



Good News
Bible Reading Program

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— April 2005 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1-2 April	Job's summary discourse: He was blessed and respected but is now mocked and devastated	Job 29–30
3-4 April	Job's summary discourse concludes: He is innocent	Job 31:1–32:1
5-6 April	Elihu's first speech: Suffering is to teach and save men	Job 32:2–33:33
7-8 April	Elihu's second and third speeches: Defends God's justice	Job 34–35
9-10 April	Elihu's fourth speech: Further defense of God and proclamation of the Creator's vast power and wisdom	Job 36–37
11-12 April	God's first discourse: He rules and tends the universe	Job 38:1-38
13-14 April	God's first discourse continued: He rules and tends the animal world; First discourse concludes: Will Job correct God?; Job's first response to God: He has no answer	Job 38:39–40:5
15-16 April	God's second discourse: Does Job think he can do a better job of being God?; Behemoth and Leviathan	Job 40:6–41:34
17-18 April	Job repents and is restored and blessed	Job 42
19-30 April	PREPARATION FOR AND OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER AND THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD	Personal study

©2005 United Church of God, *an International Association*

Highlights to Think About From This Month's Reading**Gone Are the Good Old Days (Job 29–30)****April 1-2**

Job continues his speech in chapter 29, longing for the “good old days” when it was clear that God was with him—when things were going well and people highly respected him. In verse 2 we see again that Job has been suffering his present condition for a number of months (compare 7:3).

Chapter 29 shows that Job was a ruler. We earlier saw that he wore a crown (19:9). Now we learn more about his role. He sat as judge (29:7-17), “as chief” and “as a king in the army” (verse 25). The public square adjoining the city gate (verse 7) was the center of town government and commerce. When Job took his seat here, everyone demonstrated great respect for his position. Young men scattered—as it was inappropriate for them to be prominent before him—and the city elders all stood up (verse 8). Princes and nobles demonstrated their respect for him by remaining silent (verses 9-10)—presumably until invited to speak.

Job says the people appreciated his rule (verse 11) because he was a righteous and just ruler who stood up for the little guy—who rescued the vulnerable and helpless from those who sought to take advantage of them or cause them harm (verses 12-17). The citizens valued his counsel (verses 21-23). Some have translated verse 24 as saying, “I laughed at them when they had no confidence [in a kindly, encouraging way perhaps], and the light of my countenance they did not cast down” (see *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 24). Others see the word translated here as laughed or mocked as meaning smiled (see the NIV for example). Yet the same word occurs just two verses later in 30:1, where it clearly means laugh or mock.

Regarding verse 25, *Expositor's* states: “The last line of this verse [‘as one who comforts mourners’] is awkward [in context] as currently translated, but there is no need to drop the line as NEB [the New English Bible] does nor to emend the text. Not a single consonant or word needs to be changed. Only a change in the vowels of the last two words creates the line...‘as I conducted them they were led’” (footnote on verse 25). Recall that in the original Hebrew, there were no vowels, only consonants.

Chapter 30 snaps back to the grim here and now. Rather than respect, Job now receives contempt even from those viewed as the lowlife of that society, the sons of outcast ruffians (verses 1-11). “To demonstrate the unfairness of God Job takes each of the themes he introduced in chap. 29 and contrasts his past and present state. Now [in chapter 30] Job is mocked by young and old (vv. 1-8) and verbally attacked (vv. 9-15). Now there is no blessing from God, but only suffering (vv. 16-17) and affliction (vv. 18-19), however urgently Job pleads (vv. 20-23). Perhaps worst of all, there is no compassion for one who constantly showed his compassion for others (vv. 24-31). No matter how great Job's suffering, there is no relief” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, note on chap. 30).

Job's statements in chapters 29–30 regarding his help and compassion for others in need rebuts Eliphaz's contrived charges against him in 22:5-9. We have no reason to doubt Job's description of himself, as it is well in keeping with God's description of him as blameless and upright. Job will have more to say on the issue of his treatment of others when he concludes this summary discourse in the next chapter.

Job Rests His Case (Job 31:1–32:1)**April 3-4**

Job brings his discourse to a close. He basically places himself under an oath of innocence, inviting God to impose curses on him if he can be proven guilty. Where the New King James Version in verse 35 has the words, “Here is my mark,” the NIV has “I sign now my defense.” In other words, with this chapter, Job is resting his case—waiting, as the same verse explains, for God to answer him. It is clear from the chapter that Job must be extremely confident of acquittal.

The Nelson Study Bible states that Job's oath “bears a general similarity to the oath of clearance, widely used in ancient Mesopotamia. In this oath, an accused person would swear his innocence at a trial. However, the ethical content of Job's confession, with its emphasis on inward motivation (see vv. 1, 2, 24, 25, 33, 34) and attitude (see vv. 1, 7, 9, 26, 27, 29, 30), is unique and unparalleled until Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5–7)” (note on Job 31:1-40).

Indeed, Job in the first verse mentions having made a covenant with his eyes not to look on a young woman. The typical Hebrew word for “look” is not used here. Rather, the word here, translated “think” in

the old KJV, is *biyn*, which conveys a sense of setting apart mentally (Strong, No. 995)—really focusing. The obvious implication is that this looking is with lustful intent. Job knew it was wrong to sexually desire a woman other than his wife, as Christ would later make clear (see Matthew 5:27). In an Old Testament setting, this seems rather remarkable and demonstrates that Job well understood the spirit of God's law. He also realized that violation of even the spirit of the law would ultimately bring punishment from God (Job 31:2-3). Of course, it is not wrong to merely look at a beautiful woman. Nor is it wrong to appreciate beauty. Most likely, Job's determination was that if the sight of a woman began to entice him to lust, then he would look away and think about other things. This is the approach all of us should take.

No doubt Job, in trying to understand what was happening to him, had for months been taking a sweeping personal inventory of his life—including his inward thoughts and motivations. And here we see his concluding declaration on the various aspects of his life.

Besides avoiding sexual lust, we see that Job was not a person of falsehood and deceit (verse 5). In verse 7 he says that his heart has not walked after his eyes, probably meaning here that he has not been motivated by "the lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16) in coveting things he sees. Job then remarks further on his commitment to not even entertain adulterous thoughts, much less act on them or to even allow himself to be in a compromising or tempting situation (Job 31:9).

In verses 13-15 Job addresses his treatment of his servants. Though a great ruler, Job's approach and reasoning here is again remarkable. He realized that it was important to properly esteem them or he would face divine retribution. Moreover, he saw that this esteem was utterly legitimate. Unlike other rulers of his day, Job would well agree with the words in the U.S. Declaration of Independence defying Old World aristocracy: "All men are created equal." Since God made all people, all people must be respected for that very fact—and they must all be treated according to the standards God has given for dealing with all other human beings.

In verses 16-23, Job comments on his treatment of the needy—the poor, widows and orphans. Again, as in the previous chapter, he rebuts Eliphaz's specific accusations against him in 22:5-9. In verses 24-25, Job rejects his friends' earlier implied accusations that he was motivated by greed and wealth or made proud by it (see 20:18-22; 22:23-26).

In verses 26-28 of chapter 31, Job maintains that he has not observed the sun and moon and been motivated to kiss his hand, referring to "the apparent ancient custom of kissing the hand as a prelude to the superstitious and idolatrous act of throwing a kiss to the heavenly bodies" (*Nelson*, note on verse 27).

In verse 29-30, we may again be surprised at Job's "New Testament approach" to dealing with enemies—not cursing them or gloating over their misfortunes. Yet we should realize that this approach is mentioned in the Old Testament as well as the New (compare Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 24:17-18; Matthew 5:43-47; Romans 12:17-21). Interestingly, Job understood these principles before Exodus and Proverbs were written. It is not improbable that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were familiar with these concepts.

In verses 31-32 we see that Job freely shared his food and home with his servants and all who came his way.

The translation of verse 33 is disputed since the word *adam* can mean the first man Adam or man in general. So Job could be saying either "If I have covered my transgressions as Adam did..." (compare NKJV) or "If I have covered my transgressions as men do..." (compare NIV). The latter seems more likely since the first man Adam was not motivated by fear of contempt from groups of people (compare verse 34). In any case, Job's point here is that he has not been hiding secret sins.

In verse 35, as already noted, Job essentially declares that he rests his case. Note again the NIV rendering, along with the end of the verse: "I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing." Job says he would then carry the list of accusations to God and answer every one, approaching God boldly as a prince would (verses 36-37).

Finally, Job remembers one more area in which he might be accused—his stewardship over the land God had entrusted to his care. Here, too, Job is confident of his innocence (verses 38-40). And with this statement, Job ends his words.

His three friends have no more to say either. They are convinced that Job is a hopeless cause because he remains righteous or innocent in his own eyes (32:1). Their mistake of course is that Job has accurately detailed the course of his life—he has not committed some great sin to bring his suffering as they believe.

There is a problem with Job's self-proclaimed innocence, though they are far from comprehending it, as we will see.

With all fallen silent, what will happen next? How will God answer?

A Wound-Up Young Bystander Speaks Out (Job 32:2–33:33)

April 5-6

We are now introduced to a new character in the narrative—Elihu. His words occupy six chapters and thus constitute one of the major addresses in the book. Some today accuse him of simply rehashing the arguments of Job's three friends. Yet we should note up front that when God later rebukes Job's three friends for their words, He has nothing to say about Elihu (42:7-9). This would seem to imply that Elihu's assessment was for the most part correct, as it does not seem likely that God would single out the three friends and ignore, if it were likewise wrong, the longest speech given just prior to His own address. It may even be that God, as Elihu believed, gave him his valuable insight to inject into the discussion before God arrived on the scene Himself.

This would not necessarily mean that everything Elihu said was correct or that he exemplified a perfect approach and attitude—his own affirmations notwithstanding. For consider that at the end of the book, God commends Job for speaking of Him what is right—and yet we know that Job made some mistakes in his remarks about God and that his attitude was not always the best (as understandable as that may be given his circumstances). Consider also that we sometimes regard sermons in the Church of God today as inspired without believing every word in them to be inspired. In any event, it does appear that God wanted Job to hear what Elihu had to say as part of God's answer to Job.

Elihu is introduced with details of his family background (32:2). Recall that Job and his three friends were identified by only their respective lands. It is likely that they were all well-known figures. Conversely, it appears that Elihu needs more to identify him because he is, comparatively, a young nobody. The fact that he has listened to the entire conversation thus far illustrates that there were probably a number of bystanders during the exchanges between Job and his friends—though this is the first real indication of it in the book.

Given what he has heard, Elihu is angry with Job's three friends for baselessly condemning Job (verse 3). He is also angry with *Job* because he has been justifying himself rather than God (verse 2)—that is, Job's primary concern has become one of defending his innocence to the point of impugning God's justice. God Himself will later affirm Elihu's assessment in this regard (see 40:8). While Job's suffering certainly makes his remarks understandable, there is no doubt that he has gone too far in what he has said—though he probably didn't fully mean all of it.

Elihu is so moved that he is about to burst at the seams with what he has to say (verses 18-20). He is insistent about being heard (verse 10; 33:1, 31, 33). Many in modern times have criticized Elihu for being insufferably verbose and pompous. For instance, he takes 24 verses to say he is going to speak (see 32:6–33:7). Yet loquaciousness was a prized attribute in the ancient world. Moreover, Elihu was, as mentioned, a virtual nobody compared to Job and his three friends—so he deems it important to establish why they should listen to him. He does seem somewhat overconfident in his ability to help Job “see the light,” perhaps because of his belief that God has blessed his perception of matters. That combined with youthful brashness and zeal probably accounts for his coming on a bit strong in places.

Elihu begins by explaining why he has waited to speak—he is younger and he wanted to hear what older, wiser people had to say (verses 6-7). This should illustrate that he is perhaps not so arrogant as some believe him to be. Elihu's mention of the human spirit and breath of the Almighty in verse 8 in context would seem to imply not just God giving intellectual ability to mankind generally through the imparting of the human spirit (which He has certainly done)—but, in contrast to wisdom coming with age, that God can impart wisdom directly to a man's spirit through His own divine Spirit. So Elihu, it appears, believes God has inspired him. And this may well be the case. Yet, as already mentioned, this would not necessarily mean that everything Elihu said was from God. He makes no claim to being a prophet.

The exact meaning of verse 13 is disputed. The NKJV has Elihu quoting the sentiment of the friends in the first part of the verse and giving his own opinion in the second part. The Good News Bible paraphrases this as: “How can you claim you have discovered wisdom? God must answer Job, for you have failed.” Other versions have Elihu quoting the sentiment of the friends in both parts of the verse. For example the New International Version has: “Do not say, ‘We have found wisdom; let God refute him,

not man.” That is, the friends are portrayed as saying that they have done all that can humanly be done and Elihu is here contradicting that.

Elihu then addresses Job. He is much more personal and direct than the three friends. Unlike them, Elihu repeatedly addresses Job by name. For a young man to address his elders so casually—especially someone like Job who, though presently removed from his position due to his condition, had served as a ruler over the people—would surely have seemed impertinent in the society of that day. However, this was evidently part of Elihu’s commitment to show no partiality or flattery (verses 21-22). It is interesting to note that the Hebrew verb translated “flatter,” *kanah*, means “to call someone by his honorific title” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, footnote on verses 21-22).

Elihu’s words to Job at the beginning of 33:6 are variously translated. The King James Version has: “Behold, I am according to thy wish in God’s stead.” The New King James Version gives just the opposite: “Truly I am as your spokesman [or mouth, according to the margin] before God.” Yet neither of these translations seems to fit with the latter part of the verse, “I also have been formed out of clay.” J.P. Green’s Literal Translation renders the first part of the verse, “Behold, I am toward God as you.” This seems more likely. Notice the NIV rendering of verses 6-7: “I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you.” Accepting this translation, *The Bible Reader’s Companion* notes on verse 6: “How refreshing! At last Job hears from someone who does not think of himself as morally superior. Anyone engaged in a ministry of comfort must come with Elihu’s attitude. We are all clay. We struggle together. Only the harmless person, who rejects the temptation to condemn or hold others in contempt, can be God’s agent of healing.” Indeed, Elihu appears to be taking a gentler approach with Job here than the three friends have.

Then, surprisingly, despite all his prior verbosity, Elihu cuts straight to the heart of Job’s problem: Job is not right in his accusations against God’s justice and in treating God as some sort of equal with whom he can contend in court (verses 8-13). Because of this and other statements to follow, some think that Elihu was accusatory in the same way Job’s friends were. Yet it should be recognized that Elihu limits his direct criticism of Job to only the statements Job has made in the dialogue with his friends. He does not, as the friends, accuse Job of having lived an evil, hypocritical life to deserve the suffering he has been experiencing.

Elihu further addresses Job’s frequent plea for a hearing with God by saying that God communicates with people in various ways that they do not always recognize (verse 14). Job had complained of nightmares (7:14), and Elihu suggests that God may have been trying to tell him something this way (33:15). Moreover, Elihu says that God’s objective in this would be to get a person’s attention or teach him something to keep him from perishing: “He causes them to change their minds; he keeps them from pride. He keeps them from the grave” (verses 17-18, New Living Translation). Elihu further suggests that illness is another measure God might use for the same disciplinary and ultimately redemptive purpose (verses 19-22).

Elihu is offering possibilities. He is not, like Job’s friends, bound to the notion that all suffering is punitive and that the measure of suffering corresponds to the degree of a person’s wickedness. He agrees that suffering *may* be punitive but also sees that its objective may be preventative. Perhaps he thinks that Job could be right in the description of his character but that he was headed for a prideful fall—and that God was intervening to keep that from happening. This may even be true. However, it would be surprising if Elihu simply assumed that Job had absolutely no aspects of his life prior to the trial of which to repent. We have no evidence that Elihu knew anything about the discussion between God and Satan at the outset of the book and, thus, of God’s description of Job. It could be that while Elihu did not think Job some great sinner and hypocrite as the friends did, he may have felt that Job had some relatively minor sins that his generally righteous life was leaving him blind to—and that God could have been using suffering as a means to bring Job to more thoroughly examine himself. Even if such an assumption were wrong, it would not have been unreasonable. And again, Elihu makes no dogmatic pronouncements on why Job has been afflicted.

In verse 23 Elihu presents the idea that God may send a messenger or mediator to the afflicted person. It seems likely that he views himself here as God’s messenger commissioned with showing Job God’s righteousness and justice—with the implication that a person reached in this way would then trust in God’s righteousness rather than his own, thus leading to deliverance. In verse 24, Elihu says God

commands the deliverance on the basis of having found a ransom—a *kopher*, a covering or atonement. Perhaps what is meant here is simply that God has instituted sacrifices for the purpose of redemption. After all, the offering of sacrifices for atonement is mentioned at the beginning and end of the book (1:5; 42:8). Yet there may be a more specific foreshadowing here of what such sacrifices prefigured—the role of Jesus Christ as the ultimate ransom and atoning sacrifice for the sins of all humanity.

Elihu, we should observe, looks on God’s goal in chastening in an entirely different light than Job’s friends. They only saw God harshly meting out judgment until people died or straightened up—and that He was practically ambivalent about the outcome. Elihu sees God disciplining repeatedly just as a loving parent would with the intent of saving people from destruction (see verses 29-30). Elihu appears to have this same concern for Job. Despite seeming somewhat overbearing, Elihu says that his desire in speaking to Job is for Job to be justified (33:32)—“cleared” (NIV)—again demonstrating a rather different attitude than Job’s three friends. As we will see, Elihu will get more severe in his criticism of Job—yet not because he thinks, as the friends do, that Job is a hopeless hypocrite but because he thinks that Job is jeopardizing his relationship with God and spiritual future through now lashing out at God in outrageous accusations.

“Will You Condemn Him Who Is Most Just?” (Job 34–35)

April 7-8

It appears that Elihu may have paused at the end of chapter 33 to see if Job had anything to say in response. Job remains silent, and Elihu proceeds with his own comments in chapter 34, addressing both Job and his friends—and perhaps other gathered witnesses.

Elihu now tackles Job’s charge that God is wrongly afflicting him, an innocent man (verses 5-6). In verse 7, Elihu says that Job drinks scorn—disrespect or contempt—like water. We can understand this remark by comparing it to Eliphaz’s earlier comment that man drinks iniquity like water (15:16), meaning that he takes it to himself, indulging in it. Elihu is saying that Job has sunk to coping with his situation by indulging in scorning God’s justice. In 34:8, Elihu is not saying that Job literally keeps company with the wicked. Rather he is saying that Job’s comments make him sound like he is part of the host of scornful, wicked men on earth who disdain God and his justice and see no benefit to serving Him (verse 9).

This seems a bit harsh in light of Job’s condition and character. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* offers this appropriate caution in its introductory note on chapter 34: “As we examine this chapter, we should keep in mind that Elihu had picked out of Job’s speeches those words and ideas that sounded particularly damaging. Job had had questions about the justice of God, and he had emphatically asserted his innocence. But none of this should be viewed independently of Job’s total statement. His claim to innocence was always given in the context of his reason for suffering. And while he had questioned the mystery of theodicy [divine judgment], he had also made clear he believed in God’s justice so much that he was willing to rest his entire case, all his hope, on that one issue (13:13-19; 23:2-7).” Elihu may be too quick to take Job’s remarks at face value, leaving no room for the sufferer to express his feelings as he tries to work through them. On the other hand, Elihu might realize that Job does not truly think the way described in 34:8-9 but be concerned that he would nevertheless give this impression to others.

Elihu may well have a lack of tact and appropriate consideration to Job’s affliction stemming from youth and inexperience. Yet he has a sincere desire to defend God’s justice and also to help Job. Indeed, considering that God Himself was about to intervene at this point, it probably was important at this stage for someone to properly address Job’s accusations against God—both for Job’s own good and for the sake of other people who were listening to all this. We should also consider that Elihu was not like the friends who had by now given up on Job—for Elihu was confident that Job, desiring to maintain his relationship with God, would be convinced by Elihu’s words to take necessary steps to do so.

The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* notes that the substance of Elihu’s quotation of Job in verse 5 “is accurate (cf. 12:4; 13:18; 27:6), and much of v. 6 represents Job fairly (see 21:34; 27:5; see also 6:4...)—though Job had never claimed to be completely guiltless. Verse 9 is not a direct quotation from Job, who had only imagined the wicked saying something similar (see 21:15). But perhaps Elihu derives it from Job’s repeated statement that God treats the righteous and the wicked in the same way (cf. 9:22; 21:17; 24:1-12), leading to the conclusion that it does not pay to please God” (2002, note on 34:5, 9).

In verse 10 Elihu stresses that God does no wickedness. “Elihu’s concern that Job was [implicitly] making God the author of evil is commendable. Job, in his frustration, has come perilously close to charging God with wrongdoing (12:4-6; 24:1-12). He has suggested that this is the only conclusion he can

reach on the basis of his knowledge and experience (9:24)” (note on 34:10).

In verse 11, Elihu seems to be upholding the traditional belief about retribution that Job’s friends have been reciting—that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. Elihu will say more about this in chapter 36. As mentioned before, this is a proper doctrine but the friends were improperly applying it in Job’s case.

In 34:13, Elihu rhetorically asks who put God in charge. God is accountable to no one and yet, as verses 14-15 demonstrate, exercises His rule for the good of all humanity. Elihu points out that if God decided to, He could stop sustaining His creation through His Spirit and all would be destroyed—all people on earth would die. This parallels Hebrews 1:1-2, which describes God as “upholding all things by the word of His power.” (It should be noted that Elihu here upends the view of Job’s friends, as his statement means that all people, including the wicked, are blessed by God’s grace.)

God, Elihu notes, is the pinnacle of justice (see verse 17). Indeed, the Almighty Creator is the very definer of justice. We get our concept of justice from God’s just rule, not the other way around. Whether He is just or not is not up to human judgment. If God were unjust, Elihu seems to be saying, how could He rule the world with any sense of justice, rebuking kings and nobles for ruling *contrary* to justice? (compare verses 17-18, NIV). God’s impartiality between rulers and commoners, between rich and poor, should further illustrate God’s justice—here in the sense of fairness (see verses 19-20). Again, God is the One who has set these parameters of justice.

Moreover, the fact that God is omniscient ensures that He will make no mistakes in punishing the wicked for disobeying Him and afflicting others (see verses 21-28). And, Elihu attests, God does hear the cry of the afflicted (verse 28). This is evidently to respond to Job’s complaint in chapter 24 that God allows the powerful to freely oppress the weak in this age. Elihu counters that God does often intervene. The beginning of 34:29, which follows, is more likely rendered, as in the NIV, “But if he remains silent, who can condemn him?” It follows from the question in verse 17: “Will you condemn Him who is most just?” Comparing various translations, the difficult wording at the end of verse 29 and in verse 30 could perhaps be paraphrased as: “Even if God chooses to hide his face so that people can’t see what He’s doing, He still rules over nations and individuals to [generally speaking] keep the worst people from governing and thereby destroying everyone.” Or the latter clause might have to do with keeping wicked rulers in power in this age to prevent society from descending into anarchy and chaos.

Translators agree that the wording of verses 31-33 is difficult. But, comparing various translations and commentaries and considering the context, Elihu seems to be saying this to Job: “Suppose someone says to God, ‘Okay, I’ve had enough (of affliction presumably). I will stop offending. Just tell me what I need to stop doing. If I have sinned, I’ll stop.’ Should God now make things right just because the person has recanted? What do you think? You know the answer.” Clearly God is under no obligation to immediately bring people’s suffering to an end even when they say they are ready to get right with Him. He is the determiner of when to make it cease. It is not ultimately up to the sufferer. Perhaps there are yet lessons to be learned, sincerity to be demonstrated or other reasons known only to God. Verse 34 sets up a quote in the NKJV. But it may well instead sum up verses 31-33 as in the earlier KJV: “Let men of understanding tell me [the answer to the question I just posed], and let a wise man hearken unto me.”

In verse 35, the NKJV and some other versions have Elihu quoting others in this assessment of Job’s remarks: “Job speaks without knowledge, his words are without wisdom.” But this seems more likely to be Elihu’s own assessment, as in the KJV. In 35:16, Elihu says that Job “multiplies words without knowledge.” God later affirms this assessment by referring to Job as one who “darkens counsel by words without knowledge” (38:1-2). This does not mean that all Job said was wrong, for we know that he said much that was right. But his accusations against God were unwise and not well thought out. Job will admit as much at the end of the book (42:3).

The NKJV rendering of 34:36 makes it look like Elihu wishes the worst on Job—for him to be “tried to the utmost”—for what he has said about God. This would go far beyond Elihu’s earlier stated desire to see Job cleared. The King James wording is better: “that Job may be tried *unto the end*.” That is, that Job would be brought all the way to the trial’s conclusion or, better yet, to its intended end or goal. This fits with Elihu’s question in verses 31-33. Consider also the wording of James 5:11: “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord.”

The charge of “rebellion” in verse 37 may seem rather extreme. Yet we should note that the common

word for rebellion, from the Hebrew root *marah*, is not used here. Rather, the word here is *pasha*, meaning transgression (Strong's No. 6588; see "Transgress," *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, p. 266). It can imply deviation from God's way in a specific area rather than a wholesale turning away from God. Elihu clearly limits the transgression to Job's excessive complaining against God and God's justice. Yet as before, considering Job's circumstances, Elihu appears to lack sensitivity in delivering his evaluation.

"You Must Wait for Him" (Job 34–35)

April 7-8 Cont'd

In chapter 35, Elihu takes to task Job's statements about God's apparent indifference.

He begins by addressing what he deems a major inconsistency in Job's reasoning. In the NKJV translation of verse 2, Elihu asks if Job is saying that he is more righteous than God. Yet the New International Version rendering is probably more accurate here. Notice verse 2-3 in the NIV: "Do you think this is just? You say, 'I will be cleared by God.' Yet you ask him, 'What profit is it to me, and what do I gain by not sinning?'" The *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* explains that the Hebrew for the word "cleared" here "is translated 'vindicated' in Job's statement in 13:18. Elihu thinks that it is unjust and inconsistent for Job to expect vindication from God and at the same time imply that God does not care whether we are righteous (see v. 3). But allowance must be made [as Elihu does not seem to] for a person to express his feelings. The psalmist who thirsted for God (Ps 42:1-2) also questioned why God had forgotten him (Ps 42:9) and rejected him (Ps 43:2)" (note on Job 35:2).

Expositor's notes on the chapter: "Elihu had missed Job's point, that he wanted to be vindicated because he did believe God was just. Of course Job, in his struggle to understand what God was doing, had sent out two signals, one of which Elihu, like the others, had not been able to hear."

Elihu turns the concept of serving God for no benefit around by saying that it is God who gets no benefit if Job serves Him (verses 4-7). People's wickedness or righteousness impacts only themselves and other people, not God (verse 8). Eliphaz had made a similar point (22:2) yet further wrongly claimed that God did not even care one way or the other (verse 3). Elihu does not appear to go this far in what he is saying. His point, in drawing a contrast, is to say that in any relationship between God and man, it is man who stands to gain, not God. And man should appreciate this fact. But this is usually not the case, which is the basis on which Elihu addresses "Job's concern over God's apparent indifference to the cries of the oppressed (cf. 24:1-12). Elihu maintained that God is not indifferent to people, but people are indifferent to God. People want God to save them; but they are not interested in honoring him as their Creator, Deliverer, and Source of wisdom (vv. 9-11). Human arrogance keeps God from responding to the empty cry for help (vv. 12-13)" (same note).

In verse 14, Elihu seems to be saying that even if Job does not see God or what He is doing, he should accept that God really is just and that he will have to wait on Him. Job should be glad, Elihu implies in the next verse, that God does *not* immediately punish for people's foolishness. Otherwise Job himself would not be able to say the foolish things he has been saying about God. As harsh as this may sound, Elihu's point seems to be that God's justice is tempered by patience and mercy.

"Remember to Magnify His Work" (Job 36–37)

April 9-10

Chapters 36 and 37 record Elihu's last address. He begins by further defending God's justice and ends by proclaiming God's majesty. In his defense of God (compare 36:2), Elihu says he obtains his knowledge from afar (verse 3)—that is, apparently, from God Himself and, as the latter part of the discourse illustrates, from the majesty of God's creation (compare verses 24-25).

The end of verse 4 may sound like the height of conceit on the part of Elihu—that he is claiming to be perfect in knowledge. While some interpret this as meaning eloquent of speech, that seems a needless point to make here—and it is not a literal rendering. Far more likely is that the statement "One who is perfect in knowledge is with you" refers to God. After all, Elihu later in the same speech clearly describes God as "Him who is perfect in knowledge" (37:16). Moreover, the statement at the end of 36:4 parallels the next verse, which says that God is mighty in strength of understanding.

In verses 6-7, Elihu turns again to the idea of retribution and reward. But he is here speaking in an ultimate sense. In contrast to the NKJV translation of verse 6, God does indeed preserve the life of even the wicked for the time being. The word translated "does not preserve" should in context be understood as "does not (or will not) grant," in contrast to God's granting justice later in the verse. The tense in verses

6-7 and 9-10 is open, meaning that it can be either present or future (see *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 6). Since the reign of the all the righteous in verse 7 is yet future, a better translation of verses 6-7 would seem to be: "He will not [ultimately] grant life to the wicked, but will give justice to the oppressed. He will not withdraw His eyes from the righteous; but they will be kings on the throne, for He will cause them to sit forever, and they will be exalted."

Job certainly knows this but it has diminished as his focus. His mind has been consumed with why it is wrong for him to suffer as he now does. Elihu then explains that if people are afflicted, God will reveal why, making known to them their sins (if that is the cause) and what they need to do to get right with Him. If they submit to Him, their lives will be blessed. But if not, they will perish. Again, Elihu seems to be viewing this in an ultimate sense—or at least as a general principle for life. Those who will humble themselves before God in their affliction will be delivered (Job 36:15).

Verse 16-17 in the NKJV seem to contain a very harsh judgment from Elihu—that God would have delivered Job but he is being judged for his wickedness. This would appear to make Elihu have the same basic perspective as Job's three friends. But verse 16 is better in the New International Version. Elihu tells Job: "He [God] is wooing you [present tense] from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food." That is, Elihu seems to think that his words are God's way of communicating to Job. And this does appear to be the case, at least to some degree.

Verses 17-20 may appear to make Elihu even more off base, thinking Job wicked and that he has been reliant on wealth and power. But these particular verses, as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains, are some of the hardest to translate in the entire Old Testament (note on verses 15-21). The same commentary offers the following variant translation, wherein Elihu seems to be preparing Job for the outlook he should have when the trial is over: "Since you have had your fill of judgment due the wicked, since judgment and justice have taken hold (of you), beware that no one entice you to want riches again. Do not let the great price you are paying mislead you. Of what value was your wealth apart from affliction? And of what value are all your mighty efforts? Do not long for the night, when peoples will vanish from their place [i.e., the time of God's judgment]. Beware of turning to evil, for that is why you are tested by affliction." These are some of the lessons Job needs to walk away with. As Elihu says of God in the next verse, "Who teaches like Him?" (verse 22).

Of course, Elihu doesn't claim to know all the reasons Job is being tried. But he next turns to what is vital in all trials. Rather than accuse God of wrong (see verse 23), Elihu tells Job: "Remember to magnify His work" (verse 24). And Elihu then proceeds to do just that through the remainder of his speech, extolling God's mighty works in creation. This is the right approach, for it is even what God Himself will present to Job in His speeches (chapters 38–41).

Note that the NKJV translation of Job 36:26 says that we do not know God. Yet the word "Him" is in italics, meaning it has been added to the text. A more appropriate insertion here might be the "it" from the previous verse, referring to God's *work*. So verse 26 could be rendered, "Behold, God is great, and we do not know His work." That is, we can't know all that He is doing—it is beyond us. Elihu reaffirms this in 37:5: "He does great things which we cannot comprehend." Job himself actually touched on this theme before, but his point was to show his friends that they were foolish for thinking that they had God all figured out. What Job needed to do was reflect on God's creation as proof that God is infinitely wise—that He knows exactly what He is doing in all circumstances even when *we* don't.

As his first illustration of God's unfathomable wisdom in creation, Elihu presents the hydrological cycle of evaporation, cloud formation and rain. *Expositor's* comments: "Rain in the O[ld] T[estament] world was considered one of the most needed and obvious blessings of God. The phenomenon of condensation (v. 27b) and precipitation (v. 28), while not technically understood, was certainly observable. But evaporation (v. 27) is not. [One commentator] therefore considered this proof that the Elihu speeches came a few centuries later than the divine speeches since such meteorological knowledge would have been obtained from the Greeks.... Elihu did not need a knowledge of physics since God is the one who does this (an idea even we who know the physics can still affirm), but he may have known more about the phenomenon [in his ancient context] than [some commentators are] willing to admit" (note on verses 27-33). Perhaps God inspired him.

In verse 29 Elihu mentions the spreading of clouds and thunder from God's canopy, paralleling the mention of God's canopy of dark clouds in Psalm 18:11 in describing the coming of God. Note also the next verse in Job 36: "Look, He scatters His light upon it..." (verse 30). It seems from what follows that Elihu is mostly describing presently observable phenomena. We see here the thunder and lightning of a coming storm (36:29–37:5), the thunder causing Elihu's heart to pound (37:1). A whirlwind, perhaps a massive tornado, is coming (verse 9). Ice forms, possibly describing hail (verse 10). The clouds are swirling yet there is brightness within them (verses 11, 15, 22). As the next chapter will show, Almighty God will at last answer Job out of this whirlwind.

We can envision the scene. As Elihu points toward the menacing clouds, the thunder is getting louder. The howling wind is growing stronger. Elihu must raise his voice to be heard. He argues that God is in command of the clouds (verse 12). He says that God sends such storms for various reasons—whether to correct people, to nourish the land, or to mercifully provide for people (verse 13). In this he seems to also be making a metaphor out of the storm—referring to the storms of life, which God directs and that are ultimately for people's own good. Job had used a similar metaphor when he accused God of crushing him with a tempest (9:17). But he was mistaken. He could not fully understand God's motivations in his trial just as he could not understand the present actual thunderstorm—or *any* storm for that matter. As the gusts build, sweeping up debris and causing people and structures to sway, thunder booms and the oncoming tornado rages louder still. "Listen to this, O Job!" Elihu cries out. "Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God!" (see verse 14). He then challenges Job to explain how God is doing all this (verses 15-16). The Almighty acts beyond human comprehension. Who are we to instruct *Him*? Job's concept of contending with God in court is thereby shown to be absurd (verses 19-20).

Elihu's conclusion? God is awesome, beyond understanding, omnipotent and perfectly just and righteous (verses 22-23). He is not an oppressor, as Job has implied (verse 23). Rather, the trials He brings are, in His omniscience, intended for good. Therefore men should show God the reverence due Him—and that includes Job. This is appropriate instruction in any trial and throughout life. It is why Jesus instructed us to begin our prayers extolling God's name and to finish them praising His immortal power and glory (Matthew 6:9, 13). If this remains our focus, we will have greater confidence in the fact that God is working out what is best for us and that, come what may, He will see us through.

"Then the LORD Answered Job Out of the Whirlwind..." (Job 38:1-38)

April 11-12

We arrive now at the beginning of the grand climax of the book. At last God arrives—and in an awesome display of power. Yet as terrifying as the great whirlwind must have been, God is not here to destroy Job. He is here to help Job put things into proper perspective before restoring him to health and to God's service.

It may appear that God has completely ignored all that Elihu has said. This is one of the reasons some believe that the Elihu speeches were added to the book of Job by a later author. Yet without Elihu's description of a coming storm, there would be no antecedent for God answering Job out of *the* whirlwind. That being so, some see the absence of God's acknowledgment of Elihu as an intentional snub to the young man. But this discounts the substance of God's speeches, which follow right on from Elihu's last theme. God in fact does acknowledge him by picking up right where Elihu has left off—stressing His divine power and majesty throughout the creation as the focus Job needs to have.

God refers to Job as one "who darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (verse 2), the latter part echoing Elihu's earlier assessment (see 34:35; 35:16). Yet "how did Job darken (obscure) God's counsel (v. 2)? There can be no doubt that this refers to the extreme language of Job during his moments of poetic rage when he struggled with concepts of a deity who was his enemy—a phantom deity, one his own mind created. Here he needed to brace himself and wrestle with God as he really was (v. 3)" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 2-3).

Job had wanted an audience with God so as to present his case and to question God about what He was doing in regard to his own trial as well as the sufferings of innocent people in general. But God is not here to subject Himself to such an interrogation. Just the opposite, God says, "*I* will question *you*, and *you* shall answer *Me*" (verse 3). As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* comments: "Now God speaks to Job, but not to give Job the justification of his ways that Job had been demanding. Out of the awesome majesty of the thunderstorm, he reminds Job that the wisdom that directs the Creator's ways is beyond the reach of human understanding [as Elihu had been saying]...The format of God's response is to ply Job

with rhetorical questions, to each of which Job must plead ignorance. God says nothing about Job's suffering, nor does he address Job's problem about divine justice. Job gets neither a bill of indictment nor a verdict of innocence. But, more important, God does not humiliate or condemn him—which surely would have been the case if the counselors had been right. So by implication Job *is* vindicated, and later his vindication is directly affirmed (see 42:7-9...). The divine discourses, then, [as we will see, will] succeed in bringing Job to complete faith in God's wisdom and goodness without his receiving a direct answer to his questions" (notes on 38:1, 3).

What is God's point in all that He says to Job? We must be careful in how we read God's response. Given the exciting build up of the mighty thunderstorm, we are probably inclined to imagine Him blasting Job with a thunderous voice and grilling questions so as to scare and unsettle him. Indeed, some see God's speeches as intended to essentially browbeat Job into an admission of his nothingness before God's mighty power. This is surely wrong. Job needed no such convincing of God's power. As he mourned over all that had befallen him, writhed in the agony of his illness and struggled to understand why this was happening to him, he was already afraid of God, whom he imagined as watching his every step to determine how to further wound him.

The reality is that God is here as a loving parent to comfort a hurting, confused child. He does have a rebuke for Job but it is a soft one, as we will see in chapter 40. Leading up to that, God presents His awesome, incomprehensible works to remind Job of who He is and to demonstrate that Job does not need to worry and fret. The Almighty cares deeply for His whole creation and tends to this vast, unimaginable complexity in ways that people cannot remotely fathom. He cares for Job too, and Job will just have to trust that what is happening to him is part of God's grand design—a design that in the end will somehow be of supreme benefit to Job and others. God is throughout gently chiding Job, basically saying, "Do you understand all this? No, you don't—you can't! But I do. I've got it all taken care of. And when it comes right down to it, that's all you really need to know."

The angels shouting for joy when the earth was formed (38:7) provides the perspective that all should have in considering the wonders of God's creation. (This verse also gives us a rare glimpse into both the spirit realm and the history of creation.) Verses 8-11 tell us that God has set specific boundaries for the sea. As ancient societies saw the sea as a symbol of chaos and destruction (probably due to the great Flood of Noah's day), we can perhaps also see an analogy here—that God sets limits on destructive and harmful forces. Job understood this in theory concerning the sea (see 26:12-13). But he needed to apply this important truth to his own life.

Job 38:16, regarding the springs of the sea, is remarkable in an ancient context. Author Grant Jeffrey comments in *The Signature of God*: "In this verse the Bible refers to the existence of springs of water flowing beneath the depths of the sea. It is only in the last thirty [now 40] years that underwater exploration of the ocean depths has revealed a remarkable phenomenon of numerous huge springs of fresh water pouring out of the ocean floor" (1996, pp. 119-120). Of course God, who knew about them, had no difficulty reporting on them. Jeffrey further comments: "The Book of Job also contains questions that suggest a level of knowledge that would be impossible for a human writer living in the Middle East during ancient times. For example, Job refers to deep oceans whose surface waters are frozen hard like a stone...(Job 38:29, 30). How could someone like Job, living in the area of Saudi Arabia in ancient times, have known about Arctic ice caps?" (p. 120).

Verses 31-32 present to us the star cluster known to the Greeks as the Pleides and the constellations of Orion and the Great Bear, all mentioned earlier by Job (9:9). It would seem from this that God intended the configuration of the stars to form connect-the-dot pictures in the sky. Verse 32 of Job 38 also mentions Mazzaroth, which is usually understood to mean "Constellations." The seasonal aspect in the same verse shows this to likely refer to what the Greeks named the Zodiac, probably replacing some of the original Zodiacal images with pagan, mythological figures. We should understand no astrological overtones in any of this, as God disapproves of astrology (compare Jeremiah 10:2). The stars exert no special power over human lives. The King James Version translation of verse 31, "...the *sweet influences* of Pleides," is incorrect. The NKJV "cluster" is a much better translation (see *Expositor's*, footnote on verses 31-33). In verse 33, the ordinances of the heavens are probably the scientific laws that govern the movements of heavenly bodies—and these laws control the earth also.

God then asks Job if he can, on his own, call down rain upon himself or send out lightning (verses

34-35). He further implies that Job could not even entertain such thoughts if someone had not given him a mind with which to imagine and consider (verse 36)—and that Someone, of course, is God. Yet the mind that God has given man is limited. For what person could ever figure out just how to properly regulate the earth's climate? (compare verses 37-38). Even to modern scientists, the concept would be mind-boggling.

With all this, the Almighty Creator has only just begun his discourse. He has much more to say to Job, as we will see in the next few chapters.

“Who Provides Food for the Raven...?” (Job 38:39–40:5)

April 13-14

God next turns to the animal kingdom to illustrate His sovereignty and wisdom as Creator as well as His great care and concern for His creation.

God hunting prey for the lion and providing food for the raven (38:39-41) could signal that God specifically intervenes in the natural realm to make sure animals are nourished. Or it could simply mean that God has set up the world's ecosystem in such a way to ensure that its creatures are regularly fed—that he has established an important balance in nature between predators and prey. Perhaps it means both—that God has established a self-perpetuating natural order but sometimes directly intervenes to make necessary adjustments due to the impact of other natural or unnatural circumstances. The portrayal of the young ravens crying out to God does not mean that they are consciously calling to Him—simply that they are crying out for relief and He is the One who hears them and can answer them.

Surely we can see that God is not only talking about ravens here. God's care for His creatures implies something else: that He must also have great care for His highest physical creatures—human beings. Job might as well have been hearing the words of Jesus Christ uttered more than 1,500 years later: “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than birds?” (Luke 12:24).

Job 39:1-4 shows that God has concern not just for predators but for prey—mountain goats and deer—having ensured that they are cared for at birth when they are most vulnerable.

The illustration of the wild donkey in verses 5-8 is rather interesting because Job used it as a symbol of the oppressed poor in 24:5. Job complained about the poor, like the wild donkey, having to eek out an existence in the wilderness. Yet God here says that the wild donkey is actually happier in the wilderness than in the tumult of the city serving a hard master. Beyond the literal meaning, perhaps God is implying by analogy that human beings will experience freedom if we find contentment in whatever circumstance He has placed us (see Philippians 4:10-12). He could also be saying that it may actually be better to be among the poor than to be rich and powerful and enslaved to the vices of that life. After all, as Jesus will later explain, it is very hard for a rich man to enter God's Kingdom (Matthew 19:23-24).

God next presents the powerful wild ox (verses 9-12). It has great strength and is capable of much but generally will not submit to serving people's needs. Is God drawing another analogy with people here? Perhaps. Why, Job might have wondered, would God create an animal like the wild ox, which cannot be domesticated? The answer is: only God really knows. He has not revealed his motivations. Of course, He requires no express reasons. If it pleases Him to do so, that is enough.

The next animal, the ostrich (verses 13-18), would surely evoke even more questions. It is simply bizarre to our understanding. Part of the lesson here “is that God can and does make creatures that appear odd and crazy to us if that pleases him. Imagine a bird that can't fly. Though it has wings it can run faster than a horse (v. 18). Job could not understand what God was doing in his life, and God was telling him the created world is just as difficult to rationalize” (*Expositor's*, note on verses 13-18). Indeed, there is more here. God says that this bird exposes the eggs of its offspring to danger by leaving them on the ground and is even harsh with its young, probably referring to the fact that yearlings are driven off at mating season. Recall that Job had basically accused God of indifference to human beings. Now God draws Job's attention to a parent in the animal world that really is practically indifferent to the plight of its young—“without concern,” God says. Why? Because God did not give her wisdom and understanding (verse 17). This means that parental care and concern is part of what God Himself considers to be wisdom and right understanding—so surely He must have this care for His own human children, including Job.

God's discourse then moves on to the horse (verses 19-25). Here is a great and powerful animal, brave and fearless. In verse 20, the words “Can you frighten him like a locust...?” (NKJV) do not seem to fit in context. The NIV translation asks, “Do you make him *leap* like a locust...?”—hurdling obstacles on his way into battle. This animal, we should observe, is not wild. It devotes its strength, boldness and

courage to serving its rider—and it is a wonder to behold.

Finally God mentions the hawk and the eagle. In contrast to the ostrich, these birds fly, they have incredible eyesight (“eagle eyes”), they have the wisdom to build their nests in a high stronghold and they provide for their young (verses 26-30).

In the skies above and in the untamed wilds, to the ends of the earth and beyond, all creation bears witness to the glory and majesty of God—far above the ways of man. It is a humbling lesson for Job.

Then, after God’s first long volley of evidence proving His vast wisdom and care for His creation, He calls on Job to respond (40:1-2). “God reverses Job’s accusation that God has brought a lawsuit against him (see 10:2 for the same Hebrew word). It really has been Job accusing God, not the other way around” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 40:1-2). God gives an implicit reprimand to Job. Yet notice that it is not harsh, stern or even direct. God does not say, “Shame on you, wicked man. You are cursed for daring to rebuke Me.” All He says is, “Okay, after all you’ve heard, are you still going to press your case against Me and try to correct Me? You who would presume to rebuke God, let’s hear what you have to say now.”

Job is stunned and overwhelmed—probably at both the experience and at what God has said to him ending with this calling to account. What can he possibly say in response? All he can answer in verses 3-5 is that He is vile—worthless—and He covers his mouth, probably as a symbol of his unworthiness to say anymore. Job is humbled but, as we will see next, God still has more to say.

Can Job Do a Better Job of Being God Than God? (Job 40:6–41:34)

April 15-16

As we saw in Job 40:1-5, Job had come to see himself as nothing before the Great God and considered that he dared not say anymore. Yet this was not exactly God’s point. God had been illustrating His great care for His creation (Job 38–39)—implying great care for Job as well. It seems that Job, as stunned as he was at God’s presence and reply, had not fully grasped this yet.

We should recall that Job had actually anticipated that if God ever confronted him, he would be unable to say anything or that, if he somehow managed to, it would not really matter. Note Job’s earlier words from chapter 9: “How then can I answer Him, and choose my words to reason with Him? For though I were righteous, I could not answer Him; I would beg mercy of my Judge. *If I called and He answered me, I would not believe that He was listening to my voice.* For He crushes me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause.... If it is a matter of strength, indeed He is strong; and if of justice, who will appoint my day in court? Though I were righteous, my own mouth would condemn me; though I were blameless, it would prove me perverse” (verses 14-20).

So it is not enough that Job is silenced in God’s presence. That is not the answer God is looking for—especially as Job may still be thinking along the same lines quoted above. God wants him to really think about all this and come to a reasoned conclusion. Job needs to come to some important realizations about God and himself. God therefore repeats His previous introduction from Job 38:3, saying that He is asking Job questions and that Job needs to give an appropriate response (40:6-7).

God then moves to the heart of Job’s problem, asking, “Would you indeed annul my judgment? Would you condemn me that you may be justified?” Again, we should observe that though this obviously constitutes a reprimand, God is extremely gentle here with Job, softly chiding him to bring him to his senses. As to substance, Job has certainly maligned God’s justice in his agony-induced ranting, imagining that God oppresses innocents, laughs at their suffering and practically smiles on the wicked who harm the innocent (see 9:21-24; 10:3; 24:1-12). We should recognize that due to his intense physical and emotional suffering, Job was in certain respects going out of his mind. Proper perspective and a good attitude are exceedingly hard to maintain in great trials. So God, in perfect empathy and understanding, is here to comfort Job, reason with him and help him to see reality.

In this vein, God issues a challenge to Job. In its note on Job 40:9-14, *The Nelson Study Bible* states: “The absurdity of Job’s defiant criticism of the way the Lord runs the universe (see 29:2-17 for Job’s claim to be fair in his judicial duties) is forcefully brought to his attention by God’s ironic invitation to become ‘king for a day’ over the whole universe. If Job had the power, let him don the royal regalia of God’s majestic attributes and humble the proud and wicked forces in the world. Job had criticized God for not doing this well enough (21:30, 31; 24:1-17).”

Basically God is saying to Job, “If you think you can do a better job of being God and Supreme Judge than Me, okay let’s see it.” And if Job can, then God will admit that Job can save himself (40:14)—that is, that Job wouldn’t even need God. Consider that Job has been seeking from God vindication and

deliverance for himself and judgment on the wicked. Yet why would he seek this from an unfair and unjust God bent on harming him and rewarding evil? If Job's characterization of God in this regard is right, then Job's only option is to save himself—which is of course not really an option at all.

It seems that Job has had some self-righteousness in this regard. That is, he has in effect been trusting too much in his own character to serve as his vindicator. He had spoken of maintaining his integrity to the very end. He had imagined himself going before God and presenting his righteousness as the basis on which God should overturn His judgment—that is, the judgment Job incorrectly perceived God had brought on him. Recall that God said Job was without knowledge (38:1-2). This wording is interesting in light of the apostle Paul's evaluation of the people of Israel: "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:2-3). The Israelites needed to throw themselves on God's mercy and look to Christ's sacrifice to justify them and His righteous life to save them. Job essentially needed to do the same thing.

Job's character and focus had served him well when affliction first came—indeed, remarkably so. But over time the immensity of his trial began to affect him severely—distorting his perspective of God. Job had probably never imagined that such a thing could happen to his thinking. Perhaps he was like Peter who said to Christ, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Matthew 26:33). Peter was of course wrong. He needed to come to understand that of his own power and strength he would not be able to live up to his good intentions. Similarly, Job needed to see that his own righteousness was not self-perpetuating. He was, as all men are, subject to the dark forces of the world and the downward pull of his own mind. Righteous though he demonstrably was, he nevertheless desperately needed God to not merely declare him righteous, but to make and keep him righteous throughout his life. Job had been thinking just the opposite. He considered that God had only to recognize his righteousness. God in response says that if Job can fill His shoes as God, "...then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you" (Job 40:14).

God goes on to provide examples of His sovereignty (and Job's lack) with two powerful creatures—the behemoth (verses 15-24) and Leviathan (41:1-34). God's intent here is not the same as it was in chapters 38-39, where He was illustrating His care over the vast complexities of the natural realm. Rather, we should understand God's present point in light of his challenge to Job to deal with the proud and wicked forces of the world. Only God can take down the behemoth (40:19). And only He can subdue Leviathan, the king of the proud (see 41:34). We examine the specifics of these creatures in the comments that follow.

Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40:6-41:34)

April 15-16 Cont'd

In Job 40:15, the untranslated Hebrew word *behemoth*, intensive in form, seems to have the meaning of "great beast" or "beast of beasts." It appears, from the description given, to be a literal creature that God has created. God says He made this animal with man (same verse). Its identity is disputed. Some reckon it to be the hippopotamus or the rhinoceros. Since these animals have small tails, those who advocate one of them argue that "tail like a cedar" must be a hyperbolic euphemism for the male member. Others maintain that the word refers to the trunk of an elephant. Of animals currently living, the African bull elephant would best seem to fit the description "first of the ways of God" (verse 19) since it is unquestionably the most powerful animal alive. Yet gulping river water into its open mouth (verse 23) seems to not fit the elephant, which sucks up water through its trunk and squirts it into its mouth. And there is no mention of tusks. If bringing the sword near in verse 19 is restricted to one-man sword combat, any of these animals full grown would have been rather hard to bring down. But even in Job's day men could hunt and kill these creatures with spears, especially in teams.

All of this being so, it may well be that a much larger, now-extinct creature is intended. Some have suggested an herbivorous dinosaur. This would better fit a more literal meaning for "tail like a cedar" and make more sense of the creature's imperviousness to human attack. Such creatures inhabited the world that was destroyed before the creation of Adam. Yet it is possible that God made new varieties to live in man's world that have died out since the time of Job. Others have suggested the now-extinct giant hornless rhinoceros known as *Baluchitherium* (named after Baluchistan in Pakistan, where its fossil remains were found). This massive animal, 25 feet long, standing 18 feet or nearly two stories high at the shoulder, with a thick, 8-foot-long tail, is thought to be the largest land mammal that ever lived.

Paleontologists date the creature to more than 10 million years ago, yet this is based on an evolutionary interpretation of geologic strata. It could be that this animal was contemporary with human beings even as late as Job's day.

Verse 24 could be translated as a question: "Can one take him by his eyes or pierce his nose with a snare?" Recall that God had just implied that only He could bind the faces of the proud in secret (verses 11-13, KJV). Whatever creature the behemoth actually is, it is apparently used to represent the mighty and powerful of the earth. Here is a great force that Job is ultimately powerless to deal with. But God who made the creature is easily able to overcome it. It is interesting to consider that the great gentile empires of the earth and their leaders are later represented by powerful beasts in Bible prophecy (see Daniel 7; Revelation 13; 17). And God, the One who establishes earthly authority, is the One who is able to abase the world's powers, no matter how great they are (see Daniel 4).

That brings us next to Leviathan in Job 41. *Leviathan* is basically a transliteration of a Hebrew word whose root means "twist" or "writhe." Psalm 104:25-26 shows Leviathan to be a great sea creature. Many think the reference in Job 41 is to a crocodile. They see the fire and smoke going out of its mouth and nose respectively (verses 19-21) as sunlight reflecting off of water vapor the crocodile churns up or breathes out, thereby creating the illusion of fire. But why would God in His description be passing along a false illusion as if it were real? And why would He make the specific statement that the creature's breath kindles coals? This is not adequately explained by the flashing of reflected sunlight. It seems obvious that the description here is of some kind of fire-breathing sea dragon.

Is a literal creature portrayed here? It would seem so, but it may not be a physical animal. Even if such an animal species does exist, the greater reference here is evidently to something else. Job had mentioned Leviathan in Job 3:8 in conjunction with those who called upon dark powers of cursing. Psalm 74:12-14 presents Leviathan as a beast whose multiple heads were broken when Israel was brought out of Egypt and led through the sea. This parallels the reference to Egypt as "Rahab" in Isaiah 30:7—a name meaning "Fierce" or "Violent" and perhaps identifiable with the Egyptian crocodile god Sobek, whose name meant "Rager." Job mentioned Rahab in 9:13 and 26:12, referring to him as "the fleeing serpent" that God has pierced (verse 13). Isaiah 26:21-27:1 says that when God comes to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity at the end of the age, He will "punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea."

At the time of future judgment, we know that God will destroy a final human empire described as a seven-headed beast rising up out of the sea (Revelation 13; 17). Yet the seven heads of this beast are also portrayed as emerging from the great, fiery red dragon or serpent of old, Satan the devil (see 12:3, 9). Drawing the scaly monster Leviathan out with a hook in his jaw (Job 41:1) parallels the description in Ezekiel 29:3-4 of God putting hooks in the jaws of the Egyptian pharaoh, described there as a river monster likened to a crocodile. So a great physical empire or ruler seems intended in part by the references to Leviathan throughout Scripture, but the even greater spiritual power behind the throne of all human kingdoms and false gods, Satan the devil, is surely also in mind. Indeed, this seems to be the primary meaning, especially in Job 41. Consider the words that conclude the description of Leviathan here: "He is king over all the children of pride" (verse 34). Who or what does this phrase describe better than Satan? His "heart as hard as stone" (verse 24) most likely refers to his cruelty and stubborn unwillingness to submit to God.

Now consider verses 3-4. God challenges Job regarding Leviathan: "Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak softly to you? Will he make a covenant with you?" This makes little sense if a mere animal is intended. The implication here is that Leviathan has made requests of God in a soft-spoken way as part of striking some kind of deal or agreement with God. This is exactly what Satan was described as doing at the beginning of the book of Job—he appealed to God to allow him to try Job and God agreed to let him do so within certain limits.

Yet God was the real master of what was going on. He is the one who provoked Satan into the challenge so that his purpose would be fulfilled. God was *using* Satan for His own greater design. This helps to make sense of what God says next of Leviathan: "Will you take him as a servant forever?" (verse 4). Not that Satan wants to serve God. He simply has no choice. God allows Satan to rule the world throughout this age as part of a great plan. Yet the ultimate Sovereign—who sets the limits of Satan's rule—is still God. Then: "Will you play with him as with a bird?" (verse 5). Again, Satan thought he was

really getting away with something in the trial of Job. But God was just toying with him to fulfill His own greater purpose. This is ever the case. Consider when Satan succeeded in leading Judas to betray Christ. Whose will was ultimately served in what happened? That's right. Once again, Satan was unwittingly played—this time to fulfill what God had explicitly foretold and to accomplish the supreme sacrifice to redeem humanity.

Notice also: “Or will you leash him for your maidens?” (verse 5). God puts a leash on Satan, imposing certain restrictions on him, for the sake of His people. And God will later completely imprison Satan (Revelation 20:1-3). The next questions in this series are: “Will your companions make a banquet of him? Will they apportion him among the merchants?” Perhaps the idea here is that the wealth and kingdoms that spring from Satan will be apportioned among survivors at the end of the age, just as Egypt's wealth was dispersed at the time of the Exodus, when God “broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces and gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness” (Psalm 74:14).

Any human attempt to subdue this being would fail (Job 41:7-10). Only God can stand against him. And God will. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* offers this alternative translation of verses 11-12: “Who can confront me and remain safe? When under all the heavens he dares oppose me, will not I silence his boastings, his powerful word and his dubious arguments?” (see footnotes on verses 11-12).

This is just what God is accomplishing through Job. Consider this analysis from *Expositor's*: “By telling of his dominion over Behemoth and Leviathan, the Lord is illustrating what he has said in 40:8-14. He is celebrating his moral triumph over the forces of evil. Satan, the Accuser, has been proved wrong though Job does not know it. The author and the reader see the entire picture that Job and his friends never knew. No rational theory of suffering is substituted for the faulty one the friends proffered. The only answer given is the same as in Genesis. God permitted the Accuser to touch Job as part of his plan to humiliate Satan. But now that the contest is over, God still did not reveal his reason to Job. Job did not find out what the readers know. That is why Job could be restored without destroying the integrity of the account. To understand this is to understand why the forces of moral disorder are veiled underneath mythopoeic language about ferocious, uncontrollable creatures.... We emphasize that if the specific and ultimate reason for his suffering had been revealed to Job even at this point—the value of the account as a comfort to others who must suffer in ignorance would have been diminished if not cancelled” (note on 41:1-34).

Yet without giving away the specifics of what has been going on, God is revealing to Job some important general principles that all of God's people should bear in mind during this age. Job probably understands Leviathan to be Satan. And Job likely knows that Satan is out to harm him. Perhaps he even realizes that Satan is the one afflicting him, though he blames God for this since he knows that God could prevent it. God in response assures Job that He does not step aside and cooperate with evil forces in allowing harm to come to His people. Rather, God bends the forces of evil to serve His will with the intent of working out the ultimate benefit of His people. It may appear on the surface that evil is triumphant. But God in His high and mysterious ways is using these circumstances to accomplish His awesome purposes. Job himself could never achieve the like. No man could. Only God has everything under control. Only God can rule and judge supreme—in omnipotent power and omniscient justice. Job has only to trust Him and submit to whatever He is doing.

Repentance and Restoration (Job 42)

April 17-18

In Job's encounter with God, the Lord never directly explained why He permitted Job to suffer. But He doesn't have to. Job finally realizes what God has been trying to tell him for the past few chapters. He responds to God with what he has learned—with what God has taught him: “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You” (verses 1-2). He admits that God is right to have pointed out his lack of knowledge for, he confesses, he was talking about things he didn't really understand—wonderful things beyond his comprehension (verse 3). Job at last sees that God has immense care for His creation—including him. He sees that God is in total control of His creation to accomplish His own inscrutable aims. And he realizes his complete foolishness in coming to wrong conclusions about God's justice (compare verse 3).

So Job is now ready to answer God as God has told him to (verse 4). His response? As a prelude he says that what he understood of God was based on what he had been taught by others—and that now he is at last able to really see God for himself (verse 5). What exactly did he see? He saw what God had

pointed out—mostly regarding the creation. Notice what the apostle Paul said: “What may be known of God is manifest in [people], for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood [through] the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhood” (see Romans 1:19-20). The loving, caring disposition of Almighty God is powerfully illustrated by the intricacy and complexity of design in nature for the benefit of all living things—especially for man. The creation and sustenance of the universe also illustrates God’s infinite mind and wisdom. Elihu, we should recall, had started onto this great theme with the words, “Remember to magnify His work” (Job 36:24). When this becomes the focus, everything else will fall into place.

With the evidence powerfully before him, Job now gives God the answer God has been preparing him for. Job abhors what he has foolishly uttered, and he repents of it in total humility (Job 42:6). He realizes that his accomplishments cannot be compared with God’s accomplishments, and that what little we accomplish is enabled by God. So Job now sees that nothing in him is worthy of exaltation before God. Rather, he is absolutely dependent on the undeserved love and mercy of his Creator.

God then speaks again, this time addressing Eliphaz, saying that He is angry with him and his two friends Bildad and Zophar because they have not spoken of Him what is right as Job has and that they must go to Job with offerings lest God deal with them according to the foolishness of their words (verses 7-8). This must have stung deeply. These men had come to think that they were defending God’s honor against a blaspheming hypocrite. But they had it all wrong. Still, while we can see that they were wrong about Job, why does God consider that they have spoken ill of *Him*? And why does God say that Job has spoken of Him what is right?

Remember that the friends had basically portrayed God as an uncaring arbiter of justice—a robotic judge who instantly doles out punishments for sin and rewards for righteousness who is unmoved as to which way things go in this regard. This picture effectively disregards God’s patience, love, compassion and mercy. Recall also that Job actually warned the friends about lying against observable evidence in their defense of God—that God would not accept insincere flattery and false witness even if meant to exalt Him (13:7-12). Moreover, their accusations against Job have misrepresented God. In charging Job with being a great sinner and hopeless hypocrite who along with his slain children has received just desserts, they have claimed to stand for God’s principles and so imply that God Himself is behind their charges—and thereby credit God with adding to Job’s torment through their words. Yet, as these charges are really from Satan the Accuser, whose instruments they have unwittingly become, the three friends have essentially labeled the devil’s lies as coming from God. So God now calls them to account.

What about Job? Despite his questioning of God’s justice, Job had all along still fundamentally believed in God’s justice because he had counted on it to vindicate him in the end. Indeed, in the midst of his struggle—even when he felt like God was treating him like an enemy—he still put his hope and faith ultimately in God. He had remarkably stated, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (13:15). As mentioned above, Job maintained that God would not accept someone defending Him through suppressing truth. For, though conflicted and confused, Job still attributed to God the highest standards of integrity. Unlike the almost mechanical God the three friends imagined, Job had argued that God’s infinitely majestic ways were beyond human understanding. (He needed only to more diligently apply this to his own situation.) Job further argued that, contrary to his friends’ contention, God does care whether people choose righteousness or wickedness. Indeed, Job had so much correct. And now at last God had come to help Job clear away the fog of faulty, emotionally charged imagination and let this buffeted man’s thoughts settle on a reasoned conclusion—whereupon Job was quick to repent of his ill-thought-out words and submit to God’s will for his life, whatever that might be.

For all that he had said, Job’s willingness to hang in there with God to the very end spoke even louder. Indeed, it is Job’s perseverance that the apostle James calls attention to in the New Testament as an example for us (see James 5:11). And through it victory is achieved over the Accuser. Yes, Job had fallen into doubt and deep confusion. But he had never cursed God and rejected Him as Satan predicted he would. Instead, he came to a new depth of understanding and faith—so that he was now a stronger servant of God than ever.

To their own credit, Job’s three friends immediately follow God’s order to present sacrificial offerings to Him through Job and have him pray for them (Job 42:9)—as humiliating as this must have been after all the prideful scorn they had heaped on him. Job is then shown here as a wonderful example

of intercessory prayer for others. He could have borne a grudge and really stuck it to his friends at this point for what they had said about him. Instead, he appealed to God to forgive them. And we know his prayer was sincere, or else God would not have accepted it. Then, following this outward demonstration of the humility expressed in his own repentance, God at last restores Job to health and prosperity, giving him double what he had before (verse 10).

Some Bible critics see a problem in Job now being rewarded. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains: "The restoration, it is claimed, contradicts the purpose of the book, which is to present an alternate to the counselors' orthodox view of suffering held as normative in so much of the O[ld] T[estament], wherein the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished]. When Job received again his prosperity, righteousness was rewarded and his whole case defeated. But we would remind the reader that the purpose was not to contradict normative O[ld] T[estament] theology but to provide a balance of truth. All things being equal, sin brings suffering and righteousness blessing. Since Job had successfully endured the test and proved that his righteousness was not rooted in his own selfishness, there was no reason for Job to continue to be tested; his sufferings needed to cease. God created humans so that he might bless them, not curse them. Job had been declared innocent of all those false accusations; so he could not continue to suffer as punishment. And God's higher purpose had been fulfilled; so there was no reason why Job should not be restored" (note no verse 10).

Indeed, an ending of blessing is part of what God wanted to demonstrate through all this. James tells us: "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (James 5:10-11).

We should not take from this that all trials that believers face will end with rich material and family blessings in this life. The point here is to show that God's objective is ultimately to reward those who put their trust in Him and live as He directs. In the end, all believers who suffer will be richly rewarded. And even in this life, the spiritual blessings will be great. These are in fact the greatest blessings, just as they were for Job. Far more significant than his restored health and wealth and rebuilt family and circle of friends was coming to know and understand God in a deeper way with a strengthened commitment and relationship.

Finally, we might ask: Did Job ever learn of the challenge between God and Satan? Certainly whoever wrote the book came to know it—yet perhaps this was through God's later inspiration. Maybe Job himself never knew. If he did come to know it, God decided not to reveal this fact to us in the account. Perhaps that would mislead us into thinking that the purpose for all our own trials will be made known to us in this life—and that is simply not the case. Whatever happens, let us always and ever remember to maintain our trust in God even when we don't understand what He is doing in our lives. For as Romans 8:28 assures us: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

12-DAY BREAK: Preparation for and Observance of

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (Personal study)

April 19-30

Passover will be observed this year on Friday, April 22, after sunset. The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins Saturday, April 23, after sunset, and continues until the sunset of Saturday, April 30. As usual, The Bible Reading Program will pause to allow time for relevant personal study in the days before and during these annual spring festivals. For more information on these important sacred occasions, please see our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

©2005 United Church of God, *an International Association*