

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of JOB

There is no substantial agreement among scholars either about the authorship of the Book of Job or its date. Rabbinic Judaism attributes the book to Moses, but considerable Christian tradition, going back to some of the early Fathers, and followed by Luther and, among more modern scholars, Kyle and Delitzsch and E.J. Young, have taken the view that it was composed at some time during the reign of Solomon, since it bears the character and stamp of the wisdom literature originating at that time. There is no indisputable evidence one way or the other, as the wide variety of views indicates. The time, however, of which the book speaks may be very early, as far back as the age of the Patriarchs.

Of far greater importance, however, than authorship or date, is the subject matter and substance of the book. As one well known Old Testament scholar puts it, 'The author's purpose (was) to widen men's views of God's providence, and to set before them a new view of suffering. With great skill he employs Job as his instrument to clear the ground of the old theories; and he himself brings forward in their place his new truth, that sufferings may befall the innocent, and be not a chastisement for their sins, but a trial of their righteousness.'

The book unfolds the story of a man righteous and blameless in the sight of God, yet plunged into the most terrible suffering of body, mind and spirit. Job's 'comforters' proceed on the assumption that Job must have some secret sin in his life which is the cause of his suffering. This Job vehemently disputes, and we are let into the secret of the sufferings: they are not random, not punitive, not disciplinary; there is such a thing as innocent suffering. The patriarch's suffering was an honour and a service that he was rendering to God. The book of Job is a debate, an enquiry, as one scholar has pointed out, not an oracle, nine-tenths of which consists of a groping in the dark. The questions raised by Job are not in fact answered in the book; they are answered only by Christ, and fully only in His coming again.

I) 1:1

The following analysis, taken substantially from the New Bible Dictionary will prove a useful guide to our study.

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF JOB**I** The Prologue 1:1 - 2:13**II** Job's Complaint 3:1-26**III** The Discourses with the Three Friends 4:1 - 31:40**First Cycle of Discourses 4:1 - 14:22**

- a) 4:1-5:27 Eliphaz' First Speech
- b) 6:1-7:21 Job's Reply
- c) 8:1-22 Bildad's First Speech
- d) 9:1-10:22 Job's Reply
- e) 11:1-20 Zophar's First Speech
- of) 12:1-14:22 Job's Reply

Second Cycle of Discourses 15:1 - 21:34

- a) 15:1-35 Eliphaz' Second Discourse
- b) 16:1-17:16 Job's Reply
- c) 18:1-21 Bildad's Second Discourse
- d) 19:1-29 Job's Reply
- e) 20:1-29 Zophar's Second Discourse
- of) 21:1-34 Job's Reply

Third Cycle of Discourses 22:1 - 31:40

- a) 22:1-30 Eliphaz' Third Discourse
- b) 23:1-24:25 Job's Reply
- c) 25:1-6 Bildad's Third Speech
- d) 26:1-14 Job's Reply
- e) 27:1-31:40 Job's Final Reply to his Friends

IV The Speeches of Elihu 32:1 - 37:24**V The Lord Speaks 38:1 - 42:6**

2) 1:1-5

The book opens with a brief description of Job as a righteous, godly and God-fearing man. This in itself is an impressive testimony about one who is described as 'the greatest of all the men of the east', since godliness is not a notable characteristic in the great, of any age. The affluence and prosperity of his home and circumstances are evident. It may be that there is a suggestion in what is said in 4 about his family that they sat somewhat lightly to their father's godly ways - and this seems to be confirmed in Job's expression of anxiety about their way of life in 5. If so, what he does with that anxiety is significant: he was not blind to their possible faults, thinking they were incapable of doing wrong. He knew the human heart, and knew that but for God's grace there was no sin they could fall into. He was a true priest to his family, ministering to them in spiritual things, and holding them up before God in prayer (this is the significance of his offering burnt offerings for them). There is, in the last analysis, only one way to 'sanctify' one's family, and that is to be much in prayer for them. The picture given here of Job is not, as some might suppose, one of an over-anxious parent fluttering ineffectually over his children, still less of one perpetually nagging them 'to be good'; rather that of a man of integrity, sufficiently realistic to have no illusions about them, and knowing his clear responsibility to bring them to God in prayer. This is the first lesson the book has to teach us, and it is a lesson that all parents do well to learn.

3) 1:6-12

In these verses we are suddenly taken behind the scenes - one of few such glimpses given in Scripture. This introduces us to the real meaning of the mystery of Job's experience and is the key - and indeed the only key - to any understanding of what the patriarch was to pass through. It is not too much to say that what is recorded in these verses and in those which follow in chapter 2 is determinative of all that is to follow. The veil between heaven and earth is drawn aside for us and we are given to see the human situation from the heavenly, divine point of view. We are introduced to the throne room of God and are allowed to hear God and Satan conversing about this man Job. This is one of the telling things about the book, and one of its lessons that stands out independent of the question of suffering altogether, because it tells us this: God and Satan are both revealed as being interested in Job (this is true of every man, whether he knows it or not). And in this particular sense, and in a very acute way, Job became the battle-ground between God and Satan, for a trial of strength between them. Not that God is trying to prove something to Himself about Job but to others - to angels and to men (cf 1 Cor 4:9).

There is a good deal of detail in these verses we must give heed to. 'Sons of God' refer to angels, not humans - this is a heavenly scene, after all. There is at least a suggestion that God convened this council, and it may indicate a periodical summoning of the angels as ministering spirits, to apportion various assignments to them. God's question in 8, 'Hast thou considered My servant Job?' suggests a previous command such as 'Go and consider My servant Job', and now he is summoned by God to give answer: 'Hast thou done so?' It is always God Who calls the tune. He is sovereign. This is one of the marvellous and mysterious realities in the book of Job, the interaction between Satan's malign attacks and God's sovereign permission of them (cf the remarkable evidence of this in the account of Paul's thorn in the flesh in 2 Cor 12:7ff).

4) 1:6-12

Satan's reply to the Lord in 7 about 'going to and fro on the earth....' may be meant to convey to us a sense of the inherent restlessness of evil. Sin in the beginning broke the Sabbath rest of God, and all the restlessness that afflicts the human spirit is traceable to this dark origin. The words 'Satan answered....' prompts the observation that the voice of Satan is heard only three times in all Scripture, although of course his influence is everywhere evident: in Genesis 3, here in Job 1/2, and in the temptation story in Matthew 4/Luke 4. In Genesis 3 Satan slanders God to man; in Job 1/2 Satan slanders man to God; in Matthew 4/Luke 4 Satan meets and is confronted by the God-man. The elemental nature of the 'Genesis' and the 'Matthew/Luke' occasions suggests that the 'Job' occasion is also to be thought of as elemental, underlying something basic to the whole human mystery. And just as the problem of evil has behind it the wiles of Satan, so also the problem of pain has the wiles of Satan behind it. We have already suggested that Job's soul was the 'battleground' where God and Satan were contesting, and God was 'proving' something to angels and men. But more. The 'co-operation' of Job in this contributed to the over-all divine victory of the ages against the powers of evil. One thinks in this connection of the 'horror of great darkness' experienced by Abraham in Genesis 15:12. The 'preview' given to the patriarch of the suffering of the promised seed was connected with the covenant of blessing that God initiated with him. There is surely a parallel here in the story of Job.

5) 1:13-22

The fact that Satan speaks in 9 in the form of a question as he imputes Job before God reminds us of his similar approach in the Garden of Eden as he impuned God in his approach to Eve. This should teach us to recognise one of his favourite wiles, as he raises doubts and questions in our minds about the goodness and love of God. The divine permission given to Satan to make his attack upon the patriarch is an evidence of God's confidence in his servant, and this is a consideration that we should take into account when we come under his unwelcome attentions: far from being an evidence of weakness in us, it may be a sign of God's confidence that we will not 'go under'. The transition from 12 to 13 is very striking and dramatic. There is no mention in 13ff of Satan's work -that is generally well hidden until it is well done. The phrase in 13 'There was a day...' is an indication that disaster came 'out of the blue' and without warning, and blow after blow fell upon the patriarch. The whole fabric of life as he had known it crumbled around him, as his possessions and his family were taken from him in a series of devastating misfortunes and tragedies. The closing verses of the chapter (20-22) give us the patriarch's reaction: stripped of everything, stripped down to character, he was still a great man - which is how 1:3 described him. But it is here that we really see his greatness. There is a grandeur indeed in the reference to his falling down and worshipping, and the words in 21, especially 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' are sublime in their beauty. Our Lord said 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth', and we may well add, in relation to Job, 'but in what he is when stripped down to character'. This was surely the mark of his greatness, as 22 makes plain.

6) 2:1-3

Another 'scene' in heaven is presented to us in these verses. In it we see the triumph of God, and His pride in Job who stood the test although subjected to such satanic attack and pressure. The words in 3 '... and still he holdeth fast his integrity' are significant in that they show that what Job said in 1:21 was expressive of an attitude, not a mere momentary outburst. The phrase 'thou movedst Me' is not to be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that God was 'cornered' by Satan's wiles. Rather, it is that God in His sovereignty allowed Himself to be moved against Job. We see once again the interweaving of divine and satanic power in the trial of the patriarch. The words 'without cause' at the end of 3 mean 'without human cause' in Job - that is, there was nothing in Job to draw this catastrophe upon him, as his friends and comforters later insisted there was. It was neither chastisement nor discipline, but something other and deeper, as has already been indicated, in the thought of Job's soul being the 'battleground' for this contest between good and evil.

7) 2:4-8

Satan appears unabashed, however, (4, 5) and again he brings his subtle and slanderous accusations against Job. The subtlety of this is that there is often truth in what he says, in human life. The following words quoted by L.E. Maxwell in 'Born Crucified' illustrate this very graphically: 'The last enemy to be destroyed in the believer is self. It dies hard. It will make any concessions, if only it is allowed to live. Self will permit the believer to do anything, give anything, sacrifice anything, suffer anything, go anywhere, take any liberties, bear any crosses, afflict soul and body to any degree - anything, if it can only live. It will consent to live in a hovel, in a garret, in the slums, in far away heathendom, if only its life can be spared.' We know in our own experience how true these words often are of us! The interaction of the Divine and the demonic is seen very graphically once again in the contrast between 'thine hand' in 5 and 'thine hand' in 6. It is couched in such a way that, although Satan acts by divine permission, God is nevertheless absolved from complicity in the evil of what he does. God does not take orders from the devil, but bids him do his own dirty work. Again we note the divine restriction imposed upon Satan in the words 'but save his life'. God was clearly saying to him 'Thus far shalt thou go, but no further'. The result is seen in 7, 8. The nature of Job's affliction may be open to different interpretations - the modern versions generalize the AV's 'sore boils' by rendering the phrase as 'painful sores' (NIV) or 'loathsome sores' (RSV). It is surely sufficient to recognize that it was an extremely distressing, agonizing and loathsome affliction that caused Job an extremity of suffering and distress. The contrast between his original prosperity and well-being and what he was now reduced to is complete. It is the intention of the author to make this very plain.

8) 2:9-10

It is easy to be critical of the attitude shown by Job's wife. But there are some things we need to recognize. The loss of family and wealth must have been a sore trial to her as well as to Job, and to see her loved one now thus smitten must have been extremely painful for her, and we should not underestimate the depth of her devastation. Nor should we fail to note that even in her bitterness of soul she recognized Job's integrity (as his friends refused to do, cf 4:1ff) but she says, in effect, that it does not pay him to maintain that integrity. Better to die, she thinks, than to suffer on in such extremity. Put at its best and highest, her attitude was dictated by affection and love, and deep sympathy and fellow feeling for Job. But we should observe what this led to, when her motives were not God-centred: she became a tool of the devil. It was Satan who spoke of cursing God. It is always the good - not the evil - that is the real enemy of the highest and the best. Lower the standard, she says, in effect - and says it out of love for her man. But love for her man here is enmity against God and His purposes. Job's rebuke of her in 10 is very telling. Yet it could be interpreted as 'It is not like you to speak like this!' - which, rightly understood, is no less telling a rebuke. The remainder of the verse (10) should be compared with 1:21. It expresses the same spirit and the same magnificent faith, submission and resignation to the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. What a testimony!

9) 2:11-13

The coming of Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, introduces the main substance of the book. We have seen how, in the Prologue, we have been given the 'key', so to speak, to interpretation, the 'inside story', as it were, of the mystery of Job's sufferings. Now we see, from this point onwards, how all the hidden activity of heavenly powers, both good and evil, works out in human experience. Job's friends came to mourn with him, and to comfort him. Clearly, their grief when they saw their friend was real and great. Here is an eloquent comment, from the Gilcomston Notes on these verses, by the Rev. William Still: 'In some ways we wish we could end the book here, for within a limited range, it is a perfect ending. It is a very beautiful story. The friends arranged to come together that their combined sympathy might be the greater comfort and support to the suffering man. And when they drew near and could not recognize the sufferer because of disfigurement, they wept and accompanied their weeping with common gestures of eastern mourning. Then they sat where he sat for seven days and nights and had not the heart to speak, so great was his grief. Now, let us not forget this in succeeding chapters, when these men begin to accuse. Perhaps those whose sympathy goes as far have the right thereafter to speak up, and that may be why Job is so patient with them. Let us learn a deep lesson about true Christian sympathy here. How ready people are to make perfunctory gestures of kindness at times of trouble, as if their honour depended upon it (as they may think it does), but how often in the midst of it all, someone slips in without gesture, gift or word and looks into the sufferer's eyes with love and care and silent sharing, and that is more than all. Not that we should withhold the gift, the gesture or the word, far from it, for if they are accompanied with heart-felt care how much richer the blessing to the distressed!'

10) 2:11-13

It is fair to say that there is another possible interpretation of silence in face of grief - not that it necessarily applies in the case of Job's friends, but it is as well to consider it in general terms at this point. It is impressive to read, in the biographies of well-known Christians, present and past, their reactions to sorrow and grief in their lives. A striking instance of this is seen in a letter written by C.S. Lewis, when his wife was terminally ill, to a colleague at Oxford who had just lost his wife. He said: 'I have learned now that while those who speak about one's miseries usually hurt one, those who keep silence hurt more. They help to increase the sense of general isolation which makes a sort of fringe to the sorrow itself.' What do we think of this? The present writer recalls many years ago losing a dear and deep friendship through remaining silent about a distressing situation, instead of speaking - silent because it was thought better not to speak, but this was proved to be wrong, and the hurt caused by not speaking was greater than that which speaking would have undoubtedly caused. Let us try to put ourselves in Job's place, asking ourselves whether we would prefer silence or speech in a situation of pain and distress, knowing that hurt would come either way. Well, what do you think?

11) 3:1-26

We come in this chapter to the main heart of the book of Job, and the dialogue between the patriarch and his friends, which stretches from this point through to 37:24. As has already been noted, following the 'inside story', as it were, of the mystery of Job's sufferings, we are now to see how all the hidden activity of the heavenly powers, both good and evil, works out in human experience. This being so, we see how, and in what diverse forms, the work of the enemy touches human life, and especially the human mind. Part of the value of this great book lies just here, and we must constantly be recalling to our thoughts that the evil one is behind these dark agonies through which Job passes. The influence of evil powers on the human mind is a study too long neglected in spiritual life. A great deal can be learned from the book of Job on this subject. (For an example of this, the opening chapter of C.S. Lewis' novel 'Voyage to Venus' (Perelandra) is quite brilliant and compelling and is worthy of careful study in this regard.) The discourses Job has with his friends come in three cycles (as may be seen from the Analysis at the beginning of our Readings) - 4 - 14, 15 - 21 and 22 - 31, these being followed by the separate dialogue with Elihu in 32 - 37. The cycles however are prefaced by Job's great outburst in this chapter. One commentator suggests it was caused by the long silence of his friends, in which he could interpret their thoughts that he must be a great sinner for such great affliction to have come upon him. Be that as it may, this is certainly the utterance of a man for whom, as the hymn says, 'All is darkened in the vale of tears'. The chapter has been sub-divided as follows: in 1-10 Job curses his birth; in 11-19 he quarrels with life; and 20-26 he longs for death. We shall look at all this in more detail in the Notes that follow.

12) 3:1-26

On any estimate, these verses are assuredly a torrential outburst in which Job's innermost feelings spill out in anguish of soul, a tumult of distress. There are some things we should realise however: the chapter represents not so much the trial through which he has passed as the effect of it, its aftermath, so to speak, in terms of the emotional upheaval it has produced, and the mental anguish and questioning it has precipitated. The trials and tragedies came in the first two chapters; here it is the wrestling with the meaning of the trial and tragedy, hence the repeated 'why's' in 11, 12, 23. We should not underestimate the depth and intensity of the anguished wrestling. Helmut Thielicke underlines this in a very perceptive comment: 'The tempter is a good psychologist; he calculates thus: Job thinks that when he has learnt enough from his suffering (e.g. that God gives and takes away and is the Lord) the suffering will cease, because it will then have fulfilled its function. For if it simply continued, he would not learn anything more and it would no longer have 'purpose'. And so the tempter, when he proposes to attack in earnest, allows the suffering to exceed the limits of what a man can regard as reasonable. The moment at which he thinks it must stop because he has learnt enough is precisely the moment at which it does not cease; it goes on senselessly. Time is the most uncanny minister of this prince of darkness. Time saps our resistance. Not because it goes on so long, but because it is so meaningless, and because suffering which goes on and on turns into a grotesquely scornful question: 'What do you say now?' 'Where is thy God?' (Ps 42:3). 'Do you still think this suffering is sent by God? What sense do you see in it? How can it still, after all these months and years, 'be for your good?' 'Are you really still holding on to your piety - and for how much longer?' 'Curse God and die' (Job 2:9).'

13) 3:1-26

One elementary lesson we may learn from Job's outbursts is that when in darkness like this it is better to let it out than to bottle it up. It is a measure of the essential healthiness of job's spirit that he does so. In 1-10, when he curses the day of his birth, we have to recognise not only that there is a big difference between cursing the day you were born and being determined to 'end it all', but also that what the patriarch says does not represent a settled attitude but merely an impulsive utterance. The real attitude is expressed in 1:21 and 2:10 in his willingness to receive good and evil from the hand of God. Indeed, this impulsive wail for death finds its real corrective much later, in the words 'When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold' (23:10). In 11-19 we see Job quarrelling with life in the same impulsive and impetuous way. It is true that it were better for men not to be born, or die in infancy, if their lives turned to evil and betrayal of God; but not if they enter trial as such, for trial works endurance and all manner of noble things. And as our study goes on we shall see some of these noble things beginning to emerge in some of the greatest of human utterances. One recalls the Psalmist's similar experience, when (Ps 55:6ff, 16,22) the desire to flee away and be at rest gives way to the calm and settled intention to cast his burden on the Lord. And when we come to the conviction 'He knoweth the way that I take', as Job did, we shall find ourselves disposed to doing likewise.

14) 4:1-21

The first speech of the first of Job's friends, Eliphaz, occupies this and the next chapter. We have already indicated that the point about his friends' attempt to comfort him is that they all alike tried to 'pigeon-hole' the truth of God. Their answers, their theories, were all so 'pat', and therefore ineffectual and unavailing. From which it may be learned that to be a comfort in time of need, to be able to speak a word in season, one needs more than a well-shaped and well-thought-out system of theology. One needs a heart. And this is really what was lacking in Eliphaz. What we see in these two chapters is an address of good, sound teaching, mixed with facile assumptions and a callous, unfeeling spirit, that together made Job writhe with the very hurt of it. Taken by itself, and in isolation from Job's situation, it is a very impressive speech, and in other contexts might have a very different effect. How then can this be? Well, have we never known people who say the right things, and yet what they say either falls on deaf ears, or grates on those who hear them, because they are not right people? This is how it was with Job's comforters. If a man like Job were to say such things they would carry weight. But then, would a man like Job say them in these circumstances? There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent! All three friends emphasise the same thesis: Job has done evil and is suffering for it. But they are three different men, with different approaches to their common theme, as we shall see in the Notes that follow.

15) 4:1-21

The three different approaches by Job's friends may be summed up as follows (if we may anticipate a little): Eliphaz gives the impression of age and authority; he talks rather pompously and preaches too much from a high moral bench. Bildad is less the man of experience than of tradition. When a thing is cleverly said, he is satisfied, and he cannot understand why his impressive statements should fail to convince and convert. Zophar is a blunt man, with a decidedly rough, dictatorial style. He prides himself on coming to the point. All these different attitudes we shall see as we go on.

On any count, Eliphaz' speech is an impressive one, couched in beautiful language. And, at first, we might be taken in by it, if we did not have the first two chapters of the book to be our guide. We might well say: could a man who speaks like this really be wrong? But we know, from the first two chapters, that he was wrong, seriously wrong. From which we may learn to exercise discernment, and see the wrongness and the hypocrisy of what is here said in all the right language. We see, from 2, that he is bursting to speak. The constraint of conviction? Perhaps, but from where? From all that follows, we can identify the conviction as being from another spirit than God's. The testimony he bears to Job's qualities and graces in 3, 4 is authentic and telling; but he soon passes from it, in 5ff to the real burden of his message. Job, he says, practice what you preach. But there is deep misunderstanding on Eliphaz' part: a man who can be described as he has described Job in 3, 4 becomes such a man through being forged by God on His anvil and, being forged, he does not collapse at the 'touch' of misfortune. Also, this is surely not the line to take with a man in agony of soul - with one wallowing in self-pity, perhaps, but not here. This was a major error of judgment on Eliphaz' part. Discernment is needed to distinguish between agony and self-pity. Eliphaz had none and blundered. He had not learned to feel for others, in his callousness of spirit. Long experience of life does not necessarily give us this aptitude. 'Touched' is Satan's word (2:5), and 'hypocrisy' was Satan's charge against Job. Eliphaz was doing devil's work that day!

16) 4:1-21

There is something particularly brash and heartless about the accusation of guilt Eliphaz makes against Job in 7. There was no evidence before him to justify his prejudging of the issue, only the dictates of his 'theology'. It is all too sad an evidence of an attitude that is bursting to put others right. But it is not of the spirit of God - not even when it is supported and given weight by the account of Eliphaz' vision given in 12-21. Perhaps Eliphaz saw the look of impatience on Job's face, discountenancing what he had already said; perhaps he was conscious that his words had an empty ring about them. An interesting assumption lies behind this recounting of the vision to strengthen his argument ('You must listen to me, because I had a vision'). It is the assumption that having a vision makes you right, and more important, and therefore gives you more right to be listened to. Well! Jesus once said, 'Let your yea be yea and your nay nay', by which He meant that a man's word ought to be sufficient authority without the backing of oaths - or visions. In 4, Job's words carried weight to the weary's need, because he was a real man, a man of character. Right words are truly right only when they come from a right man. One recalls the Apostle Peter's words (2 Pet 1:19) 'We have a more sure word of prophecy'. This need not have been a vision from God in any case. The presence of truth in it does not guarantee this. Satan knows his Bible, as we learn from the Temptation story. Indeed, one almost senses an element of the 'spooky' in it. What is more (17) the content of the vision was a platitude. A vision was not needed to convey this truth, for it is surely evident to anyone who thinks at all. The fact that Eliphaz thought it so important is perhaps significant in revealing the calibre of the man. 'Was your vision really necessary?', we might well say. Finally, God does not speak contemptuously of man, as in 20, 21 - that is how Satan thinks of man!

17) 5:1-27

Eliphaz continues his unfeeling, indeed heartless and insensitive, discourse. In 1-5 he shows himself at his most callous. We may well feel that what he said in 4 was a terrible thing to say to a bereaved man. Even if it had been true of Job, it could not have been the right thing to say to him at this particular time. In 6, 7 he adopts a more general tone in his philosophising. Perhaps he felt he had gone too far and was covering up his confusion by trying to soften his harsh words. What he says here is true, and spoken by another kindlier voice might have helped Job (and could help us). What he does not seem to have realised is that he had already disqualified himself from being listened to by his whole unfeeling attitude. In 8-16 we have good and worthy observations - to someone other than Job, for they are negated at the outset by the arrogant way Eliphaz introduces them, saying in effect, 'This is what I would do if I were in your position'. It is impressive, is it not, to see how what a man is, and shows himself to be, sets at a discount anything he might say, however true it might be. One cannot escape the suspicion that Eliphaz was simply mouthing well worn clichés that he had learned by rote. This is a very disturbing consideration and might well cause us to ask questions about ourselves. In 17-27 the saga continues, but we would be more disposed to listening to what Eliphaz says, but for the pompous conclusions which rounds off his discourse, in 27. It is as if he said 'This is the truth of the matter, Job, this is how I see the situation and you had therefore better listen to what I say'. It is the crass, superficiality of the man that so appalls us as we read this chapter.

18) 6:1-30

Job's answer to Eliphaz is given in this and the next chapter. Job cries for fair play (1-3). Eliphaz has shown impatience with his vexation of spirit, but Job says he is only looking at one side of the balance. In 3b, 'swallowed up' is rendered variously. The AV margin suggests that the meaning is 'I am at a loss for words to express my grief' but the modern versions, e.g. NIV has 'No wonder my words have been impetuous'. Job cannot help wild delirious words. Are they really surprising, when such pain racks his soul? The poison has gone through his system (4), causing fever of spirit and delirium. In 6 the meaning may be: 'the disdainful way you treat my agony is offensive to me and my soul refuses to touch your remedies for they are like loathsome meat to me'. There may also, however, be a suggestion that Job is hungry to know the reasons for the calamities that have overtaken him, and that nothing that has been said by Eliphaz helps him: every suggestion is either trifling and vain, or offensive and disagreeable, and his soul refuses to touch the offered explanations and reasons. One commentator suggests that a further spasm of pain racks his tortured body in 8, making him burst out in such extreme words, and this may well be. What is not in question is the depth of agony through which he is passing. This is truly a crying out from the depths (Ps 130), and it is a crying which, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, intensifies as time goes on.

19) 6:1-30

In view of the agony referred to on Tuesday, in the previous Note, the longing in 8ff is very understandable, nor is this any the less so though we realise that, as was the case also with Elijah, God had other plans for him, including final vindication. But this kind of 'light at the end of the tunnel' is not yet available for the patriarch. In his darkness and extremity Job breaks out in a forthright and bitter rebuke for his friends, in 14ff. The modern renderings of 14 are probably more likely than the AV: 'A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty' (NIV), although the RSV, which reads very differently, is possible: 'He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty'. However we translate, what is evident is the moving, human appeal for pity, which was conspicuously lacking in Eliphaz' discourse. Job's graphic metaphor in 15-17 of the dried up water brook, promising much but giving nothing, is very telling, and the picture of a thirsty soul baulked and thwarted when coming for a drink must surely have had the effect of cutting Eliphaz down to size. The climax of the metaphor, in 20, which the NIV renders 'They are distressed because they had been confident; they arrive there, only to be disappointed' must surely have moved any but those, such as Eliphaz, encased in impenetrable self-righteousness. What a condemnation of his inhumanity!

20) 6:1-30

The reference in 21 to being afraid is interesting. Was there a fear in Eliphaz lest sympathising with Job might indicate that he was siding with a sinner against God, and that the withholding of it was therefore a self-regarding attitude on his part? After all, Job had not asked them to come, and now their self-regarding motives were exposed for what they were. Ah, there is more going on in such a situation than is often realised, in terms of stripping people down to character! As a comment on Eliphaz' failure to be of help to his suffering friend, the following makes a graphic and telling statement (bearing in mind that if Job had died the friends would certainly have eulogised him - it was only when he was alive, and suffering, that they failed): 'Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheering words while their hearts can be thrilled and made happier by them. The kind things you mean to say when they are gone, say before they go; the flowers you mean to send for their coffin, send to sweeten and brighten their homes before they leave them. If any friends have alabaster boxes they intend to break over my dead body, I would rather they would bring them out in my wearied, troubled hours and open them that I may be refreshed and cheered by them. I would rather have a plain coffin without a flower; a funeral without a eulogy, than a life without the sweetness of love and sympathy. Let us learn to anoint our friends beforehand for their burial. Postmortem kindness does not cheer the burdened spirit. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance backward over the weary way.' Does that not serve as a challenge to us all?

21) 7:1-21

Job's agony and complaint continues in this chapter. It is interesting to see how Eliphaz fades from view as the chapter goes on, and Job moves from him to speak to God and about God. The intensity of the agony through which he is passing is further underlined in 1-6, as he describes life as a distasteful and onerous piece of service (this, rather than the AV's 'appointed time') laid upon a hired servant whose only consolations are the cool shadows of the evening, in which the day's work is forgotten, and the wages he receives at the end of the day. Well, life sometimes feels like that, and we shall be less inclined to criticise Job when we remember what we feel like under much less pressures than Job's. The graphic sketches in 4 and 6 are so very true to life. Trouble certainly shows up the brevity and evanescent nature of life: 'Frail as summer's flower we flourish, Blows the wind and it is gone'. But there is more in this moving outburst than an appeal for pity. Job says, 'Does the Almighty consider how little time is left to me (7, 8)? Therefore I will be frank, and say exactly what I think' - that is to say, he is appealing to God, in all his questionings, for a solution to the mystery of his sufferings. 'I want to know the reason for all this, before I die. I must not have an unresolved mystery.' We see in this intense debate something of the intellectual vigour of the man: even in the context of the agony he is passing through, his mind is clear, even racing; he is battling not merely with his boils and his broken skin, not merely with his sorrow and grief, but with the mystery, the 'why', and is wrestling for a solution. 'O God, give me a gleam of light in the darkness, before I finally slip away and am gone'. And that is a prayer which was answered progressively throughout the book, for Job was given gleam after gleam, in the gloom that enfolded him. This is one of the great lessons the book has for us.

22) 7:1-21

The debate continues in 12ff. Is he a sea-monster, he asks, that God has to hedge him in so completely? In 13, 14 the distress and inescapability of his dilemma is underlined: tossing and turning in agony all day long, he would long for night, and for the oblivion of sleep, but even in sleep he finds no rest but is tormented by nightmares, and in the wakefulness that follows he longs for the morning. The reference in 17ff seems to mean something like this (according to one commentator): 'If God is so great, why can't He leave man alone? Why must this great God be so restlessly on the prowl to torment him?' 'Preserver' in 20 means 'watcher'. The idea is that not even for one moment (18) does God seem to let up on him or let him alone. It is fair comment on these verses to interpret them as presenting a picture of God endlessly on the prowl to torment man. But in view of what is said in 1:7 and 2:2 about Satan 'going to and fro upon the earth' - that is, endlessly on the prowl - the question that is posed in these verses is: where, in fact, is this pressure coming from? From God? Or from Satan? It was part of the agony through which Job was passing that his perception and spiritual vision had become clouded so that it was no longer clear to him who it was that was oppressing him. Nor is this the only time that he experiences this confusion, for in 9:24 we find him once again groping for light in his extremity, saying of the afflictions that are besetting him, 'If it is not he (i.e. God who is bringing such distress upon him) then who is it?' The answer, quite simply, is, it is Satan! We are able to say this without hesitation, since we have been given the first two chapters of Job as a key to the true understanding of the book. Job, then, is in the depths, and in the darkness; but as the Psalmist says (Ps 112:4) 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness', and one of the glories of this book is that we see again and again, and increasingly, that promise being fulfilled to the patriarch. Nor should we doubt that in our lesser darkneses the same grace will be ours.

23) 8:1-22

This chapter brings us to the second of Job's friends, Bildad, and to the second of the three discourses in the first cycle of speeches (cf Analysis). Eliphaz was the man of age and experience; Bildad is the man of tradition. He takes much the same line with Job as Eliphaz did. Job's words, he insists, are wild and unreasonable, requiring reproof. God is a just God, and if Job is suffering, he is suffering for his sins. To Bildad's ears, Job seems to be making an assault on the justice of God. Hence his rebuke. Again, we see the coldness and heartlessness of these so-called comforters, in the reference in 4 to Job's children. He makes the same accusations against Job as Eliphaz did, but adds that his children had died for their sins, and had brought disaster upon themselves. Well, even if it was true (which it was not), was there no fellow-feeling on Bildad's part, no sense of dignified reticence in face of grief? No; only callous intrusion and assault on a bruised and broken heart. The view of God implied in 6 is that of a 'penny-in-the-slot' machine, in which - as someone has pertinently said - 'God is made to serve, or rather to subserve man, to subserve his every purpose and enterprise whether it be economic prosperity, free enterprise, security, or peace of mind. God thus becomes an omnipotent servant, a universal bellhop, to cater to man's every caprice: faith becomes a sure-fire device to get what we petulantly and peevishly crave.' Bildad's message is 'Repent, and all will be well, and God will restore you and your fortune'. Here is a man very confident, in his own estimation, about God. He has got God taped, and knows the kind of thing He will do. But, alas, such simplistic attitudes are not notable for the comfort they give to sorrowing and anguished hearts.

24) 8:1-22

Eliphaz, it will be remembered, appealed to a vision that he had experienced, to substantiate the counsel he gave to Job (4:12ff). Bildad, on his part, appeals to tradition here, in 8ff. This is all very well: the traditions of the past may have much to teach us. But we must be careful here. The fact that something is old does not make it infallible. Age does not necessarily bring wisdom, and 'their fathers' were not all necessarily always right. Appeal to tradition is all right if tradition is right itself; but it can be wrong. And the warning here is against the too uncritical acceptance of the past simply because it is past. It is possible to fall into the error of admiring the follies of the past instead of its wisdom. Some have done, and do. Furthermore, in admiration for the traditions of the past it is possible to become so bemused by them that their goodness is never allowed to touch our hearts and only their shell is assumed. And when this is so, it does something to a man: it dehumanises him. Bildad is the type of all those who, well versed in the learning of the past, are able to say all the right things, but without a heart. As one commentator puts it, 'those who attempt to explain God's ways for edification and comfort need to be very simple and genuine in their dealing with men.... But to make a creed learned by rote the basis of consolation is perilous. Indeed, it can appall and affront the sufferer by its heartlessness'. Such was Bildad the traditionalist.

25) 8:1-22

There is a difference of view among the commentators as to the interpretation of 11ff. It is clear that 11-15 refer to the wicked man ('all that forget God', 13); but some think that 16-19 refer by contrast to the righteous man, and that Bildad is making contrast in what he says in these verses. This might seem to be substantiated by the phrase in 19, 'this is the joy of his way'. However, although the RSV follows the AV in this rendering, the NIV translates 19a as 'Surely its life withers away', and the NEB takes a similar view. On the whole this seems the more likely way to take Bildad's words, as referring to the end of the godless, with others rising up to take his place, never, apparently, learning from the experience of those who have gone before, and therefore living in the same godless way. If so, Bildad, is taking a dig at Job, who knew the learning of the ancients and should have known better, as if to say, 'You know what the end of the wicked is, will you never learn?' It must have been small comfort to the patriarch to hear Bildad's closing words in 21, 22, with their hidden implication that he would need first of all to repent of his sin, before any such restoration could possibly take place.

26) 9:1-35

Job's answer to Bildad occupies this and the next chapter. He begins by giving assent to Bildad's main thesis, that God does not pervert what is right (8:3, 20), as if to say 'You are telling me nothing I do not know'. But he adds the memorable words: 'How should a man be just with God?' This, as one commentator puts it, is the question, if fairly dealt with, which must always confound shallow generalizers like Bildad. He, along with the others, thought that Job was trying to justify himself before God, and prove Him at fault, but Job replies, 'No; I know better than to try to do any such thing. I am bewildered, groping for an answer to my problem. I cannot square my integrity, which I know is real, with my affliction. It does not add up. I am not justifying myself, but simply maintaining my integrity. How could it be thought that any man could be just before God, when as Eliphaz has said, the angels are not pure in His sight?' This seems a better interpretation of the patriarch's words here than to suggest that they represent a bitter outpouring of his soul, saying, 'It is no use trying to be just with God, nothing we do will suffice. His power is arbitrary and He condemns good and evil alike'. In 3ff Job, in unfolding what he knows of God in His majesty and glory and power, gives his reasons why it is impossible for mortal man to justify himself before God. He is infinite in knowledge and wisdom and could ask a thousand questions and Job could not answer one (one thinks of God's ultimate answer to Job in 41:1ff, a chapter full of questions that are unanswerable - in what Job says here in 3, he was surely right). What, indeed, is man, in face of such irresistible magnitude? Well might the Psalmist pray, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man live and be justified' (Ps 143:2).

27) 9:1-35

Job's consciousness of the greatness and magnitude of God as Lord of creation is, even in the context of his present sufferings, deeply impressive, and his concept of a God who 'doeth great things past finding out' serves to increase his sense of desolation, in face of such vast and illimitable power. The picture in 8 and 9 of the heavenly constellations - the same clusters of stars that we can see on a clear night, the Bear, Orion, the Pleiades - evokes the same sense of awe expressed by the Psalmist in Ps 8: 3, 4. In 13 'proud helpers' (AV) is rendered in NIV 'cohorts of Rahab', and the reference may be to the rebellion of fallen angels against God. If so, we could paraphrase 13 and 14 thus: 'Beneath him bowed the fallen angels, how then can I, a mere mortal, answer him back?' The meaning of 15 seems to be 'Even if I were pure in His sight, and the saintliest man on earth, my plea would still be supplication, and not argument with Him'. In 16 Job is speaking in the bitterness of his soul, and we can hardly suppose that this is what he really believes about prayer. We must learn to distinguish in his passionate outbursts between what is the fruit of dark depression and what is the real attitude of his heart. The need for making such a distinction is even clearer in 21, 22 where he says in effect, 'It is all one, God is arbitrary, I see no sense in His dealings with men. Good and evil alike come under His stroke'. This is the language of darkness, and it is not how things really are, but it certainly is how it seemed to Job at that time.

28) 9:1-35

It is impressive, however, and indeed thrilling, to see how even in the seemingly impenetrable darkness glimmerings of light come through to the patriarch. In 24 Job cries out - in words quite obscured by the AV but clear in the RSV and NIV - 'If it is not He (i.e. God) then who is it?' From a practical point of view in the spiritual life, this is one of the most important insights of the whole book. And the simple answer to Job's cry is: 'it is Satan'. One of the subtleties of the book of Job is the interplay of good and evil supernatural powers in the drama. We have seen from the Prologue that while it is God Who gives permission to Satan to touch Job, it is Satan who brings the desolation and the affliction upon him. There is truth in the suggestion that it is God Who is doing all this, in that in the ultimate sense He has allowed it, but it is the work of the devil to create in Job's heart that God is irresponsible in what He is doing, and arbitrary and cruel. And the bitterness we see in this chapter, in the outpouring of Job's heart and spirit, is the devil's work injecting such doubts about the nature of God. Our Lord's words in the parable of the wheat and the tares 'An enemy hath done this' exactly expresses the truth of the matter so far as Job's experience is concerned. Here, then, is a word of immense significance for all who pass through difficult times; and ever to allow Job's question to enter our minds at all as a factor in the situation is to bring light and hope into our darkness.

29) 9:1-35

One commentator draws a parallel between Job's sufferings here and Bunyan's experience in 'Grace Abounding', where he speaks of dark and ugly thoughts of God that came crowding in to his mind and spirit, dazing him with their vehemence and driving him almost to despair. Those familiar with 'Pilgrim's Progress' will recall that Christian had similar experiences in the valley of the shadow. In more modern days the words of George Goodman, the Brethren evangelist, written after he emerged from a dark experience, express in poignant and beautiful language, the reality of 'the dark night of the soul':

He led me to the way of pain,
A barren and a starless place,
(I did not know His eyes were wet,
He would not let me see His face).

He left me like a frightened child
Unshielded in a night of storm,
(How should I dream He was so near?
The rain-swept darkness hid His form).

But when the clouds were driving back,
And dawn was breaking into day,
I knew Whose feet had walked with mine,
I saw the footprints all the way.

30) 9:1-35

The word 'daysman' means an umpire, an arbitrator, a mediator. The NIV renders the verse as an exclamation of longing, 'If only there were someone to arbitrate between us'. This is a helpful rendering. In view of his question in 2 'How can a mortal be righteous before God?' (NIV), it would seem that Job is still wrestling with this question, which means that he is conscious of a twofold pressure upon him, that of the mystery of his affliction, on the one hand, and on the other, his sense of human inadequacy in face of the majesty and holiness of God. The 'daysman' therefore refers to both. He needs someone to reveal the meaning of his suffering to him, and to bring light into the darkness of his anguish and its mystery; but he also needs someone to put him in the right with God, apart from any consideration of his suffering. This latter, of course, is the deeper question, indeed it is the eternal question. Both, of course, are linked, not only in Job's situation but in every human situation. And Christ is the answer to both, for He is the Way back to God and to acceptance with Him; and He is also the Truth, by Whom alone we can understand the mysteries and sorrows of life. At this point, however, in his experience, he is in the darkness, hence his cry in 33 'If only there were someone', hence also a similar cry later (23:3) 'O that I knew where I might find him'. But, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, light did break in upon him, first, it is true, in momentary glimpses and gleams but at the last in a fulness that led him into peace.

31) 10:1-22

The momentary gleams of light in the previous chapter are followed and superseded by gloom, and this chapter is a dark one, full of wrestlings and mystery and perplexity with question succeeding question, and tentative answers proving to be inadequate. No easy solutions, in these, will do: Job is too honest to evade the issues simply by squeezing events into the mould of a rigid, dogmatic theology, as his friends were doing. It had not occurred to them that it might be their doctrines that needed adjusting, not Job's conscience. Conscious as he is of the need for a 'daysman', and as yet unable to find one in the God to whom he pours out his soul, his plaint makes very moving reading, as he feels himself confronted with a 'frowning Providence', and with the terrible darkness of thinking himself God-forsaken. One thinks of the agonising words of the Psalmist (77:8, 9) 'Is his mercy clean gone forever?Hath God forgotten to be gracious?' The words in 2, 'Show me....' are eloquent in their longing and distress. In 3ff it is as if the patriarch were saying to God 'Do You get pleasure out of all this that you are doing to me? Surely You do not need to probe and explore the secrets of my heart so painfully? You know all about me without having recourse to such sufferings as I am enduring.' One can well understand the hot, even angry outbursts of this pain-racked sufferer as he speaks out his heart in the silence of his seeming God-forsakenness. And yet can we not perceive a dignity, almost a nobility, in the words he utters - words that, from a lesser man, might appear unseemly, even blasphemous?

32) 10:1-22

As the debate in Job's anguished mind and heart continues to be articulated in 8ff, he gives voice to some highly rational and rather wonderful thoughts, even as the perplexity and mystery of his situation presses in upon him. On the one hand he acknowledges the Creatorhood of God: He is the Divine Potter who fashions the clay as He will (9); but what Job cannot understand is how that Divine Potter, Who had given him life and surrounded him with His kindly providence and favour (11, 12), should be doing this to him now. 'What is the point of making me at all, if this is what You have brought upon me?' One recalls Moses' appeal to God on behalf of Israel, 'What will the heathen say if You forsake them now?' It is this dark mystery that he cannot understand, and in 14-17 the darkness upon his spirit is very deep, and spiritual vision has become blurred. This is Satan's work, and we may well see in these verses the evidences of the enemy's wiles as he misrepresents and maligns the character of God in the mind of the patriarch. The reference, for example, in 16 to the 'fierce lion' reminds us irresistibly of Peter's word in 1 Pet 5:8 about 'the devil as a roaring lion'; and as for 14, how many have had the experience of confessing sin, according to 1 John 1:9, yet never seeming to find the relief that John's promise holds out. It is the enemy who does this, and it was the enemy who was at work in Job at this point.

33) 10:1-22

The final verses of the chapter are dark indeed and prompt the exclamation 'Well might we pray, lead us not into temptation!' To Job, it must surely have seemed that the sun would never shine again. One is reminded of the words in Isaiah 50:10 'Who is among you that feareth the Lord....that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God'. Here is a comment on that verse by the Puritan, Richard Fuller: 'In fierce storms,' said an old seaman, 'we can do but one thing, there is only one way. We must put the ship in a certain position and keep her there.' This, Christian, is what you must do. Sometimes, like Paul, you can see neither sun nor stars, and no small tempest lies upon you; and then you can do but one thing: there is only one way. Reason cannot help you. Past experience gives you no light. Even prayer fetches no consolation. Only a single course is left. You must put your soul in one position and keep it there. You must stay upon the Lord; and, come what may - winds, waves, cross seas, thunder, lightning, frowning rocks, roaring breakers - no matter what, you must lash yourself to the helm, and hold fast your confidence in God's faithfulness, His covenant engagement, His everlasting love in Christ Jesus.'

34) 11:1-20

We come in this chapter to the contribution made by the third of Job's 'comforters', Zophar. It is interesting to note that of the three, Zophar has, throughout the book, rather less to say than the others, but it is not certain whether this has any significance, or simply an accident of circumstance. Ellicott has an interesting pen-portrait of him: 'Zophar, the third of Job's friends, has a clearly defined character, distinct from that of the others; he is the ordinary and common-place moral man, who expresses the thoughts and instincts of the many. Eliphaz was the poet and the spiritual man, who sees visions and dreams dreams; Bildad was the man who rested on authority and appealed to tradition; Zophar is the man of worldly wisdom and common sense. In some respects he is the most offensive of the three. He is astonished that Job has not been silenced by the replies of the other two, and thinks he can do no less than help to silence him. Thus he at once charges him with using a 'multitude of words', and being 'full of talk', and 'lies', and 'mockery'. Zophar stands on a lower level, and drags Job down to it. He turns back Job's protestations of innocence against himself, and charges him with iniquity in making them. His longing also to come into judgment with God (9:32) he turns back upon himself, being confident that it could not fail to convict him were he to do so.'

35) 11:1-20

Although we have been moved to awe and compassion by Job's anguish and darkness, this seems to have had a very different effect on Zophar. One almost sees the 'righteous' indignation rising up and eventually exploding in vehement, angry and cruel accusations, as he roundly charges Job with arrogance, empty words and lies. So dogmatically convinced is he of the rightness of his own particular views about suffering that he insists that Job must be telling lies. Job's words have an obvious ring of sincerity and integrity about them, even when he says seemingly shocking things to God, yet Zophar is quite insensitive to it and fails to see it; he has no consciousness of the depths of Job's struggle and his agonising search for truth and his grappling with mighty issues. All he sees is his apparent revolt against God. This should teach us to beware lest a narrow, dogmatic outlook rob us of true humanity and compassion. There is something almost indecent about Zophar's words in 5, 6, in the arrogance they show, and the sublime conviction that his view is right and that God is on his side in the accusations he makes against Job. But the end of the book shows otherwise: 'Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath (42:8)'. This must be the inevitable verdict on those who are more interested in doctrines than in men. It is this that colours, and indeed negates what Zophar goes on to say in 7-12 - words good in themselves, but when spoken with asperity and in a wrong spirit, useless and harmful. With such an attitude, it is so possible to be right - so far as our words go - and utterly wrong at the same time, in what we convey.

36) 11:1-20

In 13ff we have once again to make the observation that these words, taken out of their present context, are very true and right, but they simply do not apply to Job. It is the assumption Zophar makes, that Job is in need of repentance, that colours and nullifies all he says - rather like preaching an evangelistic sermon to a congregation of converted folk, who would doubtless applaud and would go off home with a comfortable feeling that the preacher was a 'right' man. All very fine, to be sure, but in such a context useless and futile. Much the same could be said about 18,19 which ring almost like the 91st Psalm - but it makes a big difference, does it not, to have seen what Zophar was like when he first began to speak in face of the moving agony and anguish of a man wrestling with gigantic problems. 'He is a babbler', he has said in effect; and when a man gives himself away like that, nothing he says - not even if he speaks with the tongues of men and of angels - is going to avail, especially if he has not love. And that emphatically is what Zophar did not have. So all this fine peroration, which on the lips of a saintly man might have been very wonderful, and might well have brought comfort and encouragement to Job, fell as nothing before him. It is possible, you see, to learn all this from books without experiencing it in one's own spiritual life. It is perfectly possible to learn the wisdom of the ancients, as Zophar had, without being touched in the deep places of the spirit. In this light, what must Zophar's final thrust in 20 have done to the suffering patriarch! It is very frightening, is it not, for a man to misunderstand and misinterpret so completely human agony when faced with it and still be able to speak in such a heartless way.

37) 12:1-25

This chapter and the next two complete the first main movement of the book and the first cycle of discourses, and Job, having answered the first two comforters, now answers all three together. We suggest that the three chapters should be read through together: this will serve to give the flavour of the patriarch's utterance and show us something of the breadth and the depth of his thinking. Even a cursory reading will suffice to make clear the nobility of his mind in its grasp of the divine revelation. Job begins in 2 with a note of irony towards his friends. One warms to his words here in the realisation that though bruised and buffeted his spirit is nevertheless resilient. One is reminded of Paul's words in 2 Cor 4:9, which J.B. Phillips renders 'We may be knocked down but we are never knocked out'. How thoroughly does Job's opening comment in 2 debunk the pretentious common places of his friends' pontifications and cut them down to size! It makes us feel like saying, 'Good for you, Job!', and giving him a round of applause. And he wades into them in 3ff. Do they really suppose that he is obtuse and lacking in understanding? Do they, indeed, really think that what they have been saying represents the sum of wisdom? Why, the knowledge they have been uttering as great profundities is so elementary that the very beasts of the field know it (7). It is perfectly obvious, he goes on, in 9ff that God's hand has wrought all that he has been suffering; that is not in doubt; but why He has done it - this is the question. But his friends with their neat, pigeon-holed and sterile viewpoint are not even aware that such a question exists, let alone give an answer to it.

38) 12:1-25

It is interesting and significant to note that Job uses the personal name LORD in 9, meaning Jehovah - the only use of the name in dialogue parts of the book. That he does so use it here shows his knowledge of God as the personal, covenant God Who has revealed Himself in grace to men. His friends on the other hand invariably use Shaddai, the Almighty. Job's knowledge of Him is personal, theirs theoretical. Job takes permission in 11 to use his discernment; he is not prepared to believe all that he hears from them, but rejects the bad and the false - and the platitudes! What follows in the remainder of the chapter (12-25) is an impressive testimony to the wisdom, power and sovereignty of God. What insights there are in these verses, as he gives expression to awe and reverence in face of the majesty of God. Job had learned all this about Him in his experience, but it is very much a question whether his friends had much of an inkling of what he was saying - indeed if Eliphaz' words in 15:2, 3 are any indication, they did not. The question that arises is: Have we? Have we any adequate sense of God's majesty and glory? And would it not colour all our being and experience if we had? Would we not walk softly all our days, and go humbly before Him, as becomes grace's debtors?

39) 13:1-28

Job crowns his moving utterance in the latter part of the previous chapter with a repetition in 13:1, 2 of what he had said in 12:3 and launches upon a bold and blunt critique of his friends' mistaken and heartless attempts to analyse and pontificate on his situation. If we feel that Job is too extreme in his denunciation of them we should remember that what he says comes from the anguish and hurt of his heart, made worse by their heartless treatment of him. 'Forgers of lies' (4) and 'physicians of no value' are phrases that describe his verdict upon their fatally false hypothesis concerning Providence, in saying that only the wicked suffer. Having taken that stance they were necessarily quite unable to help him. If only they had dropped their theories, and listened (6) to the agonisings of a torn heart they might have learned how to help him. But they were deaf and impervious to his deep cries. He says in effect in 7, 'Do you blame your wicked words on God? God does not need you to defend His actions or explain them, least of all by false explanations. Do you think His justice is clouded, and wants to be cleared up, as if He did not know what to say?' Under the pretence of justifying God in afflicting Job, they were branding him a hypocrite. God will not have this, says Job, therefore beware. Fear Him (10, 11) and do not thus trifle with Him. What if He should enter into judgment with you for what you have said and for what you are doing to me? Such are the strictures that the patriarch passed upon his friends, before he turns from them and speaks to his God (13ff).

40) 13:1-28

Job now addresses himself to God (13ff). He is not afraid to lift up his voice; he is ready for anything, come what will, for he is determined to hold fast to his integrity. What now follows in the rest of the chapter and into the next, is a remarkable admixture of light and gloom, confidence and black discouragement. There are problems of interpretation, especially relating to the famous words in 15, but what comes out clearly is Job's insistence on maintaining his integrity (not that there is any thought of denying that he is a sinner, for this is not the point: all men are sinners, and he knows perfectly well that he is sinful also. Rather, it is the assertion - by his friends - that specific sin must be causing this specific misfortune: this he disputes and denies. Whatever the reason for his sufferings may be, it is not that. The RSV rendering of 15 is open to question, and it is reassuring to see the NIV following the AV here. One of the best commentators renders it 'If He will slay me, I will not tremble provided I argue my case before Him'. If this is the sense we see what a tremendous thing it is that Job is saying: so conscious is he of the basic integrity of his life, he utterly refuses to accept the facile interpretation of the mystery of his sufferings propounded by his friends; even death itself would not matter provided he can maintain his integrity before God. It is very wonderful to realise that, even in his anguish, life was not more precious to him than his integrity. Not even the prospect of death would shake him from that stand. We see something of the greatness of the man in this, and it is that very greatness that brings him out into a clearing, as it were, in the dark valley, as he says in 18 'I know that I shall be justified'. How important this is to him is seen in 19, where he says, in effect, 'If I hold my tongue - i.e. if I stop taking this position on my integrity, everything is lost and meaningless, and I might as well die'. What stature!

41) 14:1-22

The agonising debate in Job's mind continues, as he takes up and reiterates the thoughts he expressed in 13:24ff: Why is it that such a great God should pay attention to such an insignificant creature as he is, a mere leaf tossed to and fro in the wind? Should he not be beneath the notice of the High and Lofty One? Why show such interest in 'such an one'? (3). 'I cannot be that important to You, insignificant trifle that I am. Why do You not turn away and desist that I may have some respite, and then disappear into the nothingness of death?' (10) There is deep gloom in these words, even despair - and yet, even as Job utters them we cannot but feel that he does not really believe what he is saying. What prompts this observation is that both in the moving illustration of the tree in 7-9, and in the even more moving reflection that follows it in 10-13, the light struggling to break through; for although Job seems to see more hope for the trees of the woods, even when felled, in that life can yet spring from their roots, the question lurking in that very illustration is: Does God show more care for trees than for man, the crown of His creation? And the very anguish of his cry in 13 indicates that deep in his heart there is the conviction about an 'afterwards'. And that conviction impels him to say what he does in 14, 15. It is true that what he says is in the form of questions, but it is by no means sure that Job thinks they should be answered in the negative. Indeed, he longs that there should be a positive answer, in which case he would be more than prepared to suffer patiently, and wait 'till my change come'. Truly the fight of faith is so often – as we see here - a fight for faith!

42) 14:1-22

The battle rages on; and as in the case of long and protracted fighting the fortunes of battle seem to go now this way and now that, so also it is with Job, as the darkness seems to descend upon him once more in the latter verses of the chapter (16-22). He seems almost to have come to the place where, having almost got through to a real place of light in the previous verses, he now convinces himself that that was but a dream - as if to say, 'It was a wonderful thought and it brought momentary hope to my anguished spirit, but no, the facts are all against it, it must have been an illusory hope.' It is perhaps natural, in such circumstances - and all too true in experience - that the resultant gloom should seem deeper and more complete, and the vision of God becomes ever more grim and relentless for him, as One set on doing him final despite. So dark, indeed, and despairing are these verses that we cannot but see in them the vile work of the evil one slandering God to this broken-hearted man. We can hardly suppose that at this point Job was anything like clear-sighted enough to be able to look back - as we are surely able to do, with the record before us - upon his experience and discern a progression, however imperceptible at times, in the gleams of light that were breaking through to him. This is one of the important lessons that the book of Job has to teach us, and we do well to learn it, for our comfort in time of trouble.

43) 15:1-35

This chapter begins the second cycle of discourses (see Analysis sheet on page 3), and Eliphaz responds to Job's replies to his friends. Job, as we have seen, has been very frank and blunt in what he has said in reply to them, and his words have clearly irritated and offended them. Eliphaz' second speech is very much 'the same mixture as before', only more so, as he charges the patriarch with folly and absurdity (2, 3), impiety and irreligion (4), arrogance and self-conceit (7-9), contempt of their counsels (11), opposition to God (12, 13) and of justifying himself (14). The harshness of his words, as well as their pomposity, is the striking and ominous thing about Eliphaz. He seems quite impervious and insensitive in his complete misunderstanding of Job's outpouring of heart and in the underestimation of his struggle and agony. There is a total failure to see the depth of Job's grappling, and above all there is the mistaking of this depth for the utterance of a windbag. Indeed, the chapter reveals much more about Eliphaz than about Job. The modern renderings of the AV's 'thou castest off fear' (4) can aid understanding. The RSV has 'you are doing away with the fear of God' and the NIV 'you even undermine piety'. What Eliphaz is in effect saying is, 'If what you say is true about the wicked prospering, you are undermining religion. Who will be honest if the tabernacles of robbers prosper? (12:6)' This is a revealing glimpse into Eliphaz' concept of religion, is it not, and into the barren and sterile theological system? What he does not in his crass blindness and terrible hardness of heart see is the real picture that Job represents as being very similar to that of another patriarchal figure (Gen 32:24ff), as he wrestled with the angel and said, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me'. Wesley's words, 'Hangs my helpless soul on Thee' and 'Simply to Thy cross I cling' give the real insight into Job's attitude here - but this man was utterly blind, and saw nothing of it.

44) 15:1-35

Job is charged with arrogance and conceit when he dares to dispute his friends' cut-and-dried doctrines (7-9). This is the charge that is always brought against them who challenge the easy assumptions of theological systems and put a question mark at them. It is ever so: it is an instinctive defence mechanism against a threat that is too intolerable to contemplate. Perhaps the most outrageous and near-blasphemous part of Eliphaz' whole speech is what he says in 11, which the RSV renders 'Are the consolations of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you?' That the man should have such affrontery as to suggest that his contributions to Job's situation - with all their harsh and unfeeling offensiveness - could possibly be construed by anyone as 'a word spoken in gentleness' surely is evidence of a blind-spot in him of ominous proportion. It is truly a terrible thing to be insensitive and not to know it, to be the kind of person who blunders in without the slightest awareness that in his blundering he is causing hurt and pain, and grief and shock and anger. There is a note almost of truculence and exasperation in Eliphaz' words; it is as if he were, in his irritation at Job not responding to his words, saying, 'Job, what do you want? Who do you think you are? Are you not satisfied with what we have given you?' But who could be satisfied with such empty mouthings?

45) 15:1-35

So Eliphaz drones on, rehearsing once again (17ff) his earlier statements in 4:12ff - 'that which I have seen' (17) -clearly he has never got over the strange, bizarre vision which had made his hair stand on end (4:15). He is so conscious of standing in the tradition of the wise men of his race (18, 19 - and of course he is one of them!) that it simply does not cross his mind that anything that he says could possibly be wrong, and so he reiterates his earlier statement in an unoriginal way that makes it clear that he has not really heard anything that Job has said. Ah, the accepted wisdom of the ancients, especially when uttered in such a platitudinous way, does not necessarily bear the stamp of infallibility. The observed facts of experience, as exemplified in Job's words in 12:6 bear the patriarch out, not Eliphaz, and not all the latter's insistence on the righteous of his thesis can change that. But then, people like Eliphaz are prone to stand upon their entrenched positions even when the facts of experience stare them in the face. There are none so blind as those who will not see.

46) 16:1-22

Job replies to Eliphaz, and protests against his heartlessness and his failure to give any answer to his agonising dilemma. As one commentator aptly puts it, 'Perpetual harping on one string is but a sober accomplishment'. In view of what we have read in the previous chapter, Job's forthright and blunt charge in 2, 3 is very understandable. The NIV renders 'Miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing?' Put colloquially and bluntly, Job is in effect saying 'I do wish you would just shut up!'. We wonder whether what Job goes on to say in 4, 5 got through to this miserable man - 'I could speak as you have done, if you were in my place, but I would not. Rather, I would encourage you, and bring some comfort and relief to you, in compassion for your distress' (cf Eliphaz' own testimony to Job's record in 4:3, 4). We would like to think that this might have brought some twinge of uneasy embarrassment to Eliphaz, although in view of what he next says to Job in 22:1ff, such a thought must be regarded as highly doubtful. What follows from 6 to the end of the chapter is a deeply moving outpouring of Job's tortured heart and spirit but interpretation here is very important. It will be noted that in the AV Job uses the pronouns 'he' and 'thou' for the most part throughout the passage except in 11, but the RSV and NIV read 'God' throughout. But this may not be an accurate construction to place upon Job's words. We have already seen in 9:24 Job asking the question 'If it is not He (i.e. God), then who is it?' We said then that the answer to that question was Satan. And we must take this into consideration in any understanding of what Job now says in these verses. We shall consider this further in the next Note.

47) 16:1-22

Following on what was said at the end of the last Note, here is a translation offered by a distinguished French commentator, Dhorme, 'For now the jealous man - the adversary - has wearied me. All his company take hold of me. He has become a witness and has risen up against me. My slanderer gives evidence against me. His anger has found a prey and he has persecuted me. He has gnashed his teeth against me. My enemy flashes his piercing eyes upon me.' This clearly puts a different construction upon the passage, and we think the right one. This is confirmed in the translation of 'leanness' in 8 as 'slanderer' - a literal meaning of the word would be my 'lie', i.e. the lie that has been made against me. Dhorme adds, 'We are concerned here with some personage who is Job's enemy: it is his adversary in the court of justice, the false witness, the persecutor, to whom God abandons him'. In contrast to this activity of the enemy, Job speaks in 19 of his witness in heaven, 'he that voucheth for me', namely God. When we bear in mind what we have read in the first two chapters of the book, this interpretation seems very persuasive. And the wonderful thing is that here Job seems to get through to some light that he has never seen before and recognises that it is not God, but the slanderer, Satan, who is doing this to him. This helps us to understand what he says in 11, where 'ungodly' (AV and RSV) and 'evil men' (NIV) can be rendered 'the evil one'. Job thus becomes conscious that there are two powers at work, and he is able at this point to distinguish between a dark power that is seeking to destroy him, and God Who is permitting it. This is a distinction that we also must learn to make, for it is a tremendous insight, of the greatest practical import for Christian life. To learn it is to bring a great and wonderful light into Christian experience. The dramatic imagery in 9-14 in which Job feels as if a wild beast had pounced upon him, and an archer were firing arrows at him, and a warrior breaching the stronghold of his soul, becomes all the more dramatic when we bring the New Testament insights in 1 Peter 5:8 and Ephesians 6:16 to bear upon Job's anguished experience.

48) 16:1-22

But Job is by no means out of the wood yet, in spite of his perception, however momentary, that another hand, the hand of God, is at work in his distress; and there is a good deal of darkness and gloom swirling around him, as he feels his advocate is doing nothing. 'If only God would do something', we often cry, as indeed Job does here, in his extremity. He is proving in his own heartsore experience the truth of F.W. Faber's profound words:

He hides Himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.

But he has some way to go as yet before he experiences the comfort and blessing of

The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when He
Is most invisible.

It is comparatively easy for us when not passing through the kind of pressures that Job is experiencing, to say 'He should have held on to the light that came to him in the earlier part of the chapter, as also to the gleams of light that we saw earlier in the book. But it is a different matter for the one who is embroiled in such extremities, for it is then that the changing circumstances of the battle become such a grim reality, with darkness and light conflicting with each other with such an intensity as that expressed in 15ff, and agony, that it would hardly be surprising that death itself might come. Let us not underestimate the depth of this agony.

49) 17:1-16

What was said at the end of the previous Note is borne out all too starkly in what follows in the remainder of Job's reply to Eliphaz. We are put to silence and awed by the depth of the patriarch's despair as he feels (1, 7, 11, 13) that his end is approaching. The sheer weariness and darkness of his spirit is inexpressibly moving as he appeals to God to be surety for him. As one commentator puts it, 'The bystanders flaunt him with mockeries, under a sense of which his eyes remain closed in weary endurance. He has need of one to undertake for him (cf Isaiah 38:14, Psalm 119:122), to give him a pledge of redemption. But who is there excepting God to whom he can appeal? What other friend is left? Who else would be surety for one so forlorn?' None of his friends are prepared to raise their hand (to be his guarantor), because they have misunderstood his situation (4). The meaning in 5-10 is somewhat problematic. Two possible interpretations have been suggested: the first suggests that in the face of the mystery of suffering (exemplified in Job) the righteous man nevertheless goes on and perseveres in his way, refusing to allow it to get him down. The other interpretation is that if God becomes Job's surety, this will awaken good men out of their despondency; a fresh light thrown on the mystery of providence will revive the faith of the righteous. The first of these interpretations seems the more likely. In 10-16, exasperation with his friends mingles with the dark despair that descends upon the patriarch, as the bleak sense of hopelessness closes in upon him. It has been suggested that the tone of his outpourings bear a startling similarity to that in Psalm 22 (which see). In view of what we know of the reasons for Job's sufferings given in the first two chapters of the book, this is hardly surprising, since in some mysterious way he was sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

50) 18:1-21

We come in this chapter to Bildad's second discourse, with the following chapter giving us Job's reply to it. One of the interesting and significant points we may gather by comparing each of these three friends' discourses is how little variation there is in them, and how barren of new ideas they are. We have stressed that all three represent a rigid orthodoxy, and one of the problems of a rigid orthodoxy is that it has no ideas; it stands fast and firm in its rigidity and, having said its piece, it simply has to repeat itself. As with, Eliphaz, Bildad's words here represent the same mixture as before, with an additional note of marked irritation on Bildad's part (doubtless because of what Job had said in 12:7-9 accusing his friends of empty platitudes). A further evidence of hardening in Bildad's attitude is seen in the fact that while in his first speech (8:1ff) he at least considers the possibility of repentance for Job, suggesting that if he repented of his sin the Lord would restore his prosperity, that does not seem to occur to him here as a possibility. It is interesting how mere men can decide whether a man is beyond repentance or not, and ripe for the judgment of God. This attitude makes these verses among the harshest in the book, as Bildad simply rubs his message of doom and fire to the suffering and afflicted Job. Indeed, as the debate continues, we see Job's friends becoming successively harder and harder, so hard in fact that we find ourselves saying 'Surely human beings could not be so ruthlessly insensitive to real suffering?' Oh, but they can, and the danger is all the greater when one is afflicted with a barren and lifeless theology. These men had never allowed the Word of God to touch the deep springs of their lives - this was their personal tragedy, but it was an extremely painful thing for Job to experience, being at the receiving end of it.

51) 19:1-29

In his reply to Bildad Job uses the latter's own words in 18:2 and 8:2 (which see), and in so doing exposes the depth of the injury that cruel and unfeeling words can inflict on a sensitive heart: 'How long will you torment me, and crush me with words?' The irony and poignancy of this is that Bildad thought he was doing the right thing, and had a great and virtuous sense of taking Job to task and sorting him out. What a devastating indictment this is! In 4 Job says in effect 'Supposing for the sake of argument that I am in the wrong, my error remains with myself - i.e. it is not hurting you; you are not having to suffer on account of it. Why, then, are you so hard on me, as if you were having to pay for my sin?' Job has got a point there. Why were they being so hard? It was because what he had said had exposed their shallowness and barrenness to them, and they did not like it. They were self-styled comforters, but Job was not only not comforted, he was hurt and crushed; and they took it as a personal affront. In 6 Job says, in effect, 'All right, now this as I know, that it is God Who has done me wrong'. This might raise problems and difficulties in our minds, in view of what we said earlier of his last speech in the first cycle, to the effect that Job seemed to have got through to a place where he was able to recognise that there was a distinction between the hand of God and the hand of an enemy that was at work against him. But the contradiction is more apparent than real, since in the last analysis it was by God's permission and ordination that Satan had so afflicted him. We shall say something more about this in the next Reading.

52) 19:1-29

It may help us to understand the seeming contradiction mentioned at the end of the previous Note if we consider our Lord's own experience, in the Apostle Peter's famous statement on the day of Pentecost concerning Christ: 'Him, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have by wicked hands taken and crucified'. It was evil men, inspired by the devil, who crucified Christ; and yet, it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that the crucifixion took place. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and it was the Lord Who laid on Him the iniquity of us all. But this does not alter for one moment the truth that evil men crucified Christ, and still less does it alter the truth that Satan was grappling with the Son of God in the throes of death. And so it was with Job. Indeed, it is in this chapter as much as anywhere that we see how closely his sufferings and afflictions approximate to the sufferings of Christ. Nor should we be surprised at this, since we know from the prologue that Job was the battleground on which God was moving something and doing something in His own inscrutable wisdom and for His own sovereign purposes. Job, then, is conscious of being in a dark tunnel (8) from which there is no exit. He feels hedged in on all sides. It is impressive to see, in 10, 11, the reality of his being 'got at' by the evil one, who slanders God to him by injecting into his mind and soul such dark thoughts about God. The blasphemy is not Job's but the evil one's; and did he but know it (12), the hosts of God were encamping round about him, silent, watchful, but there. It was simply that Job's own perception at this point was so different. How we feel for the dear man!

53) 19:1-29

George Philip's comments on 13-22 are moving and graphic: 'There is a particular agony in being alone and in feeling deserted in a time of crisis and distress. It is almost too painful to read these verses, let alone try to expound them. Have you ever experienced this kind of torture: the aloofness of erstwhile associates, the contempt of those whose livelihood you provide, the withdrawals of your nearest and dearest, making it plain they have no sympathetic understanding of your life nor appreciation of your work, the impertinent scorn of youngsters (of all ages) who are untried in life's experiences? Have you ever dealt thus with any of your own friends, knowing perfectly well you have been deliberately lacerating their feelings? Do you know what it is when those you have confided in intimately, laying bare your heart to them, turn away from you and use their knowledge of you as a lash of criticism?'

One further comment may be made to complete today's meditation. Why do we suppose that young children despised Job (18)? We know that children can be cruel and heartless to one another, but is it a characteristic of children that they can be wicked and heartless to grownups? Something of the child-like wonder at the mysteries of life can often make children very reverent in face of suffering and sorrow, in much the same way as dumb animals - dogs, for example - can sense their master's grief and upset. Why, then, did the children despise Job? Could it be because they heard their parents speaking about him, and picked it up from what their parents were saying about him? This, alas, is sometimes how it is. Children sometimes reveal a great deal about their parents; and it could often be said of them, and to them, 'Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did another tell it unto thee?'

54) 19:1-29

The terrible cry in 21 surely goes right to our hearts, as Job appeals to his friends, gathered round him with their stern, forbidding faces, watching him in their terrible Pharisaical cry which had no effect at all, as the words that follow in 22 seem to suggest, 'You have got your pound of flesh; I am suffering, as you can see; can't you be satisfied with that?' But in his deep anguish, as his heart cries out for his distress to be recorded for posterity in writing, for future generations to judge more leniently than his contemporaries have apparently been able to do, God Himself gives answer to him, in the wonderful gleam of light that He gives in 25ff. The words, as they stand in the AV, are truly magnificent as a testimony to the Resurrection - and who has not thrilled to Handel's glorious rendering of them in his 'Messiah' - and it is entirely right and proper that we should take them as a great affirmation of the ultimate realities of the Christian Faith. But as Job spoke these words, their reference is more limited, and what he means is that at the end of the story, when this long and bitter trial of his is finished, He will have the last word, my Vindicator. The word 'stand' in 25 is almost a technical word, meaning to stand up in a court of justice. This is the measure of the conviction that has come to Job, that in face of all the accusations by his friends - and by the enemy himself - he would be utterly vindicated, and his integrity established. And so, the dark tunnel referred to in 8 as having no light in it and no way out is suddenly bathed in glory. There is nothing greater than this in all Scripture, not even in the magnificent fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians! And we wonder whether, in retrospect, after the Lord turned the captivity of Job, he may well have felt that it was worth passing through all he had passed through, to come to such an ultimate conviction.

55) 20:1-29

This chapter records Zophar's second contribution to the ongoing discussion of Job's sufferings. We should bear in mind as we read it that he has just listened to the moving and wonderful words in 19:21ff. We may well ask, is it possible that any man should be so blind to such words and the significance they bear, and still assume that Job is in the wrong, and suffering because of sin? Could such a man as the patriarch ever have risen to such spiritual heights if he had been what Zophar and the others assumed was the case? Surely Job's words and testimony, the visible agony and the fruit of it, must have convinced anyone that was not utterly hardened and blinded by the devil? Zophar is very angry, as the opening verses of the chapter make clear. What has stung him is Job's warning to his friends at the close of the previous chapter, and he indicates that he is greatly disturbed (2, NIV). 'I hear a rebuke that dishonours me', is how the NIV translates 3 (the RSV has 'I hear censure which insults me'). It is this that triggers off the vehement and ill-tempered outburst that follows. The old Puritan, Matthew Henry, makes the perceptive comment: 'Being resolved to condemn Job as a bad man, he was much displeased that he talked so much like a good man'. Indeed, he was so convinced he was right that nothing could budge him from his conviction that all sufferers are sinners. One recalls the moving words in Isaiah's picture of the Suffering Servant of God (Isa 53:4) 'We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted' and the prophet goes on, in effect, to say: 'But we were wrong, for He was wounded for our transgressions....' The question that arises here is: What would Zophar have said as he looked at the Cross?

56) 20:1-29

With regard to the anger expressed by Zophar, as referred to in the previous Note, one important lesson that we may learn is that when the sublime and Spirit-filled words spoken by men of God produce nothing but irritation in those who hear them, this merely reveals something about those who are irritated; it does not cast any reflection on these who utter them, but it does expose those who react in this way as being out of joint spiritually. This is, alas, how it was with Zophar. It is striking to note how similar many of Zophar's statements in these verses are to the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 37: In the Psalm, 2, 10, 35, 36 find near identical echoes in Zophar's words in 5, 7, 9, and elsewhere throughout the chapter. And the question that arises is: Why is it that all this sounds so right when the Psalmist utters it, and so hollow and empty on the lips of Zophar? It is certainly not imagination to say that when we read this chapter we sense the chill of an arid and barren doctrinal position in all that Zophar says, and feel the emptiness of it; yet, when we read the Psalm, it becomes a distillation of grace, and love and assurance. Why should this be? The answer must necessarily lie in the men who spoke on these two occasions. The Psalmist was in the Spirit, and this man was not. Right things and true things spoken by a man when he is not in the Spirit bring a chill upon the soul; it is only when right and true things are spoken in the Spirit and by the Spirit that they warm and bless. This is a distinction of tremendous importance, and very solemnising too, because it indicates that it is not enough for us to hold orthodox views: if our hearts are not right in the sight of God, our views will simply chill and affront and hurt people. R. Murray McCheyne once said: 'One word spoken by us when we are in the Spirit is worth ten thousand words spoken in unbelief and sin' - even if all ten thousand of them were impeccably orthodox!

57) 20:1-29

From 12 onwards to the end of the chapter we see the same general thesis, unfolded earlier by Zophar in his first speech, monotonously purveyed once again. And throughout, there is the sinister implication that since what he unfolds at length is what happens to the wicked, and since it seems to have happened to Job, therefore Job must be wicked, and therefore his need is to repent. There is almost a viciousness in Zophar's words, as inflamed anger and temper seem to get the better of him, leading him to cruel insinuations and veiled accusations. One can readily understand how hurtful all this was to Job - the constant innuendo, the constant thrusting of such a challenge before him - and what he needed most of all was understanding and fellow-feeling and comfort. The irony and the subtlety in Zophar's approach is that what he says might well have been true of some men. But there is great danger in generalizing a particular instance and making of it an inflexible principle. We need to beware of taking partial insights and exalting them into absolutes, and assuming that God cannot do anything else but act according to our particular assumptions. This would mean that everything about our views would be unbalanced, leading us to one-sidedness and away from reality, when the common experience of multitudes proves us wrong. What would Zophar have said if God had revealed to him His purpose of planting the idea of innocent suffering throughout the whole Bible, culminating in the Cross? Would he not have to criticise God, and tell Him that He was making a mistake? Ah, pigeon-holing God and dictating to Him how He should act is a perilous venture!

58) 21:1-34

Let us see now what Job has to say to all this. The sense in 2 seems to be something like this: 'Listen carefully to my words, and may your consolations be limited to that - i.e. let simple listening to my complaint be the consolation you give me'. It is as if he had said 'By your words you have failed to console me; but just listen, and that will be a comfort to me'. This is very penetrating. Sometimes, the most valuable thing we can do for anyone in trouble is just to be prepared to listen - not to speak, not to trot out all the old clichés, not to give him the benefit of our well-systematised doctrine - but just to listen sympathetically. This is a grace much to be desired. It may well be that Job spoke sarcastically - he could hardly have expected much from his friends by this time, in view of all they had already said - but his words nevertheless bear a profound truth: often when nothing else is possible, it is still possible to give a listening and sympathetic ear. To listen in such a way that the person who is speaking to us and outpouring his heart to us senses a kindred spirit that makes him think, 'Here is someone that understands' - this is surely a great ministry. In 7 onwards, Job calls in question Zophar's point of view. It is true that God does what Zophar says He does, sometimes. But He does not always so act. The acuteness of Job's insight is very impressive, as is the sanity of his judgments. He had a questing mind that called in question accepted statements, testing them by experience and reality. The truth of the matter is that the prosperity of wicked people is often only too plain to see, when everything they touch seems to turn to gold, and nothing ever goes wrong with their lives. The lines seem to have fallen for them in pleasant places right to the end. Does not all this give the lie to Zophar's confident preachings? 'Look around you, man', Job says. 'Life gives the denial to what you are saying'.

59) 21:1-34

One cannot but be impressed with the sheer realism of Job's observations in 8-15. It could even be that he is referring to people he knows - and whom Zophar also knows - whose lifestyle is so different from his own, yet not only is it the case that all they do prospers, but also in their prosperity they sit light to the things of God, and indeed to God Himself. Nor is there any question of any vague longing in their hearts or a sense of aimlessness and dissatisfaction for, hardened by prosperity, they are perfectly happy and satisfied without God, and full of life and spirits. This has a message also for us in our concern for evangelism. It is much too facile to make the assumption that there is an unsatisfied longing and yearning in every unbeliever's heart, if only it could be reached, for this is true only of some; with others there can be a total insensitivity to spiritual realities that would make them laugh at our suggestion. The real word for such people is to point out that the fact that they are happy and satisfied as they are is hardly the point: the real issue is whether God is satisfied with them as they are. That is an infinitely more important question. In 22ff Job accuses his friends of dictating to God how to run His world, but God refuses to work in any set way in His providence, and to suppose that He does simply flies in the face of observed reality: with one it is this (23), with another it is that (25), and it simply will not do to be naive and simplistic in face of the incontrovertible mysteries of life. We have to accept that there are some things for which there is no discernible explanation or answer. In face of this undoubted fact of human experience, Zophar's confident and facile pronouncements are seen to be things of straw.

60) 22:1-30

We come with this chapter to the third cycle of Discourses and to Eliphaz' third attempt to put Job to rights. One has to admit to a sense of astonishment at Eliphaz' words and attitude in 1-20, to see what this exercise has degenerated into. Ostensibly the three friends started off with the desire and purpose to comfort Job, but now it has become a slanging match in which wild and completely unsubstantiated charges are levelled against the patriarch. First of all, in 1-4, Eliphaz gives voice to a curious and highly questionable thesis, beginning with the question, 'Can a man be profitable unto God?' What he means is that man is too insignificant a creature to be of advantage to God. The gain from virtue (3) is not to Him, but to those who practise it. It pays men to be virtuous, and it does not pay them to be otherwise. But utilitarian ethics are false ethics. Job does right not because it pays, but because it is right. What Eliphaz is saying simply echoes Satan's thesis in 1:9, 'Doth Job fear God for nought?' The illogicality of Eliphaz' position here should be noted: if man's virtue is of no profit to God (i.e. if it is not something in which He can take real pleasure), then why should Eliphaz assume that lack of virtue should be punished? If God is so sovereign that He is above thinking of man's virtue or being influenced by it, then by the same token He can hardly be influenced by man's lack of it either. But illogicality is not Eliphaz' only problem. His base and scurrilous attack on Job in 5ff reveals something very fateful about the man, as we shall see in the next Reading.

61) 22:1-30

The accusations that Eliphaz makes in 5-14 are much the most blatant that we have found in the book. They are wild indeed, and foul libels. There is a sense in which one sees the logical outworking in his mind of the doctrinal assumptions that he has held and expounded with such dogmatic tenacity, i.e., that sin is punished and that if a man is under affliction he must be a great sinner. And now he is compelled, by the evidence before him of Job's afflictions, to postulate the kind of sins he must be guilty of and that have caused such affliction. The sheer enormity of the accusations he makes against Job in 6, 7, 9 - without the slightest evidence on which to base such charges - constitute a level of effrontery without parallel and are a horrifying evidence of the extent to which a barren and sterile theological position, heartless, graceless, can dehumanise a man. We are almost tempted to think that this picture must surely be a caricature of reality, so extreme is it, but alas, we know only too well that ideas can be held and clung to with extraordinary tenacity even when they have been proved beyond any doubt to be wrong and false. And when a man insists, 'No matter what is said, I will still hold to my opinion', when that opinion has been proved wrong. What requires to be recognised is that, far from being a man of strong conviction he is simply prejudiced and bigoted, with an obstinacy that indicates not strength but weakness and insecurity. This is a biggish lesson for any man to learn.

62) 22:1-30

Eliphaz' advice to Job in 21-30 presents another example of the kind of paradox we have seen in earlier chapters and it raises again the question as to how such pearls of wisdom could possibly fall from the lips of such a man. Two things may be said about them, first, that although wise and moving, they simply do not apply to Job in his situation, since they make the assumption that he is at odds with God and therefore needs to repent; and secondly, the fact that Eliphaz was such a man as we have seen him to be makes such words on his lips to be highly distasteful. It is not, in fact, beyond the bounds of possibility that he was quoting from another source and that the words were not his own. Taken by themselves, however, out of relation to Eliphaz, they stand as an authentic spiritual exhortation, full of grace and promise for all who, conscious of their sin and need would seek to return to God. This, indeed, is the way back, and we might well use the words of the hymn writer, 'None too vile or loathsome for a Saviour's grace' as a measure of the assurance that these verses afford. One readily thinks of David's moving utterance in Psalm 51 in that great penitential cry, and it would be a spiritual exercise in itself to compare the two passages, not least the words in 29 'When men are cast down, then shalt Thou say, there is lifting up' with Psalm 51:13,15. Nevertheless, we still have to ask ourselves what Job's reaction was likely to have been to words that did not meet his case and that presupposed a situation which was wide of the mark, so far as he was concerned.

63) 23:1-17

Job's reply to Eliphaz' words occupies this and the next chapter. If we follow the AV in 2, Job is saying that his bitter complaints and groaning do not represent the half of what he is suffering - this, in answer to his friends' chiding him for the intensity of his outbursts. But the RSV and NIV render 2 differently: 'His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning'. What he says in 3, in memorable words, 'Oh, that I knew where I might find him!' seem to be an answer to Eliphaz' words in 22:21. 'Acquaint now thyself with Him', as if to say, 'I wish I could'. But we must be careful here in our interpretation, for what we have said might well make it seem as if Job were agreeing with Eliphaz' general thesis in 22:21ff, which he is not. The ease with which misinterpretation can take place here may be seen from the fact that Mendelssohn, in his great oratorio 'Elijah' brings Job's words here into the beautiful aria 'If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me, ye shall ever truly find Me', as if to suggest that when men fail to find Him, they are not seeking with all their hearts - a statement which is, of course, perfectly true in some circumstances, but not true in Job's. Job's problem was not one of reconciliation but of mystery. And what he is giving expression to is the experience of a Christian under darkness, a darkness not of sin, but of suffering and perplexity. This that Job was passing through was 'a dark night of the soul' for him, a dark valley of mystery unrelated to sin, and when a man passes through this it is something out of which it seems very difficult ever to emerge. And there is a qualitative difference between such an experience as this and the kind of darkness expressed in William Cowper's hymn, 'Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?', the answer to which is 'The dearest idol I have known.....help me to tear it from Thy throne and worship only Thee'. Of the latter Job would say, 'This is not where I am' although his three friends were convinced it was.

64) 23:1-17

Job wants to meet God in order to argue his case before Him, to establish his integrity before Him, that is, to assure himself that, whatever the cause of such affliction might be it was not due to his sin. His words in 8,9 are deeply moving, reminding us of the hymn writer's words, 'He hides Himself so wondrously, as though there were no God', an experience all too familiar in the dark passages of life. In contrast, however, there is the Psalmist's remarkable utterance in Psalm 139:7-12 where the sense of the inescapable Presence of God is paramount. There is no contradiction here: the same God Who in some human experiences is inescapably present is in others the God Who hides Himself (Isaiah 45:15). But overshadowing all the dark experience there comes this wonderful word in 10, 'He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold'. Here is another gleam of light shining in Job's darkness, a double gleam indeed, for not only is there the assurance that although he is in darkness and perplexity, God is not, and knows all about his situation, knows also what He is doing in it, for His counsels are sure and He makes no mistakes, and can do no wrong, but also there is the consciousness that he is being tried (would that his friends could have grasped this truth!) and that there would be a blessed and fruitful issue from the trial. It is easy to think that the apostle Peter had Job's experience in mind, when he wrote in his first epistle (1:7) of 'the trial of faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire'.

65) 23:1-17

The Apostle Peter's words, quoted at the end of the last Note, are matched by those of the Apostle James in his epistle (cf James 1:3,4; 5:7,8), and James' insistence on 'long patience' in time of testing is a very relevant one so far as Job's trial is concerned. It is this, in fact, that Job's words in 10 seem to imply - it is when the trial is over (however long it may take) that he was to come forth as gold. This, as James would put it, is the 'end' of the Lord, His purpose in putting him through the fire. To pursue the metaphor a little further, it is helpful to remember that gold in the raw, imbedded as it is in the ore, is a far cry from the precious metal when refined. And, painful though the process be for us, we should be thankful that God has seen gold in us worth going to some trouble about. Behind every gleaming piece of gold there lies a story of trial by fire. Our part in the trial is to bear up and keep our integrity and not go under; it is His to apply the pressure (11, 12). In the last verses of the chapter (13-17), the darkness again descends on Job as the oppressive sense of a frowning Providence comes upon him once more. Yet, even in the darkness, he is conscious of the Divine Presence (15), albeit it is a frowning and frightening Presence, and we should compare and contrast this with 3 and 8, 9. William Cowper's well-known words, 'Behind a frowning Providence He hides a smiling face' are an apt commentary on this chapter, for surely Job has experienced both, and although the darkness has descended at the chapter's end, his testimony in 11 is a substantial indication that darkness cannot have the final word in his life.

66) 24:1-25

What was said at the end of the previous Note is worth emphasising once again as we continue into Job's ongoing discourse in this chapter. The one right thing to do in time of darkness and pressure is to hold fast and firm (23:11,12), and to stand on the true moral ground and go on, even if it is into deeper darkness, in the true moral attitude. 'His way have I kept' are words imbued with majesty in this connection, when not even the sense of the 'frowning Providence' can daunt or move him. That is how big the man is! The measure of Job's perplexity is seen in what he proceeds now to say, as he thinks aloud about the problem of suffering and evil in the world. The question that exercises him is, all kinds of evil and injustice are rampant in the world, and God seems to sit light to them and be indifferent. One commentator puts it thus: 'Property is violated, widows and orphans robbed, the poor are oppressed, the peasants are exploited and reduced to the most squalid misery, while their exploiters are sated with luxury. If from the country we pass to the town we are faced with the same scenes of disorder and crime: murder, adultery, theft, plunder, the triumph of those who roam at night and fear the light of the day'. And God seems to pay no attention. There is a sense in which these verses need little in the way of comment, but the problem they present is a very real one, and it is this: Why should this be so, why is there no redress? Job's friends had been insisting that the prosperity of the wicked is short, but he challenges this facile assumption in these verses and brings them face to face with the problem of continuing and protracted evil. Such is the scenario presented in this chapter.

67) 24:1-25

It is very striking to realise that in launching into a general statement about evil rampant in town and country alike, Job sees his own suffering as only part of a still greater general mystery. The fact is, he is not absorbed and immersed in his own woes, even in the darkness of his agony and perplexity. Self-pity is not to the fore; he is still clear-sighted enough to be exercised by something bigger than himself. His spirit had a vitality and vigour which not even protracted suffering could undermine. He is not self-centred in his grief and woe. This is one great lesson we are to learn from this chapter. The question so exercising Job is, of course, one that the whole Bible exercises itself about. We may recall the words in Revelation 6:10, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' And the comprehensive answer given throughout the book of Revelation is the revelation of the Throne, and the assurance that in spite of everything God was in control. And because God is always in control, we must say that He permits the continuance of evil for His own wise and sovereign purposes. Significantly, in this connection, we read in Revelation 13:5,7 the words 'there was given unto him....' and 'it was given unto him....' - references to the destructive power given to the beast in his attacks upon the people of God. The power was given him by God, and we may compare this with what we read in Job 1, 2, where Satan is given leave to torment Job. And the mystery is that of God permitting these things - whether in Job or in the world at large - for this reason: in order to give evil its head, in order finally to destroy it. Thus we read in Revelation 17:15-18, and particularly 17, the all-important word 'until' - that is to say, until God's time of action comes, when the disintegrative and self-destructive power inherent in evil manifests itself, to its own destruction. There was a time like that coming for Job also (cf 42:10). What a marvellous and comforting word that 'until' proves to be!

68) 25:1-6

One's first reaction, in reading this very brief statement by Bildad, is to think that the man has run out of steam and has spent himself in what he has already said in his first two contributions (the same could be said about Zophar who says nothing in this third cycle of discourses). And this no doubt is true. There is a certain sublimity for all that, in what he says, as he emphasises the majesty and the might of God, and man's consequent littleness in significance and sin. This is all very well, but it does not happen to be the question that is under discussion. Job knows all this, as he witheringly points out in the opening verses of the next chapter. He is not claiming to be sinless; rather he is maintaining that it is not sin that has caused his suffering and that there must be some other explanation. And this is what in their obtuseness these friends of his were not able to see. Matthew Henry says of this chapter, that Bildad should have preached, to one tormented and in agony like Job, not the majesty of God, but His grace and tender mercy, the consolations not the terrors of the Almighty. This is a very perceptive statement and it underlines once again the insensitiveness of these men to Job's suffering and agony. It is all very well to trot out sublimities of doctrine - which, of course, are in themselves true - but oh, in times of agony surely the need is to minister the balm of Gilead to hearts that are bruised and hurt. But then - and it is difficult not to voice this suspicion - if Bildad's whole point was to make Job feel his insignificance, and thus bring him down a peg or two for daring to challenge God, as he felt, then we see the emptiness and the affront that his words must have been to Job. How different is the impression created by the Psalmist in Psalm 8, as he speaks of the greatness of God, prompting the exclamation 'What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?' The truth is, even in His sternest dealings with us, God does not make us feel like a worm (as Bildad was clearly intent upon doing to Job): He invests us with the dignity of personality and treats us with fundamental respect. This is what Bildad was apparently unaware of; and when a man does not know that, he does not really know much about God.

69) 26:1-14

We can hardly fail to notice the bitterness and scorn of Job's reply: 'You do not have to tell me these things, Bildad. I know the greatness of God, indeed I am conscious of it more than you are. I know the might and majesty of God, and have bowed low in worship before Him. The difference between us is - and this is the point in Job's rehearsing the wonders of God's power throughout the chapter - that you speak of these wonders as if you know them all and have got them - and God - taped, but I am so deeply conscious that when all that man can know of Him has been found out we still have only touched the edges of His ways (14)'. Once again Job is sufficiently objective and detached from his suffering to try to instruct his friends and show them that there is a deeper dimension in life that they have not begun to suspect. It is recorded of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, on reading a superficial biography of Wesley by the poet Southey, which completely failed to grasp the significance of Wesley's life and ministry, that he made the scathing comment to Southey, 'Sir, the well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with'. We feel that Job might well have said the same to Bildad. There are people in the world like that who seem to be blissfully unaware of the real problems of life; they have lived on a superficial level all their days; they are not even conscious that such problems exist let alone be able to answer them. And so Job takes Bildad to the depths below (5, 6) and to the heights above (7ff), that he may learn how little of the dominion of God lies within the range of a mind like his, or indeed of mortal sense. Well might he speak of 'the outskirts of his ways' (14, RSV). We shall say something further of this in the next Note.

70) 26:7-14

We are given a good illustration of 'the outskirts of his ways' in Exodus 33:18 - 34:8, in God's response to Moses' request, 'I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory'. This was too much to ask and God said 'I will make all My goodness pass before thee', and added, 'Thou canst not see My face'. And what followed was almost too much for Moses, in the overwhelming experience of the divine manifestation such as was given him (34:5-8). And as it was, we are told later in Exodus, that when he went down from the mount, that he did not realise that his face shone with the glory of the outskirts of His ways. That indeed was mercy to Moses, because if God had revealed His glory to him it would have consumed him. It is to this that Job gives expression here in 14. We must beware of the danger of assuming that man can know all that can be known of God. The complete revelation of God in Scripture does not tell all the infinity of His Person and character. As Paul explains in Romans 11:33, 'How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out'. If this is so, how vain and presumptuous of us to demand that we shall understand all things and explain all mysteries. This is Job's point, and it has very real importance in relation to the final revelation that is given to Job at the end of the book when, as we shall see, peace came to Job's heart not by having his questions answered, but by having a sight of this transcendent God and being brought to a place where he could trust Him in the darkness. There is more than a suggestion throughout the book that Job's friends tended to think that they had everything at their fingertips and knew all the answers. One of the great lessons we have to learn in life - a lesson that the book of Job teaches us - is that sometimes there is no answer down here to the question 'Why?' and that we have got to learn to live with this, and what is more, live in peace with it, in the knowledge that God knows why although we do not. As one commentator puts it, 'Fully to understand divine providence is impossible, but it can be seen that One Who is supreme in power and infinite in wisdom, responsible always to Himself for the exercise of His power, should have the complete confidence of His creatures'.

71) 27:1-23

We come in this chapter to an extended discourse by Job stretching to the end of chapter 31 which seems to constitute his final reply to his three friends, before another, Elihu, takes up the strain in an extensive discourse (32:1 - 37: 24). Job sums up his position as over against all the accusations and insinuations of his friends who all along have insisted that because Job is suffering so deeply and so protractedly, he must be a very great sinner - therefore he must confess his sin and he will enter again into peace with God. And Job takes the name of God on his lips in a very daring vow (2-4), in which he asserts that as long as breath is in him his lips would not speak falsehoods and say he was a sinner when he knew he was not. One has, of course, to qualify that statement, as we have done repeatedly throughout the previous chapters: Job is not claiming sinlessness, and all that he is disputing is the insistence that his suffering is caused by glaring sin. His complaint is that he has called on God to engage with him in a formal, legal debate about his situation, and God has seemingly declined the challenge, and taken away his right to answer back and plead his own cause (2), the implication being that He had been unjust to His servant. Job is wrong, of course, but with his present knowledge of the situation this is the only conclusion he can come to, and he is too honest to avoid drawing that conclusion. And if we read the book aright the message that comes to us is that God is more well-pleased with a man who speaks like that in rugged honesty, even if it seems to be accusing Him of injustice, than with someone who tries to square the truth to fit a preconceived idea of theology, as his friends were clearly doing. At the same time, however, Job never abandons his faith in the righteousness of God, and it is precisely because of this that his conflict is so agonising, introducing as it does a complete contradiction that he is unable to resolve.

72) 27:1-23

The connection between 7ff and what has gone before is somewhat difficult to establish but the meaning seems to be something like this: if Job belonged to the category of the wicked and the impious, as his friends insinuate, he could not turn to God as his friends were advising him to do, nor would he be justified in hoping in God and praying to Him, for God closes His ears to the appeals of wicked men (8-10); if then his friends are unwilling to agree that he is righteous, why do they waste their time exhorting him? (12). They treat him as a guilty man, and at the same time encourage him to pray. These things are contradictory.

The remaining verses of the chapter (13-22) present a problem, in that these verses express the exact opposite of all that Job has said in past chapters, and Job seems now to be contradicting himself. There are several possible solutions to this problem. One is to interpret it as devastating irony on Job's behalf, almost mimicry, with Job mocking his friends in his bitterness of soul. Another is to take the verses as stating how far Job agrees with his friends and how far he disagrees, admitting that there is some truth in what they say but not the whole truth, while disagreeing completely with their inferences regarding his life. But there is a third suggestion made by commentators, namely that these verses constitute Zophar's third discourse (it will be seen from the Analysis that Eliphaz and Bildad each contribute a third statement). This is an ingenious and plausible suggestion, particularly when comparison is made between these verses and Zophar's second discourse in 20:1-29. The echoes are remarkable. We would have to assume, if this be the case, that any reference to Zophar making a third speech had become lost in the transmission of the text, and this would raise the question: Is there any evidence of this? The answer to this must be in the negative. But it is an interesting thought.

73) 28:1-28

This is a remarkable chapter, different in tone and content from what has gone before. Those who suggest that 27:13ff may be a third speech by Zophar think that this chapter continues his speech (with Job resuming his reply in 29:1ff). Another, and more likely suggestion, however, made by some commentators, is that this is a poem introduced almost as an aside by the writer of the book, a meditative reflection on the subject of wisdom. Those acquainted with Greek tragedy will know that the Greek tragedians employed a Chorus in their plays to speak certain meditations in the midst of the drama - comments, as it were, on the course of events or on life itself - and it is almost as if the writer here employs such a device to make his point. At all events, it is an impressive chapter, and it divides naturally into two parts, 1-11 and 12-28. The first part underlines the assiduousness and enterprise of man, digging into the ground for precious metals, burning and refining the ore. The point that is being made is that man is a most enterprising creature full of ingenuity and skill and exercising a mastery over nature, creating wealth in the world by extracting it from the earth. But this, as we shall see when we study the verses that follow (12-28), is considerably qualified in the contrast that is made with divine wisdom. This we shall consider in the next Note.

74) 28:1-28

The contrast made in these verses is this: man can do so much, he is so enterprising and skilful; yet where is wisdom to be found, and where is the place of understanding? The point being made is that only God can reveal wisdom to men: it is not something they can search out in the way that they can search out the precious metals from underneath the ground or - to underline a contemporary scientific advance - in the way they can transplant human organs. Knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing. Man is still in some sense the overlord of creation - 'Subdue the earth', was God's command to Adam, and the whole pattern and development of modern technology and science is a fulfilment of man's God-ordained function in the world. But, having said that, one must recognise that this is not the same as saying that man has found wisdom. The sad truth about our modern world is that man's moral being has not developed side by side with his technological expertise, and when face to face with the kind of problems that Job has been wrestling with, modern man is as lacking as Job's comforters were in any real answer. It is the spiritual dimension that is all important, as the final verse of the chapter makes clear: 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding'.

75) 29:1-25

This chapter and the next two belong integrally to one another, giving us the final summing up of his case in the following three points: his past happiness in 29; his present sufferings in 30, and his integrity always in 31. In 29 we are given the testimony of a man of God; in 30 we are given the sufferings of the man of God; and 31 explains both - for it lies behind and underneath the quality of Job's testimony, explaining its virtue and power, in terms of the hidden disciplines of obedience and righteousness (only thus can such testimonies be produced); and likewise it explains why the suffering has come - it is the fellowship of Christ's sufferings adumbrated here, and this follows from the hidden disciplines unfolded in 31 also.

We look first of all, then, at Job's testimony in the first of these three chapters. It is a deeply moving utterance, all the more so when it is a looking back upon a situation that no longer obtains for him (as the 'But now' in 30:1 makes plain). It is a portrait of a true man of God, God preserved (2b), God-guided (3) and God-befriended (4); domestically blessed (5) and prosperous (6) and universally respected (7-10), with a righteousness of character that warmed and blessed so many. One recalls something once said to Dr. R.W. Dale of Birmingham by a very ordinary woman in his congregation: 'God bless you, Dr. Dale! If you could only know how you have made me feel hundreds of times, and what a happy home you have given me! God bless you!' How many could have said the same to Job!

76) 29:1-25

A continuing meditation in this moving chapter brings some important considerations into sharp focus. For one thing we are reminded, by what is said in 19ff of the picture of the godly man in Psalm 1 (which see), of whom it is said that he is 'like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season....whatsoever he doeth shall prosper'. For another thing, the words of Anna Laetitia Waring seem to echo so much of what Job says here:

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes,
And a heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathise.

'A heart at leisure from itself' - this is surely how it is with Job, but alas how it so often is not with us, who often find it difficult to escape from ourselves, our own concerns, our own battles and temptations, so that there is little time or energy to think of others. True salvation is not only from, but unto, and there is a qualitative difference between trying to avoid evil and going about doing good. As the old hymn says, 'Oh, the good you may be doing, while the years are rolling on'. This is how it was with Job: please God it may be so more and more with us.

77) 30:1-31

The words 'But now' at the beginning of this chapter, introduce the marked contrast between Job's past experience and his present sufferings. From being a venerated figure, the patriarch becomes a by-word to all, held in derision (1, 9), an abhorrence not only to men but also, apparently, to God. The contrast could not be more complete and the language used to describe it is indeed extreme. There is a sense in which not much in the way of comment is needed although one or two verses are problematic as to the best translation to follow, (e.g. 24-26, and modern versions should be consulted). Two points, however, may be noted in particular: one is the sense of mystification that Job gives expression to - it is the sobering consciousness that God is involved in all he is suffering that he cannot understand: God has become his enemy, he feels, and this is what he cannot square with anything he has known in the past. The other consideration is this: the very language which Job uses to express his consciousness of being held in derision and abhorrence makes us think almost irresistibly of some of the great Messianic passages in the Old Testament - Isaiah 53:3, Psalm 22:6,7, are but two of many that could be quoted. It is certainly not fanciful to hear echoes in what Job says of the experiences of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. In this sense, Job is a 'type' of Christ in the sufferings he endured. Nor is it fanciful to think of the contrast presented in the gospel record itself between the acclamation which our Lord received from the crowds as He rode into Jerusalem, as they cried 'Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord', and their very different reaction less than a week later as they cried 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' This is how it was with Job, in the contrasted presented between this chapter and the previous one.

78) 30:1-31

Further to what was said at the end of the last Note it is important for us to realise that the kind of contrast presented between this chapter and the previous one is one that will eventually repeat itself in every life that becomes involved in the work of the Kingdom of God. One has only to think of Saul of Tarsus, the scholar who sat at the feet of Gamaliel, a man who on his own confession had much to boast of - 'Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel....touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ'. And what did that mean for him? We may use his own words to answer this question, in 1 Cor 4:9-13: 'I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men...being reviled we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day'. His language, as we see, is so similar to Job's in this chapter. It is ever so, for every soul that shares in the sufferings that are inherent in faithfulness to the divine purpose in the world. It is not that Job was conscious of this; but with our insight into his sufferings given in the first two chapters of the book, we are surely able to see that he was involved in the mystery of the divine purposes and in the conflict between good and evil. How illuminating the New Testament scriptures would have been to the patriarch!

79) 31:1-40

In the light of all that has been said in the two previous chapters Job now protests his integrity before God. We said earlier that Job's wonderful testimony in chapter 29 is explained by what we read here: this is why he was such a man, there were deaths that he died day by day in terms of maintaining an utter purity in the inmost thoughts of his mind and heart. It is thus that he is able to plead and maintain his integrity before God: his life is untainted by immorality (1-12), or by thoughtlessness (13-22, 31, 32), or by love of money (24, 25), or by idol worship (26, 27), or by evil thoughts (29, 30), or by insincerity and hypocrisy. It is on this ground that he protests his innocence before God (35-40). It is an impressive statement indeed, and we are to look at it in some detail.

What is said in 1-12 indicates that behind the outward correctness of his behaviour was inward purity. The sin of uncleanness, in violation of the seventh commandment was held by him in fear and abhorrence. Such an attitude is a 'must' for all who walk with God because such sin deserves the punishment of God (2, 3), and the punishment of man alike (11), and because it is an offence against society itself as well as a fire that can utterly destroy a man's life (12). Well might the Scriptures urge us to flee this!

80) 31:1-40

It is hardly necessary for us to examine in detail all Job's protestations. Suffice it to say that he brings his domestic life and his attitude to others alike under the scrutiny of the all-seeing eye of God; indeed all he did - his attitude to business (24, 25), his dealings with the poor and the needy (16ff) - was conditioned that there was a God above to whom he was answerable. This is a great way to live, and it can hardly be doubted that living in such a way imparts a stature and an integrity to life that cannot be gainsaid and that even enemies recognise. It is little wonder, and very understandable that this remarkable catalogue should end with the exclamation he utters in 35-40 protesting his innocence. As someone has put it, 'Behold my signature! I state my innocence. I set to my mark. I stand by my claim. I can do nothing else. Let the Almighty prove me at fault. God, you say, has a book in which His charges against me are written out. I wish I had that book! I would fasten it on my shoulders as a badge of honour, I would wear it as a crown!' This is all very impressive, and we need once again to remind ourselves of the specific, and indeed limited, sense in which the patriarch's words are proved, otherwise we could easily find ourselves charging him with self-righteousness. But this - as we have noted repeatedly during these studies - is to miss the point: Job is not claiming sinlessness nor is he claiming that there are no faults in him; indeed, as we shall see later in the book, God chides him and corrects him. But what he is doing is to maintain his integrity and to insist that the assumptions made by his three comforters, that God was making him suffer because of some great sins, was wrong. That is the point at issue.

81) 31:1-40

We may remain with this chapter one more day to underline some important considerations and observations. For one thing, we should note the echoes of several of the Ten Commandments throughout the chapter, and learn from this that the godly life is a life in line with the commandments and that there is a strong moral and ethical tone to it. What the New Testament speaks of as the 'things that accompany salvation' (Heb 6:9) are not only important but essential. It is worthy of note that in the later books of the New Testament especially the emphasis is on Christian behaviour. It is never unnecessary to remind ourselves that faith without works is dead. For another thing, the issues that Job mentions here are not spectacular things, but ordinary, even humdrum matters. Matters such as keeping one's word, being truthful and fulfilling the ordinary responsibilities involved in being the people of God. It is not a reassuring sign for Christian people to be more taken up with their rights and privileges than with their duties and responsibilities, and to sit light to the need to be faithful and honourable in the fulfilling of these responsibilities. It may be a truism to say that Christians are required to behave, but it is disquieting that it should be necessary to underline it. Job lived the life. Do we?

82) 32:1-22

With this chapter we come to a new section of the book, in which we are introduced to another of Job's friends, Elihu, who proves to be of a rather different calibre than the others. It will be seen from the Analysis of the book given earlier that Elihu makes a very long statement covering six chapters, and we should note that Job does not make answer to him, for in 38:1ff it is the Lord Himself Who speaks to Job. Elihu in some ways is a paradoxical character. On the one hand he says many things which are much more penetrating, not to say more subtle, than the other three; and yet he is like them, inasmuch and insofar as he also takes issue with Job, taking it upon himself to censure him and scold him roundly for his insistence on maintaining his integrity. He certainly gives utterance to some very deep and fine thoughts, but on the other hand he is more than a little self-consciously important in his own eyes, and more than a little - as one commentator puts it - prosy in his deliverances. Nevertheless, many of the things he says are marked by keen spiritual insight, coming far closer to the heart of the mystery than the other three could ever do, recognising that suffering may be sent as a means of strengthening and purifying the children of God.

83) 32:1-22

An examination of the six chapters of Elihu's speech indicates that after some words of introduction (32:1-5) he addresses himself, in 32:6-22 to the other three 'comforters'. Then, in 33:1-33 he addresses Job. He turns again to the others in 34:1-37, then finally in 35:1-37:24 he speaks once more to Job. We shall study the chapters in this way in the next few Notes.

A problem of translation arises in the opening verse here: the AV, followed by the RSV and the NIV says that the three men ceased to answer Job 'because he was righteous in his own eyes' - as if to say, 'What is the use of saying anything more to this man, he is absolutely unshakable in his conviction that he is in the right; we are wasting our time upon him'. But the distinguished French commentator Dhorme, along with Rotherham's translation (and also the Septuagint) render the phrase 'because he was righteous in their eyes', and this would mean that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar yielded up the argument to Job and accepted that what he had been saying was right. In other words, they were silenced by him, and especially by his wonderful testimony in chapters 29-31, and were forced, in spite of themselves, to concede that Job was right. What follows, then, in 2 and 3 would mean that Elihu was angry with Job, because he justified himself rather than God, and furthermore that he was angry with the three friends because they had ended up by seeming to agree with Job, taking sides with him against God, and thus condemning God. This was intolerable to Elihu, and explains his entry into the debate. The idea thus seems to be that Elihu speaks because he thinks that the three friends have 'let the side down', and conceded the argument to Job. This he attempts to rectify, addressing first the friends in the remainder of this chapter, and then Job in what follows in the next.

84) 32:1-22

Elihu begins well in 6ff and shows a commendable spirit of respect for his elders, even although he did not agree with them. He had listened patiently to all that they had said to Job (and doubtless found himself sympathetically disposed to Job's impatience and irritation with their platitudes), and now he quietly and firmly cuts them down to size in what he says in 8, 9, 12, 13, implying in speaking about the 'inspiration of the Almighty' that they were markedly lacking in it. His quiet critique of their efforts must surely have discomfited them greatly. All the same, in what follows in 15ff we begin to see something other than the quiet authority that the earlier verses of the chapter indicated, and this elaborate preparation of what he was to say marks him as self-consciously pompous and self-important. As Dhorme comments, 'He is interminably prosy!' In this regard the metaphor he uses in 19 may be thought to be somewhat unfortunate, although self-revealing: the swelling of a wine-skin is not all that far removed in thought from the swelling of a balloon filled with air, which needs only a pinprick to burst it!

85) 33:1-33

Elihu now turns to address himself to Job. But still he is not ready to begin his observations, for 1-7 are still by way of introduction, or exordium. Dhorme comments, 'We are dealing with a man who talks for the sake of talking, and who with much bustle announces that he is about to declare extraordinary things which we are still waiting to hear'. One is reminded of Queen Victoria's complaint about one of her ministers: 'I wish he would not address Me as if I were a public meeting'! Elihu is intent on showing (5, 6) that he and Job are equally matched in this battle of words and ideas - they are two creatures moulded by the same Creator. Perhaps - and it is easy to form such a suspicion - Elihu says this with the silent implication 'Nevertheless, I will wipe the floor with you. Watch me do it now'. When Elihu does finally begin what he has to say to Job he gives a brief resume, in 8-11, of Job's position throughout the debate and then he gives his judgment on it in 12: 'Behold in this thou art not just'. This is his general thesis, and he proceeds to elaborate it in all that follows.

86) 33:1-33

The NIV and the RSV both differ from the AV's rendering of 13, and substitute 'words' for 'matters', but perhaps the AV gives the sense of the original more truly, and the NIV in fact gives as a marginal alternative 'he does not answer for any of his actions'. This is real wisdom and if we can forget Elihu's rather portentous approach for the moment we may recognise that this has something of application for us also. If God is infinitely greater than man, He does not have to explain everything to us. The commander-in-chief in the Army does not explain to the private soldier on the front line everything that is going on. Indeed, it is not the private's job to know this: his task is to obey orders without question. Yet God does speak - now one way, now another - though man may not perceive it (14, NIV), and in what follows Elihu instances two ways in which God speaks to men. The first is in a dream or vision (15-18). What does this have to say to us today? It is, of course, true that we have evidence in Scripture how God has spoken to His servants in dreams and visions - we have Joseph's dreams in the book of Genesis, we have the dreams that came to the New Testament Joseph, the husband of Mary, and we have the visions that Paul experienced. No one can therefore say categorically that God does not speak today in dreams and visions. But they will be the exception rather than the rule; and it must surely be an evidence of spiritual immaturity when Christian folk covet being spoken to by God in dreams, and for this reason: it tends to abrogate human responsibility, and particularly the responsibility of thinking things through with the conscious mind. We will say more about this in the next Note.

87) 33:1-33

There is ample evidence in the New Testament to show that God's appointed way of guiding His people and making known His will to them is through a sanctified mind: 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is', Paul says in Ephesians 5:17. To want God to speak in dreams, therefore, is simply to abrogate our God-given responsibility as intelligent beings to think things through. We should bear in mind, with respect to the undoubted occurrence of 'dream revelation' in Scripture that there was little in the way of teaching of Scripture as we know it today in these far off times. This is where the Apostle Peter's words in 2 Pet 1:19: 'We have a more sure word of prophecy' - referring to Scripture itself - are so pertinent and significant. All this requires to be said, because there can be a real danger today of being misled in spiritual life by wrong and unhelpful pre-occupations, and becoming fanatical in the bad sense in coveting visions and dreams. If we are determined to be guided by dreams, we will have dreams all right, but the question will arise whether it is the Good Spirit, or the evil one that is speaking in them.

88) 33:1-33

The other way in which God speaks to men is through chastening, pain and suffering (19ff). It does not seem, and we are not entitled to assume, that Elihu is implying that it is because of the insensitiveness of Job's heart that Job has had to suffer pain and chastening. He is not in fact saying, as Job's other friends had clearly done, that Job must be a very great sinner to be suffering in this way. Rather, the general observation is that God is saying something to him in this heartsore experience. This is very true. God does say things to men through chastisement, through bringing them down to the brink of the grave; but He may not necessarily be saying, 'Job, I am angry with you, therefore I am doing this to you'. Elihu may mean nothing more than that suffering can produce an attitude of heart and spirit that alone can make us receptive to God's word. We do in fact learn things through suffering we would never have learned without it; it is often the only condition under which God can convey His new word to our hearts. One recalls C.S. Lewis' well-known words, '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'. One of the problems, however, is that the language of affliction is so difficult that most of us do not know what it is saying to us, and we need help, as 23 makes plain. But something must be said about this, which we must leave until the next Note.

89) 33:1-33

There are in fact two things to be said about Elihu's words concerning the need for 'a messenger, an interpreter' in 23. The immediate understanding of what he says is, of course, that he, Elihu, is offering himself as that interpreter. In fact, the main point in his discourse, namely that God's purpose in allowing suffering is disciplinary rather than punitive, comes quite near to the position unfolded in Job 1/2, although what he says is only one component part of these fundamental chapters' statement, not the whole (although it is difficult in reading between the lines in 23, in his claim to be such an interpreter, to avoid the suspicion that there is a certain pompousness about his attitude!).

But there is a deeper lesson also, for what is said in these verses (23ff) is the kind of thing that happens on a grand scale in the work of redemption, for the New Testament proclaims a Mediator, one among a thousand indeed. In this light the words in 24 afford a wonderful picture of the miracle of saving grace. This is the language our Lord Himself speaks. He looks up into the face of the Father and says of the sinner, sick and helpless and ready to die, 'Deliver him from going down into the pit: I have found a ransom,' and with that mighty word of redemption salvation becomes a reality. In the verses that follow (25-28) the resultant blessing and joy of salvation are unfolded in an indescribably moving way, and one readily thinks of the joy that came to the prodigal son when he returned to his father's house: how well suited these words would be to him and on his lips! And surely, in view of the marked messianic character of so much we have already seen in the book of Job, this can hardly be an arbitrary application of Elihu's words!

90) 34:1-37

In an earlier Note (see Note on 32:1-22) it was suggested that the words in 2 here, 'Note ye wise men', may indicate that Elihu is addressing Job's other three friends at this point, and this is certainly a possible interpretation. Although, in fact (as some commentators maintain), he may simply be calling on all wise men to consider what he is saying so that they might see that he is right - and if this be so it is surely further evidence of Elihu's rather pompous approach. Either way, however, we must try to grasp what is being said, because even a pompous man can speak profound truth and have something to say (this is why pompous people are often very irritating!). Elihu highlights a twofold complaint that Job has been making: in 5, the plaint, 'I am righteous, and God hath taken away my judgement (denies me justice', NIV)'; and in 9, 'it profits a man nothing when he tries to please God'. The first of these complaints Elihu deals with from 12 almost to the end of the chapter, while the second is taken up in chapter 35. This is a convenient and useful way of studying these two chapters. In effect, it is as if Elihu were saying to Job, 'I may not be able to understand why God is allowing you to suffer, other than that it is disciplinary, but my interest in your suffering is how you are reacting to it, in a spirit of rebellion. Your sin is not this secret thing that these three friends of yours have been insinuating must be in your deepest heart; rather it is your angry reaction to what you are passing through. It is because of this that you are incurring the anger of God'. It is clear that this is a much more penetrating and persuasive approach than that of the other three - not at all the whole truth, indeed, but certainly coming much closer to what is unfolded in the first two chapters of the book.

91) 34:1-37

Since Elihu's words come much nearer to the truth than any of the other friends, it is not surprising that they echo from time to time Job's own wonderful insights, as for example, 'when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold' (23:10) - this is the disciplinary idea that Elihu emphasises. But - and it is as if Elihu goes on to say this - 'If this is the case, Job, then you cannot say that God does not give account of any of His matters; He is speaking to those who have ears to hear'. This is an important lesson for us to learn. Often we hear people say, 'I do not know what I have done to suffer this'. God, however, is speaking in the suffering, and we should learn to listen to what He is saying. And it is not a question of finding out what we have done, necessarily - although that is always a possibility - but of finding out why God is allowing it. We may not know at the time - and indeed we may never know - what particular discipline God is laying upon us in any particular spell of affliction, but it is enough for us to know and to recognise that the all-wise hand of God is at work, as the hand of the potter fashions the clay, and we may trust Him. As the hymn says, 'My Father's hand will never cause His child a needless tear'. And even if the implication in these words is that some tears are needful, is it not true to say that we learn many deep lessons in the crucible that we could never learn outside it?

92) 34:1-37

One point that has been made – and with some justification - about Elihu's dealing with Job's first plaint (5) in 12ff is that he simply asserts that God does not do unrighteous things - but says nothing by way of demonstrating the truth of what he is saying. It is true, indeed, that God does not do unrighteous things, but can there not be some circumstances in which we might feel - and surely, Job's circumstances at that particular time were such! - that if only Elihu could have said something persuasively convincing here to demonstrate to the suffering patriarch that the Judge of all the earth cannot do wrong, it might have helped him to bear his sufferings and soldier on, trusting Him in the dark. Perhaps in his own way he is trying to give Job some indication why it is impossible for God to do anything but right, in what he goes on to say in 12ff, in words which begin by emphasising the majesty and sovereignty of God - words which remind us of the great hymn 'O worship the King, all glorious above....' It has been suggested that what lies behind 13-15 is this idea: that if God withdrew His Spirit from mankind, all flesh would perish together, and the whole created order would disintegrate, the implication being: 'If it is as easy as that for God, Job, you can hardly believe, as you have been saying, that He is trying His hardest to destroy you, if all He needs to do is to take back His Spirit from you - it would hardly be but the work of a moment, and it would hardly stretch Him so to do. It should be clear, then that whatever He is doing with you, He cannot intend destroying you. The fact that He is maintaining you in existence, when He could so easily end your life must mean that the suffering has a different meaning and significance'. Does that help you, Job?

93) 34:1-37

It is not always easy to follow Elihu's meaning, and different constructions have been placed on the latter part of the chapter. Some think that he is simply falling into the same mould as the other friends, in castigating Job for his rebellious spirit; and in 29-33 it might seem as if this were so. But it may be doubted whether this is really so, in view of the more perceptive statements he has been making, distancing himself from the others. The suggestion has been made that the Apostle John may have been thinking of the words in 29, which the RSV renders, 'When He is quiet, who can condemn?', when he made the wonderful statement, 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things' (1 John 3:20) - a blessed and precious word for all who tend to have sensitive consciences that are tormented by the power of the evil one, as Job surely was at that time. Another New Testament passage that is relevant here is Hebrews 12: 5-15, which seems to be very close to the viewpoint Elihu is expressing in this chapter. Of course, it is the spirit in which we say such words that is important, and Elihu was not free from a pompous and insensitive attitude, as 33ff unfortunately indicate. But if 31 may be taken simply as a suggestion from Elihu (see NIV rendering, 'Suppose a man says to God...'), then what 32 goes on to say must be about the best counsel we have found in the book: 'That which I see not teach Thou me', for there are always areas in our experience, especially when we are passing through the fires of God's disciplines, where we are not clear-sighted enough to understand what is happening, and this is therefore a relevant and advisable prayer to be on our lips. That is to put the best kind of construction on Elihu's words, and we readily concede that it is only too possible to speak words wise in themselves with a sharpness and acerbity which all but nullify the wisdom they contain. How careful we must be, and how great the need to have the mind and compassion of Christ, in what we say, especially to those who suffer!

94) 35:1-16

Elihu now takes up Job's second complaint (cf 34:9), 'It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God'. Elihu begins by saying that he will answer Job and his companions (i.e. the other 'comforters'). There seems to be a reference in what he says in 3ff to an earlier statement by Eliphaz in 22:2ff and it would seem that he is identifying Job with Eliphaz' sentiments. Whether or not this is the case (we think it probably is) it is certainly the case that, whether wittingly or unwittingly, he is identifying himself with Eliphaz's position in that earlier passage. He is in fact on very shaky ground here, and he affords a graphic - and frightening -example of how possible it is for a man with high and exalted ideas of the divine sovereignty and majesty and greatness to fail seriously into error in the inferences he draws from such a sublime theological position. For consider the conclusion he draws from what is undoubtedly a profound awareness of the greatness of God - 'If thou sinnest, what doest thou against Him? (6)...If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him? (7)'. In other words, He is aloofly indifferent to the doings of mere mortals such as we are: our sins may hurt our fellows, and our righteousness may profit them, but God is above all such petty considerations. We will add only one word to demolish such an extraordinary notion, from the gospel record: 'The Lord turned and looked upon Peter' (Luke 22:61). Was it a look of aloof indifference to the denial that made Peter go out to weep bitterly? We should beware lest Elihu's attitude inadvertently affect our carefully held theological positions also: it is certainly not unknown today for impeccable orthodoxy (including the five points of Calvinism!) to be accompanied by a lack of the milk of human kindness and of the genial graces of compassion and even of good manners. Something seriously wrong there!

95) 35:1-16

The exact meaning of some of the verses in this chapter, especially from 9ff, is difficult to ascertain, even in modern translations, but these should be consulted and compared so as to bring as much light and understanding as possible. The theme seems to be, at least in part, the problem of unanswered prayer, with the cries of the oppressed finding no answer or redress. Elihu's answer is, in effect, that it is not God Who is at fault, but man, who even in his extremity does not cry out for God (10). It is His deliverance they want, not God Himself. How easy it is to use God as a kind of insurance policy against misfortune. If this, in fact, is what Elihu is saying to Job it is singularly inept of him to say it to one whose godliness has been borne witness to so unmistakably throughout the book. But, aside from the context in 10, the statement that 'God giveth songs in the night' is a very wonderful one, for it bears witness to the truth that God can indeed transform the dark night of suffering and sorrow. And surely we have seen again and again throughout the book gleams of light breaking into Job's darkness, bearing witness to the truth of the Psalmist's words, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning' (Ps 30:5). Often, indeed, He is seeking, in suffering and sorrow, to teach us more about Himself - as the only way He can teach us. This is Elihu's great thought, the teaching God gives in and through suffering and chastening. And although his words at the end of the chapter are spoken abrasively and chidingly (14-16) they in fact simply echo the insights that Job has himself received in the darkness (23:12). Did Elihu really think, as he says in 15, that Job 'knoweth it not'? Elihu certainly goes down in our estimation in this chapter!

96) 36:1-33

It has been suggested that what Elihu does in this chapter is to point out that Job's trial has been lengthened and prolonged because he has not yet learned the lesson it was meant to teach. Once again, we see a mixture of truth and error in this position. It is, of course, sometimes true that this happens; but it is not always true, and some of the most intractable and anguished of trials and afflictions are such simply because they cannot be explained in this way. It is altogether too simplistic to apply partial insights to human distress and agony as if they were absolutely and invariably true in every case. It is all too easy for the Elihu's of this world to arrogate to themselves an infallibility that properly belongs to God alone. Elihu prefaces these remarks (1-4) with a somewhat pretentious introduction that serves to colour in considerable measure what he proceeds to say in 5ff. George Philip, in his commentary on Job, says: 'It is manifest that he is carried away by a sense of his own impressiveness. He takes to himself the place of God's spokesman, and this self-appointed counsellor of tried and proven saints claims for himself a vast range of knowledge. It is not very clear in v 4 whom Elihu refers to as being 'perfect in knowledge'. It looks very much as if he means himself, and he would not be the first person to act upon such a confused notion.'

97) 36:1-33

Elihu's rather pompous and pretentious attitude in 1-4 tends to detract somewhat from our appreciation of the statement in 5ff, a passage which contains great and thrilling truths which Job would surely in other circumstances have rejoiced in, but we may well question whether an approach more marked by the milk of human kindness and compassion for Job in his distress might have been more appropriate at this point. All the same, taken by themselves, the verses contain many impressive and perceptive spiritual insights. It will help to compare the AV with the modern translations, particularly the RSV and NIV, for the latter sometimes give particular insights into what is being said which are not readily evident in the AV. In 7, for example, it is taken by one commentator as a reference to Israelite history 'Kings are placed on the throne, but they exalt themselves, and God binds them in fetters because of their sins, and they are tied with the cords of affliction. Then he reveals to them their work.' There are in fact many points in the Old Testament story of which we could say that this is true. Elihu's general thesis therefore is very similar to the apostolic emphasis in Hebrews 12:11ff, especially in the concept of the 'afterwards' that these New Testament verses underline. We should note particularly the repeated emphasis on the 'opening of the ear(s)' in 10 and 15. Elihu may well be saying that it is the affliction itself that constitutes God's word to men, and enables them to hear it. And this is what he covets for job.

98) 36:1-33

What was said at the end of the previous Note has, of course, a darker alternative: obedience and response lead to deepening understanding of the ways of God, but 12-14 paint a very solemn picture indeed. It is possible to resist God's dealings when He takes men in hand this way, and when they do there comes a time when souls become insensitive to spiritual influence and, as 14 says, 'they die in youth', that is, spiritually, and their life ends in - not shame, as the RSV has it, but in adolescence - that is, they never get out of the bit spiritually but become stuck, in arrested development, for twenty, thirty, forty years. There are those in our churches today who all these years ago heard the voice of God in the Word of the gospel, and they resisted it so much that their souls died in them and they have stagnated, spiritually moribund, and become castaways (1 Cor 9:27). In 16 Elihu rises almost to the heights of New Testament paradox in the marvellous description of the results that come from true understanding of a response to affliction - something that became a blessed reality for Job in the end (42:12ff) - but he seems to allow himself to be carried away in 17ff, as once again the note of asperity and even harshness in what he says about job becomes once more evident, with an accusatory attitude (e.g. 17b,18) which must have proved crushing to Job in his affliction. And this, surely, is more akin to the work of the 'accuser of the brethren' than of the good and gracious Spirit of God. If it were asked how truth and error should be so present in the words of Elihu, we need only recall the story of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, where our Lord Himself called him blessed of the Father, and in almost the next breath, said of him, 'get thee behind Me, Satan'. Solemn thought, indeed!

99) 37:1-24

Some commentators think that at this point, as Elihu continues to address Job, a thunderstorm is building up on the horizon, with ominous rumblings all around, as the words in 2-4 might seem to indicate. In view of the fact that the next chapter tells us that the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind (38:1) this seems very likely, and Elihu makes full use of the natural phenomenon to continue his excursus on the greatness and majesty of God in creation. One thinks readily enough of the glorious theophany in Psalm 18:7ff, which has marked similarities to the language used here. The meaning in 7 appears to be that when storms rage, man cannot get out of his house and the beasts of the field huddle for shelter. The power of God in the storms of nature is wondrously disruptive! In 14-24 the words are so clear that they scarcely need comment. What Elihu is doing is to exalt the God of creation in such a way, and saying that God is so great and full of majesty that that the very thought of mere man questioning His ways is presumptuous. 'It is not for us, job, to question the ways of God', he says, in effect. From one point of view, how tremendously true this is! And when we have a right perception of His majesty and greatness, we will find ourselves less and less presuming to question what He does with us. It is the kind of attitude expressed in Psalm 8, 'When I consider thy heavens, the work of Thy hands....what is man that Thou art mindful of him?' But there is another thought also here - a very beautiful and comforting one, and it is this: God calls and ordains the storms, and they obey His will - fire, hail, cloud, wind and snow, all are in His command (Ps 148). And the implication is that if He has such complete control of such mighty forces, is it too much for us to believe that He can also manage our lives, storm-tossed though they may be? If even the mighty tempests are in the hollow of His hand, is it too much for us to believe that when our little boat is rocked alarmingly in the sea of life, He is nevertheless still in control? Whether or not this was in Elihu's mind, there is little doubt that his words bear this clear implication!

100)37:1-24

Further to what was said at the end the previous Note, we may recall the story of the old lady who lived alone, and who experienced an earthquake tremor in the district in which she lived. When asked by friends whether she was very afraid, she replied, 'No, I was rather thrilled at the thought that I had a God Who could shake the world like that'. It is something to be able to say that in a time of earthquake, is it not? One further comment will suffice in this chapter before we begin the final movement of the book: in 16 Elihu uses a remarkable phrase in his question to Job: after the impressive statement in 14, 'Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God', he asks, 'Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds?' This is a truly remarkable utterance! The fact is, when the clouds come on in our lives, we tend to think there is very little balance in them at all, and that they are all weighted against us. But God has these clouds delicately balanced, with finer precision than a watchmaker balances the movement of a delicate instrument. God balances the clouds - what a wonderful truth this is! Is not such a God One whom we can trust? The hymn, already quoted, says, 'My father's hand will never cause His child a needless tear'. God balances the clouds, they are poised in perfect precision for our good. What comfort and encouragement for hard-pressed souls there is in this! Surely it behoves us in face of such a God to be humbly submissive and humbly quiet before Him. To learn that He is a God Who balances the clouds is to learn something that brings a new confidence and a new hope to our hearts.

101)38:1-41

We come in this chapter to the final section of the book, and to the Lord's reply to Job. This occupies four chapters (36-41), with a brief interjection by Job in 40:3-5, while the final chapter (42) forms the epilogue to the whole book. To read this chapter and the next at one sitting is something to be encouraged, for this will give some sense of the overwhelming nature of God's response to the patriarch's anguished cries and questionings. There is so much for us to learn here that time must be spent patiently to unfold all the lessons the chapters contain. The first lesson concerns what is said in 1. We are told that the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind or storm. It was suggested in the Notes on the previous chapter that a storm had built up and that Elihu had made use of it as a background to what he was saying to the patriarch. And now the Lord answered Job out of the storm, and the magnificence and grandeur of the outburst of natural power becomes, as it were, the voice of God to him. Other commentators think, however, that the natural storm should not be pressed overmuch, and that it should be 'spiritualistic' to indicate the whirlwind and maelstrom of suffering and tragedy that had caught Job up in its intensity, the storm that has been blowing through all the previous chapters. It may be that what we are meant to take from this verse is that the storm of Job's trouble eventually crystallised into a word from God. At all events, God speaks to the patriarch in no uncertain way, and the revelation He gives of Himself is simply overwhelming. This is the real thing, and no one is left in any doubt about it.

102)38:1-41

The thought of Job meeting with God in the storm and the whirlwind brings to mind the passage in Exodus 20 we are told that Moses went up into the mount and 'drew near unto the thick darkness where God was'. The parallel is a good one: here Job meets God in the thick darkness. Here is a comment on that passage, by Henry Frost, one-time leader in the old C.I.M. and a man of God indeed:

'There had been times when Jehovah had revealed himself to his servant in the light, as at the burning bush. But now He was only to be found in the 'thick darkness'. And as between the two experiences, no doubt Moses preferred the revelation of God in the light. Darkness, and especially thick darkness, is not inviting, for it is cheerless, oppressive, terrorizing. But Moses knew that it was, just then, where God was to be found, and whatever it might imply, he must reach Him. So he chose the darkness. St. Augustine used to address God as the One 'most hidden, yet most manifest'. Yes, it is often in the deepest gloom that God is most easily discovered, and it is ever in the deepest darkness that he is most clearly discerned as the God of Light. So then, friend, the next time you see a great, black, forbidding cloud, do not shrink from it, but make for it, and never stop until you reach the centre of it. For it will be there that you will find God – and glory!' That is powerful writing indeed, and is surely a word for those who are passing through dark days.

103)38:1-41

God's first word is a question: 'Who is this that darkens counsel without knowledge?' Some commentators suggest that this is a reference to Elihu, and that he is thus summarily dismissed from the scene, along with the other three 'comforters', and 'cut down to size'. Whether this be so or not, it seems clear that it is to Job that God speaks in what follows, and it may well be that Elihu and the others are simply ignored, and that His exclusive concern is with the patriarch. After all, it does say in 1 that 'The Lord answered Job....' Can we apply it to Job, then? Well, yes, if we take the words to imply that in insisting that there has been neither rhyme nor reason in what he has been passing through, Job has not understood that right from the outset there has been both counsel and purpose in all his bitter trial, indeed a divine purpose being outworked (we, the readers, have been given an insight into this purpose in the opening chapters of the book). Two further words, still by way of introduction to the Lord's word to Job, must be said. The first is this: whatever else might reasonably have been expected at the end of the book, what follows in these verses can hardly have been. For we must surely have expected a definitive answer to agonising questions and problems that have riven the patriarch's heart; but the extraordinary thing is that not one of Job's questions are even touched upon. There is nothing to indicate whether his three friends, or Elihu, were right or wrong in what they had adjudged to be the answer to Job's situation; there is no word about suffering or the meaning of suffering, whether it be punishment for sin, or disciplinary, or for any other reason. This has caused some commentators to doubt whether these chapters are genuine. But this is simply to miss the point: the reason why no answers are given to Job's questions is that answers cannot be given to them. There are some mysteries that cannot be understood and, ultimately, suffering is one of these. One can only go so far. But when the last word that can be spoken has been spoken, mystery still remains. And therefore God's reply to Job is of a very different kind, in the profound, even overwhelming revelation of His greatness and glory. God answered Job, not his questions. And it is very important that we see the distinction between these two statements. We shall continue this in the next Note.

104)38:1-41

To continue what was said in the previous Note, by the use of a simple illustration. Let us suppose we have passed through a very dark and perplexing time of darkness, in which we have felt utterly alone, with no light at the end of the tunnel. We have reached the extremity of endurance, when suddenly our best friend appears on the scene. In an intangible but unmistakable way, the whole situation seems now to be different. The problems have not been solved, no answers have been forthcoming, but now our friend is there, and comfort has come. Our questions have not been answered, but we have been answered, and our hearts are brought into peace. What needs to be understood is that, in distress or sorrow, even if all the 'Why's' that our minds have been asking were completely and satisfactorily answered, that would not bring comfort to our hearts - and that is what we need most of all! The great message here is that God came to Job, and revealed Himself to him in such a way that his heart was brought into peace.

The other introductory point relates to what is said in 3: 'Gird up thy loins like a man'. This also is very striking. One would have thought that what Job wanted was a word of encouragement and assurance, but instead God gives him this forthright challenge to square his shoulders and hold firm. Hard, we may think? Ah, yes, but there is infinite wisdom in God's dealings. One recalls how it was with Jeremiah, when in the depths of his agony he cried out to God, yearning for the divine comfort, God spoke to him in a similar way, warning that there was worse to come, and to brace himself: 'If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee....' (Jeremiah 12:5). The truth is, God is a better judge of what we are able to stand than we ourselves are, and He is strong enough to resist pity until His other purposes for us have done their gracious work in our lives. And we may trust Him here also, yes, must trust Him!

105)38:1-41

It is interesting to realise that right through this chapter, and the three that follow it, the theme is the revelation of God in nature; and the message that came home to Job was this: the realisation that God is so mighty, majestic and all-powerful means that this was a God Who was able to control and direct our puny lives. The point about the questions throughout the chapter, and indeed in the next chapter also, is that if there are mysteries in nature that men cannot understand, how much more are the mysteries of divine providence and grace likely to perplex us. Job was conscious of a raging sea, and his feeling was that it knew no authority, but was sweeping over him, engulfing him. Then came this revelation, that the God of seas and oceans is the God Who says, 'Thus far and no further' (this is precisely what God said to Satan in ch 2). And when Job got this message, his heart subsided into peace - as if to say, This is a terrible raging sea that is engulfing me, but this God Who is pressing in on me, is the God of that sea, and therefore it is in His hand; His ordered government of His creation shows that He can well control my life, and what is more, the order bespeaks a God Who cares. Indeed, the God Who brings rain on the wilderness where no man is, to satisfy the desolate and waste ground - something that no farmer would waste time in doing - is surely a certain kind of God, and - Job says to himself, so to speak, will not such a God care for me?

106)39:1-30

The general theme of God's power and sovereignty in nature and creation is continued in this chapter, and little is needed by way of additional comment on what is said. It is the implications of this approach that are so significant and important. We have already pointed out that God does not answer any of Job's questions, but rather reveals Himself to the patriarch. The truth of the matter is, they are the kind of problems and questions for which there is no human answer; but when God comes and reveals Himself, the intolerableness is lifted and removed, and we are enabled to live with them, in the acceptance of the fact that 'the secret things belong to the Lord our God'. This is highly important in pastoral and personal work, and it explains why someone who comes to comfort us in time of tragedy can bring a wonderful message from God without saying a single word. We must be very wary of uttering trite, glib phrases, the stock-in-trade of many Christians, for we are on holy ground in the presence of grief or suffering or sorrow. Trite phrases cannot answer a grief-stricken heart; only God can. And whatever we say must somehow mediate God to the souls of the suffering and the sorrowing. This is the great need. And this is what happened to Job; and the way it happened was for God simply to draw aside the veil and let Job see how unutterably great He was. We shall say more of this in the next Note.

107)39:1-30

What was said in the last Note in relation to pastoral and personal work is just as relevant, and with the same practical implications, in our regular gatherings for worship. No one may know how many different kinds of problems, heart-aches or perplexities are represented in a congregation on any particular Sunday; and doubtless many people come longing that God will speak a specific word to their need. Sometimes God does that, and it is very wonderful when He does. But even when He does not speak a specific word, this does not mean that He does not care. Rather, the important thing is this, that in the Scriptures, in the reading and preaching of the Word, and in the worship of His Name, He reveals Himself to the perplexed and the heart-broken, and they can be answered in such a way that they go out and view their problem with a new eye; and if they are of the kind for which there is no human answer, they are taught of God to live with them. This is why it is so tremendously important that there should be a sense of the presence of God in worship. Given that, hearts will be blessed and lives will be uplifted. This is why it is immensely heartening to see God's people, prior to the beginning of a service, bowing in prayer, beseeching that presence, wooing Him by their prayers into the midst. The words with which we generally begin our service, 'Let us worship God' is not an empty and meaningless formality, to be discarded somewhat contemptuously by the advocates of a freer, more modern approach. The words should mean just what they say. C.S. Lewis is so right when he says that 'It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men'.

108)40:1-24

God's revelation of Himself continues in this and the next chapter, with a very brief interjection from Job. In 4, 5 he says 'I am vile' ('unworthy', NIV, 'of small account', RSV), as if to say 'What right have I to have made the protestations that have escaped my lips?' The word 'vile' in the AV does not have a moral connotation, and the RSV conveys the sense more accurately. It is the same kind of expression as Paul used when he spoke of himself and his status as a believer: in one argument with his detractors he maintained that he was 'not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles' (2 Corinthians 11:5) - and of course this was perfectly true; but in speaking of himself in relation to the majesty of God he said that he was 'less than the least of all saints' (Ephesians 3:8); and it is in this sense that Job says, 'Behold I am of small account'. The French commentator, Dhorme, makes this comment: 'the only reproach which Job feels on his conscience is that of having spoken lightly about things which he did not understand. The words of Jehovah have no other aim but to show how vain and futile it is to presume to speak about the nature of God and His works. God alone knows these marvels, and He alone can give voice to them.' Here, and in the next chapter (41), God asks Job, in gentle irony, to give evidence of his power, his glory, his anger, his mastery over nature, and thus prove that he is capable of doing without God (7-14). It is as if He had said, 'If you can do that, Job, then perhaps I will acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you the victory'. If in fact Job could do this, he would be in a position to pass judgment on God's ordering of his life, but only then. Once again it is the invitation to view the divine power and Godhead in the things He has made: if Job is incapable of exercising sway over the material order of creation, represented by the various creatures mentioned in these verses, how much less could he hope to exert sway over the moral order?

109)41:1-34

We have already suggested that we will get most out of the four chapters (38-41) which record the Lord's reply to Job by reading them altogether. The cumulative effect of what is said was clearly overwhelming for Job. All the same, there is a difference in emphasis, in that in 38, 39 Job is confronted with things that he does not, and cannot, know ('the secret things belong unto the Lord our God'), convincing him of his littleness and insignificance; whereas in 40, 41, he is convinced of his lack of power, with the same conviction about his insignificance - the difference between 'Knowest thou?' and 'Canst thou....?' 'Leviathan', that features in this chapter, is held by commentators to be the crocodile or some similar water animal, but may well refer to a now extinct form of monster. What is said of it is designed to emphasise man's very limited power in face of such brute strength and fierceness. Again, we see the divine irony playing gently through the chapter, as if to underline Job's human limitations even in relation to the natural order, and by implication much more so in the realm of Divine Providence. How effective this was in subduing Job will be seen in his response in 42:1-6. It is important, however, for us to realise that in all this God is at no point challenging Job's assertion of his integrity, nor does he chide him for so doing. That is not the point at issue, as far as God is concerned, for He is simply saying, 'There are mysteries too high for you to understand, look to Me, and let all your questionings and strivings cease'.

110)41:1-34

In relation to the final words of the previous Note, here is a comment from the French commentator, Dhorme: 'Why insist that the speeches of Jehovah should give the final solution? We already possess the solution in part in the Prologue which has shown us that it was a test which God imposed on the righteous man, in order to counter the allegations of Satan. This premise is completed by the Epilogue. The test is only temporary, it must be followed by an increase, a redoubling of good fortune. Of course, that is what happened. And God blessed Job more than at the first. But this temporary test is a mystery for him, because its origin is in the divine counsel which is beyond our comprehension. For this reason, the discussion between Job and his friends is vain, and that is what the Lord proposes to make Job understand here. Job was right to insist that the arguments put forward by his friends were of little value, but he was wrong to discuss a mystery beyond his knowledge - this is the point. And that is why God does not answer any of his questions'. It is as if He were saying, 'Job, it is not for you to know the mysteries - you are only a man, I am God; the mysteries are Mine; be content that they should remain mysteries; that will keep you in your place'. This is a most salutary word, because there is something in us all that is so utterly determined to know all the answers; and in our sinful arrogance, we will go so far as to say, Unless God gives me all the answers, I will not believe in Him or trust in Him.' Well might God say to us 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?'

111)41:1-34

The comment by Dhorme included in the previous Note concludes with a quotation from a poem by Victor Hugo, the gist of which runs something like this: 'In Your skies, beyond the sphere of the clouds, in the deep of that immobile and dormant blue, perhaps You are doing unknown things, in which the suffering and pain of man enters as but one element'. This is a wise and perceptive observation. Perhaps in these mysterious profundities where God dwells, He is doing unknown things in which the agonies of man constitute merely one factor. This puts things in their proper perspective, does it not? Someone has pointed out that one of the hazards for Job in all he suffered - and this of course is one of the hazards in all our woes - is that he became very preoccupied with himself. And this is true, although we need not think of it in an unworthy or derogatory way. But to see from the divine perspective is to see in a proper perspective, for then we realise that the travail of our little world is but one element in a vastness that is incomprehensible and inconceivable to us, and that that vastness is controlled in its minutest detail by the hand of God. Our little world? - It is just a speck in the vastness of the universe, our little personal world with its worries and agonies - and yet God controls every one of these specks in detail. This should give us great encouragement and assurance. Job was saying, My way is hid from the Almighty - and God is saying, How could you and your ways be hid from Me? Your name is written on the palms of My hands. Hid? Why, the darkness and the light are both alike to Me! 'If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' Your heavenly Father knoweth....'

112)42:1-6

These verses, giving Job's response to God's revelation of Himself, round off the main message of the book of Job (what follows in 42:7-17 forms the Epilogue). The confession that he makes is impressive and comprehensive. The modern renderings of 2 are more helpful than the AV 'I know that Thou canst do all things and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted' (RSV and, substantially, NIV). This is the great confession, and when a man comes to this, he has entered into peace. In retrospect, we see that Job's fear throughout the long argument in the book was that God's purposes for his life had been thwarted, that he had lost grip of his life, and that his way was hid from the Almighty. We see, then, what a revelation of God can do - a revelation that did not answer a single question, but nevertheless brought the patriarch to the conviction that no purpose of God can ever be thwarted. This is infinitely more important than getting one's questions answered about the mysteries of life and why it should have happened. What a mighty word is this, to know that God has a purpose for one's life which nothing can thwart, however much to the contrary it might seem, many a day! In 3, Job quotes the Lord's words to him in 38:2, and it seems as if he were saying, 'You said to me, Lord, 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?' I am that man. Now Lord, I confess it freely, and realise now how utterly inappropriate my complaints have been. I have been so much out of my depth.' Well, it is surely a measure of the bigness of the man that he should have made such an unreserved confession. The words 'I abhor myself' in 6 are said by one commentator to mean 'I make myself disappear' - it is the kind of phrase we sometimes use when we say, 'I just wanted the ground to open and swallow me up'. We understand the feeling, only too well!

113)42:1-6

What Job says in 5 is worthy of careful consideration. Job was a man of God, as the opening chapters of the book testify, and was one of His choice saints, one who loved God and walked with Him; but the revelation of God that the storm of trial and anguish brought him clearly a new dimension to his experience that could not well be described otherwise than by what he says in these words 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee'. There are scriptural parallels to this: Moses knew and worshipped God; but when God manifested Himself in the strange and marvellous way at the Burning Bush a new dimension entered his experience. Isaiah knew God: he was a prophet of the Most High; but in the year that King Uzziah died, he saw the Lord; and this brought a new dimension to his experience. The Apostle John walked with the Saviour, and knew Him as the risen, exalted, unseen, victorious Lord; but when the vision of His majesty broke upon him on the Isle of Pathos, and he fell at His feet as one dead, that also was something different. This 'deeper dimension' - witnessed to in the Apostle Paul's word also in 2 Corinthians 12:1ff - is something that has happened again and again in the experience of God's people, particularly in times of unusual spiritual awakening and power, as spiritual biography bears abundant testimony. It is not that it is an 'experience' that believers should covet (for the coveting itself has proved a costly snare to many) but rather it is something that overtakes us in the context of God's dealings with us - often in the crucible of pain and suffering, and seldom without this. This is how it was with Job. We can hardly suppose it would be otherwise with us. There is no crown without a cross.

114)42:7-17

We come in these verses to the Epilogue. In this, the Lord addresses Himself to Eliphaz and his two friends, Bildad and Zophar, expressing His displeasure at them because they had not spoken about Him what was right. We wonder whether they had been in attendance when God revealed Himself to the patriarch, and what their thoughts must have been when He turned His attention to them. It is salutary for us to realise that God takes note of the hard and unfeeling things we say to others! Did our Lord have this in mind when He said 'By your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned'? Nor was there any easy way back for them, for they had to go to the man they had wronged to put things right with him. And they were accepted because of Job's prayers (8, 10)! We should also note the nature of the language used in 9 - it is priestly language. If we compare the Prologue with the Epilogue, it will be seen that in 1:5 Job exercised a priestly function for his family - this was the ancient prerogative and privilege of the head of the household. But the interesting and significant thing is that here, after his affliction, Job's priestly function extended beyond his family to His friends also. This is no accident: always, there is an accession of power and authority when trial and testing are successfully sustained. Having passed through the fire, Job came forth more fully equipped. We may recall his earlier words, 'When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold'. Trial, properly reacted to and accepted in the name of the Lord, not only has a purifying, but also an empowering, effect. Luke records of our Lord that when He went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil He was filled with the Spirit; when He came forth victorious, He returned into the coasts of Judaea in the power of the Spirit - surely a significant change of terminology!

115)42:7-17

The final picture of Job is of a man who has passed from the sphere of his own sorrows to the work of intercession for his friends, and 'it was through the very act of this self-oblivion', as Ellicott puts it, 'that his own deliverance was brought about' - the final proof, as it were, that the test imposed at the beginning had been passed with flying colours. His willingness to pray for those who had despitefully used him displays a Christ-like spirit. And do not let us forget what we were told in the Prologue: the point of the exercise - this long and terrible trial - was simply this: the defeat of Satan. The soul of Job was the battlefield between God and Satan, and at the end of the bitter conflict, Job is on his knees praying for his friends. And God says, 'Look at that praying man, Satan: the victory is Mine!' One thinks of Paul's great words in Ephesians 6:13: 'Able to withstand in the evil day - and having done all, to stand'!

The remaining verses, which describe Job's latter end as being better far than his beginning, remind us of the Apostle James's comment, 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (5:11). How proud God must have been of him, when all was over!

116)42:7-17

As a final postscript to our study of this wonderful book, here are two comments; the first from the French commentator Dhorme: 'The trial of Job began when God permitted it, and ends when God so determines. It was not the consequence of sin, and it is not conversion which causes it to cease. God alone knows the motives of His own decrees. Man cannot subject them to the demands of human logic or morals. He can but adore in silence the mystery of the divine government of the world. The sovereign judge will exercise His justice. But when and how? Those who have tried to explain it in all too mechanical a way have been on the wrong track. God Himself suggests that they be more circumspect in the face of problems whose ultimate solution will be truly evidenced only in the light of final revelation.'

The second comment is from Delitzsch: 'The comfort which this theologically and artistically incomparable book presents to us is substantially none other than that of the New Testament. For the final consolation of every sufferer is not dependent upon the working of good genii in the heavens, but has its seat in God's love, without which even heaven would become a very hell. Therefore the book of Job is also a book of consolation for the New Testament church. From it we learn that we have not only to fight with flesh and blood, but with the prince of this world, and to accomplish our part in the conquest of evil, to which, from Genesis 3:15 onwards, the history of the world tends; that faith and avenging justice are absolutely distinct opposites; that the right kind of faith clings to divine love in the midst of the feeling of wrath; that the incomprehensible ways of God always lead to a glorious issue; and that the suffering of the present time is far outweighed by the future glory - a glory not always revealed in this life and visibly future, but the final glory above. The nature of faith, the mystery of the cross, the right practice of the care of souls, - this, and much besides, the church learns from this book, the whole teaching of which can never be thoroughly learned and completely exhausted.'