those who suffered more often ask “How long?” than “Why?”³⁰⁸ He explains, “Their tendency was not to demand that God give them an explanation for the *origin* of evil but rather to plead with God to

³⁰⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 27.

³⁰⁶ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 27.

³⁰⁷ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 27.

³⁰⁸ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 27.

do something to bring about an *end* to evil.”³⁰⁹ And the biblical narrative, surely promises an ultimate end to all evil. However, within the story of Job, he wrestles with both wanting to know why and how long he is suffering. And yet, Job does not appear to get an answer as to why he suffers.

Wright presents the sobering reality that much like in the story of Job, the rest of the biblical narrative does not provide clear answers for the origins of suffering and evil. Whereas Genesis 3 speaks to the entrance of evil into humanity, it does not clearly explain the ultimate origin of evil that prompted humanity to consider sin.³¹⁰ Wright contends:

In other words, the Bible compels us to accept the mystery of evil. Notice I did not say, ‘compels us to accept evil.’ The Bible never does that or asks us to do so. We are emphatically told to reject and resist evil. Rather, I mean the Bible leads us to accept that evil is a mystery (especially in terms of its origins, a mystery that we human beings cannot finally understand or explain).³¹¹

Such an argument is reminiscent of God’s reply to Job, in that a human, like Job, simply cannot understand the inner-workings of the created order (Job 38-41).

Wright concedes that much of the suffering in the world does originate from human sin and wickedness.³¹² Thus, this is where more tension is created for Job and many others to see God respond to their suffering with justice, as expressed in Job 24. Wright admits, “...we shudder because we know that if God were to do that right now and deal out instant justice, none of us would escape.”³¹³ Although Job was innocent, as a mere human, the outpouring of God’s judgment and justice would have inevitably led to Job’s demise. Thus, whereas Job asks “Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for

³⁰⁹ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 27.

³¹⁰ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 29.

³¹¹ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 29.

³¹² Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 29-30.

³¹³ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 34.

such days?” (24:1), he may in fact take comfort in a God who delays in executing judgment on humanity. Also, in critiquing God’s method of judgment, Job positioned himself as judge over God. Wright says, “As we try to stand in judgment on God, we don’t really have a leg to stand on ourselves.”³¹⁴

Another important theological argument among the voices in Job is centered around the doctrine of retribution, as related to the causation of Job’s suffering. Job questions why he is suffering if he is innocent, whereas the friends insist he must have sinned if he is suffering. Each of these voices, then, upholds the doctrine of retribution. On the other hand, God insists that this test of suffering was indeed, “without any reason” on Job’s part, unprovoked by direct sin. (Job 2:3). In this way, God defies the doctrine of retribution. Wright contends, “The Bible makes it equally clear that we cannot just draw simple equations between what one person suffers and their own personal sinfulness. Often it is terribly wrong to do so and makes the suffering even worse as Job discovered.”³¹⁵ Thus, while much suffering is derived from human sin, it is not that simple to determine the root cause of each instance of suffering.

Wright also addresses one of the factors that intensify suffering, the longing to understand. He admits that such a longing for understanding is an innate part of our human design. He writes:

It is a fundamental human drive to understand things. The creation narrative shows that we have been put into our creative environment to master and subdue it, which implies gaining understanding of it...Our rationality is in itself a dimension of being made in the image of God.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 34.

³¹⁵ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 35.

³¹⁶ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 41-2.

With this innate desire to understand, humans long to order and make sense of the world.³¹⁷

Wright surmises, however, that when humans try to employ their rationality to evil, only frustration ensues.³¹⁸ This is so, as evil is not rational—it does not “make sense.” Wright explains the following:

God with his infinite perspective, and for reasons known only to himself, knows that we finite human beings cannot, indeed *must not*, ‘make sense’ of evil. For the final truth is that *evil does not make sense*. ‘Sense’ is part of our rationality that in itself is part of God’s good creation and God’s image in us. So evil can have no sense, since sense itself is a good thing.³¹⁹

Because Wright views evil as having no proper place in God’s creation and in the ultimate reality where all is to be redeemed, he suggests that God conceals the mystery of evil.³²⁰

Within the narrative of Job, Wright’s explanation of the mystery of evil and suffering appears to be true. For, in the story of Job, God never explains why people suffer and experience evil. God does not rationalize with Job. Rather, God emphasizes that His own understanding is greater than Job’s. He hints at the very concept presented by Wright in that such inner-workings of the created order are too lofty for Job to comprehend. While it may appear cruel that God does not provide a rational explanation to Job for his immense suffering, Wright proposes that such concealment is “providentially good.”³²¹ In his crying out to God, Job was met with silence, or silence in regards to the answers that he longed for, as God’s reply was not what he anticipated. Wright examines that this is the common experience of humanity, searching for the “sense” of their suffering. He writes, “It’s not that we get *no* answer. We get silence. And that silence *is* the

³¹⁷ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 42.

³¹⁸ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 42.

³¹⁹ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 42.

³²⁰ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 42.

³²¹ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 42.

answer to our question. There *is* no sense. And that is a good thing too.”³²² It is good since the good God has determined it is better for us to not understand.

Whereas God met humanity’s question about the origin of evil and suffering with silence, he draws attention to “what he has done to defeat and destroy it.”³²³ Wright clarifies this is not simply a means to “gag our desperate questions,” as God provides humanity with several biblical responses to their suffering, such as grief, weeping, and lament—all of which are expressed by Job.³²⁴ Wright argues it is only right that a human’s response to evil and suffering is to struggle against it.³²⁵ He explains, “We struggle against it with lament, grief, anger, disgust, and protest...and the Bible not only gives us permission but even gives us the words to do so.”³²⁶ Thus, Wright would affirm Job’s response to his suffering.

Wright’s view on God’s allowance for particular forms of evil provides an interesting commentary on the specific suffering faced by Job. For instance, in chapter 1, a “mighty wind swept in from the desert,” and ended up causing a house to collapse, killing Job’s children (v. 19). Job’s friends interpret his suffering, including this particular incident of a “natural disaster,” as a form of God’s judgment or rebuke. Wright provides the following input:

So the Bible does tell us that God used *some* (though actually not many) natural disasters as acts of divine judgment. But we cannot invert the logic that *any* or *every* natural disaster is therefore an act of divine judgment on somebody...On the contrary, the Bible actually *discourages* us from jumping to the assumption that people who suffer some disaster are the victims of God’s judgment on sin at all.³²⁷

To support this argument, Wright appeals to Luke 13:4-5 in which Jesus responds to an incident, of a tower collapsing, either due to an accident or natural disaster, which led to eighteen people

³²² Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 42.

³²³ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 43.

³²⁴ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 43.

³²⁵ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 44.

³²⁶ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 44.

³²⁷ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 49.

being killed.³²⁸ In his evaluation of this incident, Jesus explains their death was not to be viewed as a means of judgment for their specific sinfulness being greater than others. Wright appeals also to John 9:1-3, where Jesus explains that a man's blindness was not to be viewed as a punishment for sin.³²⁹

Wright looks to the story of Job as affirming that such disasters leading to suffering need not be viewed as judgment or punishment. He contests:

Job's friends insisted that the disasters that had come on him were God's judgment on his wickedness. But God and the readers know that the friends were wrong. And Job, though he did not know what the readers know, refused to believe that the friends were right about *him*, no matter how right their theology was. His suffering was a testing, but it was definitely not judgment. The friends came up with a lot of true general theological affirmations about sin and judgment, but then made a false specific application to Job's particular suffering. Job's three friends were orthodox and scriptural in their theology, but totally mistaken in their diagnosis and disastrously callous in their pastoral application.³³⁰

Thus, Wright contends that how one applies general theological truths to particular suffering is important, as in the case of Job. If anything, the story of Job reminds the reader of the limited perspective and understanding humans have of what is going on in the heavenly council and the causation of earthly circumstances.

Next, Wright affirms the practice of lament, as expressed by Job's voice. Wright expresses beautifully that:

Lament is not only allowed in the Bible; it is modeled for us in abundance. God seems to want as many words with which to fill out our complaint forms as to write our thank-you notes. Perhaps this is because whatever amount of lament the world causes us to express is a drop in the ocean compared to the grief in the heart of God himself at the totality of suffering that only God can comprehend.³³¹

³²⁸ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 49.

³²⁹ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 49.

³³⁰ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 49.

³³¹ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 51.

Thus, put into perspective, if humans are not fully able to comprehend suffering, as the story of Job suggests, then the angst that is expressed by humans is a fraction of the pain bore by God. The laments that may seem so cruel among human voices, are not as intimidating to God. This is particularly true in light of the Cross. Wright expresses that the book of Job highlights this. After Job voices multiple laments of protest, God declares him as more right than his friends who had tried to dogmatically resolve his suffering.³³² Furthermore, Wright expresses that the biblical examples of those who cry out in pain, protest/lament not because they do not know God but rather because they do.³³³ They cry out because of the discrepancy they experience in what they experience and who they know God to be.³³⁴ This is certainly evident in the story of Job, as it is clearly indicated that he *knows* God, that he is God's servant, and so this is what impresses him to cry out for the God who he knows can help him.

The Voice of Keller

Timothy Keller faces the problem of suffering in his book *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. He insists that:

For many people it is not the exclusivity of Christianity that poses the biggest problem, it is the presence of evil and suffering in the world. Some find unjust suffering to be a philosophical problem, calling into question the very existence of God. For others, it is an intensely personal issue.³³⁵

Within the Joban narrative, none of the voices are atheistic. Rather, all of the voices assume and accept that God is aware and involved in Job's plight. So, for Job, his suffering leads to the intense "personal issue" of which he does not question God's existence but rather wrestles with the God that He is experiencing conflicting with the character of the God he knows exists.

³³² Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 51.

³³³ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 53.

³³⁴ Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 53.

³³⁵ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008), 22.

Keller addresses the issue of evil and suffering appearing pointless as problematic in terms of a good God allowing such pointless pain. Keller says, “Tucked away within the assertion that the world is filled with pointless evil is a hidden premise, namely, that if evil appears pointless to me, then it must be pointless.”³³⁶ Keller identifies such reasoning as “fallacious,” as “Just because you can’t see or imagine why God might allow something to happen doesn’t mean that there can’t be one.”³³⁷ Ironically, Keller notes that the reasoning of there being no point to suffering when it is difficult to identify its meaning, puts an unsurmountable amount of faith in one’s own cognitive faculties.³³⁸ Job’s experience is surprising as he wrestles with understanding why God would allow him to suffer innocently. He begins to judge God’s ability to oversee the created order. It is this logic that God corrects, reminding Job that his cognition is nowhere near as mighty. If Job cannot understand the innerworkings of the created order, surely he cannot expect to understand or identify the point of every instance of suffering—even his own.

Keller’s commentary on whether or not evil/suffering is pointless finds some contention with the story of Job. Job 2:3 seems to suggest that what God has allowed, the suffering that Job faced in order to be tested, was without reason, or pointless. And yet, when God confronts Job, he reminds him that his understanding is limited. He asks Job, “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?” (38:2). Evidently, Job, as a human, lacks the knowledge to understand God’s plans and purposes to the point where they can be obscured. Thus, as Keller advises, humans must be cautious of their own cognition in assuming that just because they think suffering is pointless or that God could not have a reason for allowing suffering, there could not

³³⁶ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 23.

³³⁷ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 23.

³³⁸ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 23.

be. Due to the limitations of humanity, it is, therefore, unreasonable to assume that if there were reasons for evil/suffering, such reasons would be known or easy to comprehend.³³⁹

Keller explains that both logic and experience disprove the notion that being unable to identify a reason for suffering, is adequate to prove suffering as pointless.³⁴⁰ He appeals to the story of Joseph in Genesis, in which Joseph's suffering, allowed by God, eventually enabled him to be positioned as "...a powerful agent for social justice and spiritual healing."³⁴¹ Furthermore, as a pastor, Keller reflects on the countless times he heard a congregant identify with such a narrative, in which hindsight has revealed that their experiences of suffering were crucial to "success in life."³⁴² Keller proposes the following: "If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways."³⁴³ This is the tension and resolve for Job. Eliphaz was easily convinced that God had a good reason for his suffering; it was a rebuke to lead him to repentance and a right relationship with God. Knowing that he need not repent, Job is unable to see how God could have a good reason for his suffering. And yet, at the end of the story, Job accepts that God, in His infinite knowledge of the created order, can be trusted.

Thus, the book of Job does not present a scenario in which the problem of suffering fuels atheism. Keller does however indicate, that simply because the problem of suffering does not lead one to denounce God, it does not mean that it does not skew the believer's view of God, or

³³⁹ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 24.

³⁴⁰ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 24.

³⁴¹ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 24.

³⁴² Keller, *The Reason for God*, 24.

³⁴³ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 25.

that it does not lead one to feel unease in their relationship with God.³⁴⁴ Keller paraphrases a complaint one may make, “All this philosophizing does not get the Christian God ‘off the hook’ for the world’s evil and suffering!”³⁴⁵ Keller writes, “In response the philosopher Peter Kreeft points out that the Christian God came to earth to deliberately put himself on the hook of human suffering. In Jesus Christ, God experienced the greatest depths of pain.”³⁴⁶ Although Job is not aware of the New Covenant hope of Christ, such a reality of the hope of a God who so empathizes with human suffering is seen in the similarities of Job’s and Christ’s voices in their moments of agony. In his suffering, Job does not forsake his relationship with God, yet cries out to Him, laments, and asks questions. And when Jesus was on the cross, He asked, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46) Such a question sounds reminiscent of Job’s complaint in which he says, “I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me” (Job 30:20).

Thus, according to Keller, Job’s cries were not sinful, as the perfect Son of God expressed similar complaints in His own suffering. It also vouches for the state of Job’s relationship with God as his servant (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8). Keller looks to the reflections of Bill Lane to expound on Jesus’s cry on the cross: “The cry has a ruthless authenticity...Jesus did not die renouncing God. Even in the inferno of abandonment he did not surrender his faith in God but expressed his anguished prayer in a cry of affirmation, ‘My God, my God’.”³⁴⁷ While this was originally David’s cry in Psalm 22, “Jesus recasts David’s individual lament describing his own suffering...”³⁴⁸ In response, Keller notes that Jesus’ statement was “deeply relational” and

³⁴⁴ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 27.

³⁴⁵ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 27.

³⁴⁶ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 27.

³⁴⁷ William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), quoted in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008), 29.

³⁴⁸ C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, Second (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 127.

that “Jesus still uses the language of intimacy—‘my God’—even as he experiences infinite separation from the Father.”³⁴⁹ This critiques Job’s friends who were concerned for Job’s relational status with God in the midst of his anguish. The ultimate hope of Jesus, as Keller has indicated, is that one in right relationship with God can cry out to Him in pain. Also, there is the hope that such sufferings of humanity were to ultimately be experienced by Christ (Isa. 53:3-4). And so, while Job is seemingly met with silence and indirect answers by God, he is unaware that God’s response will ultimately come to experience suffering himself.

Keller makes an assessment of why God allows suffering and evil, such as the suffering that Job experienced, to persist. He writes:

...we look to the Cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, we now know what the answer isn’t. It can’t be that he doesn’t love us. It can’t be that he is indifferent and detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself.³⁵⁰

Although not explicitly answered in the Lord’s speeches, for each of Job’s questions as to why—Keller then, affirms that Job need not doubt the Lord’s love or faithfulness. In other words, persistent suffering, or the absence of God’s voice, is not to be interpreted as the absence of God’s love or faithfulness. The loneliness felt by Job in his suffering eventually met with the company of the Son of God on the cross—wrongfully accused, truly innocent, and feeling forsaken.

Although Keller takes great stock in the fact that God is with us—“Immanuel” in our suffering, he recognizes this may not resolve the fear that suffering is in vain.³⁵¹ Job knew God was aware of his suffering, yet longed for its reasoning. Thus, Keller points beyond the cross to

³⁴⁹ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 29.

³⁵⁰ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 30.

³⁵¹ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 31.

the resurrection.³⁵² He claims that many may ask what Sam Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings* asks when he realized his friend Gandalf was not dead: “Is everything sad going to come untrue?”³⁵³ Keller argues that because of the resurrection, “The Answer of Christianity to that question is—yes. Everything sad is going to come untrue and it will somehow be *greater* for having once been broken and lost. Embracing the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and Cross brings profound consolation in the face of suffering.”³⁵⁴ Such a proposal, however, faces tension in the story of Job. First, there is no mention of Job being an Israelite. Thus, it is unclear what Job’s knowledge of God’s covenant is, and if there is any indication that he has the New Covenant with Christ to anticipate. It is unclear as to how resurrection hope is to be expected within Job’s story. In the epilogue of Job, it is revealed, “After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had done before.” (42:10) Job’s fortunes, his possessions, were restored. His children, however, who had died, were not resurrected. 42:12-13 says that “The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters.” Job was blessed with more children, and yet still, the ones who had died in Job 1 were not resurrected. And so, it is unclear as to whether the restoration and blessings of the epilogue are to truly be the closure for Job, or if he is anticipating resurrection hope. While heaven is mentioned in the prologue, there is no mention of eternal life, and so Job’s sufferings seem contained and resolved without a view of immortality.

³⁵² Keller, *The Reason for God*, 31.

³⁵³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (various editions), quoted in C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962), 33.

³⁵⁴ Keller, *The Reason for God*, 33.

The Voice of Lewis

C.S. Lewis is another influential voice for understanding how God relates to Job's suffering is. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis addresses the problem created by the tension of the human experience of a painful world in conjunction with the knowledge that there is a good God. Lewis explains the following:

If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God either lacks goodness, or power, or both.' This is the problem of pain, in its simplest form.³⁵⁵

With such a problem, then one may wonder as Lewis explains why God, in His absolute goodness, would create the universe if there was an evident possibility of suffering in His creation.³⁵⁶ Lewis admits, "I am aware of no human scales in which such a portentous question can be weighed."³⁵⁷ And yet, Job tries to weigh this. In chapter 3, Job even curses the day that he was born, concluding that it would have been better for him to not have been born, to not have been created, than to endure suffering. In stating this, however, Job oversteps his humanity, judging God's wisdom expressed through creation. Lewis writes, "On the one hand, if God is wiser than we His judgment must differ from ours on many things, and not least on good and evil. What seems good to us may therefore not be good in His eyes, and what seems to us evil may not be evil."³⁵⁸ This point is repeatedly shown throughout the Joban narrative, as Job and his three friends each offer an assessment/judgment of the value of Job's suffering. Job simply views his suffering as cruel. The friends view Job's suffering as good in the sense that it is God's retributive justice or rebuke. They all, however, fail to accurately interpret the value of the

³⁵⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 19.

³⁵⁶ Lewis, *Pain*, 27.

³⁵⁷ Lewis, *Pain*, 27.

³⁵⁸ Lewis, *Pain*, 28.

suffering. While Job's friends labeled his suffering as good, God clearly disagrees with the theology they used to support this conclusion. Therefore, Lewis's point appears to be true, regardless of the bend of judgment. Humans must, therefore, appeal to God as the wiser judge.

Lewis also presents a challenging concept regarding Job's story: "God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake."³⁵⁹ This implies that God is not obligated to respond to Job's suffering. Because God does not exist for the sake of humans, God's response to humanity does not alter His status as good. On the other hand, the fact that He does choose to respond demonstrates an abundance of His goodness—He does what He does not have to do, out of desire rather than obligation. The concept that humans do not exist for themselves, presents the idea that one's life, possessions, blessings, etc. are at the disposal of the God who granted them. At the beginning of his suffering, Job seems to recognize this, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (1:21) In response to Job saying this, the narrator reveals, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (1:22). As mentioned in the chapter on Job's voice, it is difficult to assess the attitude in which Job spoke these words, whether it be out of the numb shock of loss, or whether he was fully convinced it was true. Through Lewis's evaluation, it appears correct to reverently remember that all that has been given ultimately belongs to God. And according to the narrative, when God takes away what he has given, it cannot be viewed as wrongdoing on God's part.

This notion for Lewis, also lends itself to the fact that "God has no needs."³⁶⁰ Lewis writes, "If He requires us, the requirement is of His own choosing...If He who in Himself can

³⁵⁹ Lewis, *Pain*, 36.

³⁶⁰ Lewis, *Pain*, 38.

lack nothing chooses to need us, it is because we need to be needed.”³⁶¹ This concept is important to the dialogue between God and the satan in the story of Job. The satan challenges God, “But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” (1:11). This may imply that the satan views God as being threatened by what a human fails to do for God. While God is certainly worthy of worship, His divinity is not threatened or undermined by the state of Job’s heart. Lewis also comments on the idea that God was disturbed by Job’s lacking in his authenticity of worship. Lewis writes, “If the immutable heart can be grieved by the puppets of its own making, it is Divine Omnipotence, no other, that has so subjected it, freely, and in a humility that passes understanding.”³⁶² It is God’s choice, a divine humility, to be grieved by His creation. Thus, God was not motivated as much by cruelty, as Job might have assumed but rather by humility and the love that He chose to have for his relationship with Job.

Furthermore, Lewis speaks about God’s purpose for pain. He writes, “God...shouts in our pain: it is His mega-phone to rouse a deaf world.”³⁶³ Lewis surmises that God uses pain as a tool to get one’s attention. This notion is reiterated repeatedly throughout the story of Job. The satan proposed that if Job were to be afflicted with pain that it would arouse an adverse reaction in him and reveal his true heart (Job 1:11; 2:5). To the satan’s point, Lewis agrees that it is difficult to be attentive to God when all is going well.³⁶⁴ The friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar also see Job’s suffering as a tool that God uses as a means of rebuke to rouse Job to repentance. Finally, Job is roused by his suffering, crying out for God’s response, wondering what God is trying to tell him. Thus, each of these voices seems to affirm that pain is surely a powerful means

³⁶¹ Lewis, *Pain*, 39.

³⁶² Lewis, *Pain*, 39.

³⁶³ Lewis, *Pain*, 74.

³⁶⁴ Lewis, *Pain*, 76.

of pointing one's attention to God. In the story of Job, however, it should be observed that Job was already faithfully attentive to God prior to his suffering (1:8). Thus, suffering is not necessarily a tool required for one's faithfulness to God. Additionally, it is important to note that Lewis's understanding of pain expanded after experiencing the loss of his wife, detailed in his book, *A Grief Observed*. Written after *The Problem of Pain*, *A Grief Observed* serves as a sort of addendum in which Lewis may not be as cavalier in viewing pain and suffering as a tool, empathizing with the frustration of those who seem to be met with God's silence.³⁶⁵

Lewis and the satan agree that painful circumstances are the true test of one's devotion to God. Lewis says:

We cannot therefore know that we are acting at all, or primarily, for God's sake, unless the material of the action is contrary to our inclinations, or (in other words) painful, and we cannot know that we are choosing, we cannot choose. The full acting out of self's surrender to God therefore demands pain: this action, to be perfect, must be done from the pure will to obey, in the absence, or in the teeth of inclination.³⁶⁶

It is this very concept that the satan uses to challenge whether or not Job truly fears God (1:9-10). Therefore, the satan's understanding of suffering is not necessarily wrong. The fact that Job withstands, or passes, the test of suffering demonstrates that Lewis's point is not always correct. One can be truly devoted to God even in times of blessing and prosperity.

While there is much debate about whether or not God truly needed to test Job to know the state of his heart, Lewis offers that pain can also be used to strengthen the one being tested. Lewis recognizes God as omniscient, and therefore, it may seem like God's methods of testing are pointless torture.³⁶⁷ To this point, Lewis appeals to St. Augustine's example of the testing of Abraham in which, "...whatever God knew, Abraham at any rate did not know that his

³⁶⁵ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London, UK: Faber & Faber, 1968).

³⁶⁶ Lewis, *Pain*, 79.

³⁶⁷ Lewis, *Pain*, 81.

obedience could endure such a command until the event taught him: and obedience which he did not know that he would choose, he cannot be said to have chosen.”³⁶⁸ Likewise, Job cannot have been said to have been devoted to God even in suffering, had he not endured suffering. Even though God, in His omniscience, knew that Job would be faithful, Job did not know that his faithfulness could endure such trials. This concept, then, detracts from the speculation that God’s testing was cruel and pointless.

Theological Praxis and Application

The voices in the narrative of Job offer various views of God’s interpretation of suffering. A theological examination of these voices shows that while each of their theologies was not completely accurate, much can be gleaned from them for a modern approach to navigating one’s relationship with God in a time of suffering. In particular, the reader can have a better understanding of how to speak about God and respond to suffering in such a way that is theologically sound. Thus, the reader is equipped to comfort the sufferer or navigate their own suffering in a way that is God-honoring, in accordance with the Joban narrative.

One particular application is in how Christians, in particular, interpret the causation of one’s suffering, in relation to God. As demonstrated by this research, it is inaccurate to assume that one’s suffering is a retributive punishment from God for the sake of one’s sin. To assume that all suffering is retributive agrees with the voices of Job’s friends, who ultimately were rebuked by God for their retributive theology. While cross-referencing with other Scripture demonstrates there are *particular instances* in which God invokes suffering as a rebuke, the voices in Job demonstrate this is not so in *every instance* of suffering. Thus, the Christian is to be slow to identify suffering as retribution.

³⁶⁸ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, quoted in C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1962), 81.

One particularly comforting application provided by the dialogue in Job is that there is freedom offered to those suffering in expressing their anguish to God. As seen in the dialogue of Job, God does not issue a gag order to those who suffer. God refers to Job as His servant in both the prologue and the epilogue. Between these, Job lamented, asked questions, and expressed frustration. Although God corrected Job's misunderstanding of His character and judgment, God does not forsake Job. Rather, God eventually responds to him. This serves as a reminder that God provided the sufferer a means to express their pain without fearing they will be abandoned. It is important to note that "Laments constitute the largest group of Psalms in the Psalter. There are more than 60, including individual and corporate laments."³⁶⁹ With such a biblical precedence, lamenting is to be a practice for the biblical Christian. The Christian is invited to not only lament in their suffering but also support others in doing so. If God does not enforce a gag order, then neither can the Christian enforce one on one's self and others. Thus, it is both the responsibility of the individual and the Church at large to create safe spaces for lament. Churches may consider including opportunities to lament in worship services.

Job's friends assumed he was rejecting God's rebuke, and yet he was actually pursuing God in seeking His response. Thus, both the individual and Church can encourage the sufferer that God is not intimidated by their pain or questions. Rather, it is better to communicate with Him and seek Him, as opposed to avoid or altogether reject Him. The individual and the Church may encourage the sufferer to speak to God, even asking the painful questions, rather than withdrawing and concluding that He does not exist or care. Although God is silent during much of Job's suffering, His eventual response demonstrates He was aware and present during Job's

³⁶⁹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 212.

suffering, listening to his cries. Thus, the sufferer can be encouraged that even in the appearance of God's absence, God is aware of their situation.

One sobering point of application from the story of Job is simply the acceptance of the reality that humans are not provided with all of the answers for their suffering. Job is invited to accept that he is not God, that he does not have the same power, knowledge, or wisdom as God. This is not a means of bypassing Job's pain, but rather, it is the ironic good news for the sufferer. God does not allow suffering to be comprehended, for it to make "sense." The reader can accept the mystery of suffering, in that God is working all things together for a grander purpose, even when one's suffering speaks what is contrary. God does not demand that one accept suffering as an ultimate end. Rather, within the narrative of Job, God displays his heart for restoration and compassion. This foreshadows the reality of the Cross, in which God became familiar with pain, and bore the suffering of humanity (see Isa. 53:3-4). Indeed, the theocentric theology of the Joban narrative invites the sufferer to cast their eyes not on themselves but on the God who suffered in order to bring about complete restoration.

Summary

A theological evaluation of the voices of suffering in the book of Job offers practical insight and application to the modern reader. Wright contends with Job's desire to understand his suffering, offering that it is actually God's mercy that he cannot understand it. Keller identifies the fallacy that simply because one cannot clearly identify the point of suffering, it must be pointless. Lewis shows that suffering often aids the sufferer in realizing their devotion to God. Where the reader identifies with the Joban dialogue, they may also apply Job's acceptance of a God's character over God's answers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Suffering is a common experience of humanity. This thesis has explored the voices in the narrative of Job, in an effort to help the reader assess their own voice in times of suffering, and thus understand if it is theologically accurate. Ultimately, the voice of God functions as a means for the reader to be reminded of a God who is good, present, and just in the midst of suffering. Where most of the voices assume that suffering is a result of retributive punishment, God's voice challenges this, asserting that humanity may not so easily identify the "why's" of suffering. God asserts that humanity can identify their own weakness and limitations, and trust in the One who oversees creation.

Singer-songwriter Bethany Barnard wrote the following modern-day lyrics of lament, in response to watching her dad suffer and ultimately die from cancer:

I've got to reconcile that
 You don't fast forward me through this
 And I've gotta reconcile that
 You want to know me when I'm like this
 And I've got to reconcile that
 You didn't change the diagnosis
 And I've gotta reconcile that
 You've reconciled it all in Your flesh
 You, Son of Man
 Love Incarnate
 You don't see from far away
 You come, sit with me
 And grieve with me
 And I see tears on Your face³⁷⁰

The dialogue of Job has revealed a God who is acutely aware of Job's suffering. The God who responds to Job is the God who responds to the suffering of humanity by becoming human. Unbeknownst to Job, God too, will sit in suffering, grieve, and shed tears. And

³⁷⁰ "Tears on Your Face," Spotify, track 3 on Bethany Barnard, *All My Questions*, 2021.

so, it is not that God does not speak to the suffering that is so difficult to reconcile, rather God becomes acquainted with suffering for the sake of the reconciliation of all things, including our present sufferings (see Col. 1:20; Rom. 8:18). Surely, then, the sufferer can speak of a God who is good, *all the time*.

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