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Deconstructing Theodicy: A Fresher Reading of the Book of Job

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INTRODUCTION

If someone were to have approached me, even a year ago, with questions about the meaning of the Book of Job, I would have likely answered something to the tune of “a comprehensive treatise on the purpose of suffering in the life of the good.” Indeed, considering the atmosphere of extreme suffering prevailing nearly every moment of the book, coupled with God’s apparent approval of the entire occasion, one can easily sympathize with the ubiquity of interpretations seeking to make sense of this counterintuitive depiction of Yahweh, a God who seems to claim unequivocal goodness (Ps 145:9; 106:1; Luke 18:19 NLT), allowing, and possibly condoning, extreme chaos to befall His most loyal follower (Job 1:8; 2:6). In addition to the ease with which I was thrown-about by the prevailing winds of popular interpretation, there existed within me a personal motivation for subscribing to the aforementioned interpretation.¹ Indeed, there has never been an answer that I, and perhaps many others, have desired more from God than an answer for why good people are allowed to suffer; the more I read the Book of Job, the more this desire consumed me. “Why are *good people* allowed to suffer?” “Why was *Job* allowed to suffer? Of all people, *Job*?”

Paul teaches us to mourn with those who mourn (Rom 12:15), and hints at the importance of suffering, but that does little to bring us any closer to an understanding of why good people must mourn at all. What of the righteous Job? Doubtless, if anyone deserved an easy life, it was him. Yet despite God’s own recognition of him as “the finest man in all the earth,” Job

¹The summary I have given is in fact what is in the prevailing wind of popular interpretation. Most of the contributors to my research (Wright, Yancey, Estes, Kushner) attempt to use the Book of Job as a vehicle for offering meaning and answers for the existence of suffering in the lives of the good (though, admittedly, in vastly different ways). The point of my thesis is not so much a claim to the contrary but rather an accusation of insufficiency. There is much *more* going on within the Book of Job than these individuals claim.

experienced unspeakable sufferings, which occurred seemingly despite God's own teachings on the consequences of moral action (i.e. Prov. 11:25; 22:8). How could this be?

Each turn of the page in the Book of Job brings an increasing awareness to the primary problem of the book: how is it possible that God could allow Job, or any righteous person for that matter, to experience such a tremendous amount of pain and suffering? This is the Job paradox, which has left a plethora of interpretations in its wake; some more plausible than others, yet each focused on solving what is assumed to be the prevailing concern of the book: why people suffer.

The concern, as it is typically expressed, states that if God is both all-good and all-powerful then he should possess both the desire and the power to stop the types of suffering displayed in the Book of Job. Yet, since the human experience and the contents of Job include gratuitous suffering, then God is either lacking sufficient goodness to care or He simply does not have enough power to do so. Either way, it seems God is in a precarious position: one that has left many struggling to find an answer to this problem so that they might justify maintaining their belief in God's worshipfulness.

Perhaps nowhere in the entire Bible is this struggle displayed more than in the Book of Job. Indeed, 38 chapters vividly display the woeful attempts of four wise teachers trying to reconcile the reality of Job's suffering with their shared belief in a just and powerful God. As readers moving through the problems of Job, we can often empathize with each character. Indeed, each step forward is wrought with hopeful expectation and the more palpable the problem the louder and more heartfelt our demand for justice becomes. There exist few, if any, problems more relatable than the problem of pain. Indeed, the problem of pain is humanity's most widely shared aspect of human life on this earth. Therefore, it is only natural for some to

expect the Book of Job to provide an answer to the problem it so vividly displays: the existence of God and the reality of suffering. Job's readership, not unlike Job himself, respond to Job's pain with a cry for justice and understanding. There is likely to be nothing we, the readers, desire more than for God to show up and provide Job and, by extension, the church, an answer for why good people suffer.

However, our mere desire can no more shape the purpose of the Book of Job than Job himself could shape the earth's foundations (Job 38:4; c.f. 40:1-5). Our cry for answers cannot force the Book of Job to provide them. Moreover, the pursuit of purpose must never be motivated by felt-needs but rather by an unfettered demand for truth. Therefore, the church must not settle on an interpretation for the Book of Job merely because it makes us feel better or because it makes suffering somehow more palatable. As Karl Barth once stated, "The quest for truth is inherently critical."²

This is not to say that finding the true purpose behind the Book of Job is easy. Indeed, the entire concept of righteous suffering is so foreign, so unreasonable, to our modern sensibility that the readership of the Book of Job, indeed Job himself, often find themselves repulsed into a flippant torrent of anger and confusion.³ Questions of "why?" plague the conscience of the readership as they, standing alongside the suffering Job, demand answers, crying, "God, how could you allow the suffering of such an amazing individual?" "Do You even care?" "Are You truly as good as You claim?" The sentiment expressed is that we, both Job and the church, want

² Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 38.

³ This claim, though anecdotal, is not unwarranted. The story of Job is, arguably, meant to induce a vivid and emotional response. I believe the reaction and dialogue of the characters themselves affirm the appropriateness of this type of language. Moreover, some philosophers would argue that it is neither desirable nor possible to be a neutral observer (i.e. Alison Jaggar and Grace Jentzen). If true (and I believe it is), it would be dishonest of me not to include it.

an answer, and since we want an answer, God must have provided that answer within the pages of the Book of Job. However, this raises at least one thought-provoking question: Assuming we deserve an answer, does the Book of Job provide it? While many might respond in the affirmative, as it is a popular interpretation of the book, I am not convinced. Indeed, the more I reflect on my research, the more convinced I become that despite being given such a tremendous amount of shelf-space within the Book of Job, the topic of suffering exists as a mere incidental aspect of something much deeper and more profound than the sufferings of a mere man.

Since my research into Job began, I have become convinced that popular interpretations, which tend to focus on theodicy, are not accurate reflections of the book's message. Indeed, the sufferings of Job, though integral to an accurate understating of the book that bears his name, have become a distraction from its primary purpose. Moreover, if the readership allow themselves to rise above the contextual ground floor of the poem they will recognize the sufferings of Job as merely one tree among many within a lush poetic forest, rich with both prophetic and Christological significance. That said, I both recognize and appreciate that, for many, any relatively atypical interpretation of the Book of Job may be cause for concern. As a reluctant colleague of mine once remarked in response to my argument, "Fair enough, but one cannot deny that the Job poet saw fit to devote 30 plus chapters, if not the whole book, to the express topic of suffering. By suggesting the purpose of the book is something that moves against, rather than with, the path of least resistance, are you not, in some way, moving farther away, rather than closer, to the goal of authorial intent?" To which I answered, "No, and also yes. But mainly no." An honest, albeit complex, answer, which, I believe, reflects the complexities of the book itself.

Doubtless, Job's sufferings play an invaluable role within the purpose of the book and therefore must relate to the intent of the author. However, the question remains: "what *is* the purpose of the Book of Job?" What should readers glean from Job's story? The method I used for approaching these questions in my research was to emulate Socrates, asking "why" at every opportunity.⁴ Indeed, when seeking out the purpose of the Book of Job, the readership will likely benefit greatly by asking themselves "why?" For example, why did Job say this and not that? Why does the Joban poet describe Job's "comforters" one way rather than another? Why does the Joban poet both begin and end his book from a heavenly perspective? Why does the Joban poet not provide any historical context? After asking, "Why?" to nearly every passage in the book, I have concluded that the author of the Book of Job did not write the way he did so that Israel (or the modern church) might have an answer for why good people suffer. Moreover, I am convinced that if Job's readership adopts a similar approach to the Socratic path I have walked for the last several months, they too will reach a conclusion similar to my own: namely, that the Book of Job fails to provide a sufficient answer for why people suffer and therefore *must* have some other purpose.

While I cannot deny the tremendous amount of attention given to the sufferings of Job, a righteous man, I have come to the conclusion that the purpose of the book has less to do with an answer for why good people suffer, and more to do with exactly what God has done, and continues to do to rectify that suffering, culminating in the Christ event. Stated simply, the Book

⁴ Socrates was known for constantly asking "Why?" Hopefully we don't get the same ultimate answer he did.

of Job exists as a harbinger, to all those with eyes to see and ears to hear, to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: explaining what to expect and how to respond to a suffering messiah.⁵

Furthermore, it is important the reader understand what the thesis is not, lest he or she criticize it for something it was never intended to be. It is not a robust commentary on the Book of Job nor is it a comprehensive presentation on the merits of either a Christocentric or Christotelic reading of the Old Testament. Moreover, while I argue what I believe is a warranted interpretation for the Book of Job, I am not attempting to highlight apostolic agreement or trace firm connections between testaments. What follows should not be mistaken as an argument for *the* interpretation of the Book of Job but rather one suggesting a *potential* interpretation as an alternative to theodicy. I believe an argument could be constructed to show the interpretation offered here is the most appropriate but to do so would require an extensive investigation into the original languages of the testaments, 2nd temple hermeneutics, the interpretive traditions of both Jesus and the apostles, and a robust understanding of biblical theology. Doubtless a worthwhile endeavor, but one that must wait for another time.

PART I: THEODICEAN INTERPRETATIONS OF JOB

Before I begin, I want to emphasize the sympathy I genuinely have for those intent on seeing the Book of Job as an answer to the problem of evil. A cursory reading does seem to suggest such an interpretation. Moreover, I understand the desire for order and balance in the

⁵ Reverend Christopher Ash, in a discussion about his book *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*, states, “Like every Bible book, Job is most deeply a book about God and specifically about Jesus Christ, the righteous man who suffers unjustly and is finally vindicated by his Father. It is a mistake to think the book speaks simply to human suffering as a universal experience; for the central character who suffers is very far from a typical or universal human being; he is conspicuously great, exceptionally upright, and definitively righteous. Job in his extremeness foreshadows Jesus in his uniqueness,” pg 56. Similarly, Lindsey Wilson in an essay on the Book of Job highlights that the only time the NT names Job, it is in relation to his steadfastness in light of his vindication in the end (similar to Christ’s experience). See in particular, Kevin Vanhoozer et al., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of The Bible* (London: SPCK, 2005), 387.

midst of chaos, especially given the reality of God's existence.⁶ Indeed, a demand for balance where there is apparently none seems so deeply ingrained within the consciousness of humankind that any notion of genuine coincidence or perpetual disequilibrium become cause for great fear and confusion, which contradicts most understandings of Yahweh as the all-good and all-powerful God of the universe. In some sense, humans desire understanding and in the midst of the human predicament many feel forced to sacrifice their belief in at least one of three areas: God's omni-benevolence, God's omnipotence, or the existence of gratuitous evil (i.e. randomness/coincidence)⁷. As the argument typically goes, if God is all-loving, he would want to end evil and if he is all-powerful, he could end all evil; yet evil exists. Therefore, either God is not all-loving or he is not all-powerful. The specific force of this argument, while modern, is not lost within an Ancient Near-Eastern (ANE) context. Indeed, the dialogue between Job and his friends clearly demonstrates a reluctance to accept any notion of randomness or coincidence, a notion seemingly contrary to most wisdom teachings.⁸ Humankind, including Job, simply struggle to handle the idea of randomness in a universe created by Yahweh.

Harold S. Kushner, commenting on such sentiments, states, "Some people cannot handle the idea of [randomness in the universe]. They look for connections, striving desperately to make sense of all that happens. They convince themselves that God is cruel, or that they are sinners,

⁶ This paper assumes the existence of God. While arguments for God's existence are important, they exist outside the scope of this essay.

⁷ Chaos: Randomness and extreme coincidence can be interpreted as gratuitous evil, at least in some sense.

⁸ Assuming the content of Job reflects the theological milieu of the time, Job (a wisdom teacher) would have likely assumed a strong belief in God's omnipotence.

rather than accept randomness.”⁹ I am inclined to agree.¹⁰ Not only do I experience this both personally and in other people, but also within the pages of the Book of Job. Indeed, it appears it was easier for both Job and the “comforters” to believe suffering existed for the express purpose of some greater good (either known or unknown) than to see suffering as the result of mere coincidence.¹¹ These followers of Yahweh, when presented with seemingly contradictory information (i.e. the cohabitation of righteousness and suffering in the life of one person), abandon the most likely of answers for ones that vindicate God; they create theodicies, which, in the case of Job, seems altogether inappropriate.¹² Indeed, in the case of Job, both he and his “comforters” quickly trade their comforting dialogues (or lack thereof) for ones that sought to defend God above all else.¹³ Kushner’s remarks concerning this human tendency possess a striking relevance within the dialogue of Job and his comforters: either God is cruel or someone has sinned. Indeed, the characters within the Book of Job choose to either “convince themselves that God is cruel, or that they are sinners, rather than accept randomness.”¹⁴

⁹ Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 46.

¹⁰ While Kushner has much to offer on the topic of suffering, he chooses to abandon God’s omnipotence and by doing so abandons classical theism and goes to a place that I am unwilling to go.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, in his essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials*, depicts Job’s friends in a similar fashion, stating, “Job’s friends declare themselves for that system which explains all ills in the world from God’s justice, as so many punishments for crimes committed; and, although they could name none for which the unhappy man is guilty, yet they believed they could judge *a priori* that he must have some weighing upon him, for his misfortune would otherwise be impossible according to divine justice.”

¹² Kant charges Job’s friends with insincerity, which seems likely given that the most appropriate understanding of Job’s predicament was something that championed a certain level theological flexibility; not something that abandoned what the friends already claimed to know about Job (Job’s overall righteousness).

¹³ This is not a critique of all theodicies but rather a critique of *Job* as a theodicy; a point that will be highlighted throughout the thesis.

¹⁴ Kushner, 35.

Rather than accepting randomness, Job chooses the former, prior to the epilogue, convincing himself God is either cruel, above any notion of unequivocal justice, or both stating, “If God snatches someone in death, who can stop him? Who dares ask, ‘What are you doing?’ . . . If it is a question of strength, he is the strong one. If it is a matter of justice, who dares to summon him to court? Though I am innocent, my own mouth would pronounce me guilty. Innocent or wicked, it is all the same to God” (Job 9:12-22 NLT). Job’s theodicy, his attempt at divine vindication, is to abandon God’s goodness.

Job’s “comforters” also refused to accept coincidence but, unlike Job, maintained God’s goodness. Their response was to convince both themselves and everyone involved, Job especially, that no injustice had taken place but rather, as Kushner highlights, insist the sufferer (i.e. Job) was a sinner (4:7-8; 8:3-4; 11:2-6). The theodicy of the comforters was to delegitimize the existence of evil so God’s goodness and power could be justifiably maintained. For these four individuals (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophor, and Elihu) God is always good and nothing in this world happens outside his express, intentional, and active will. Even the Joban poet recognizes the desire for balance and may even sympathize with the characters of his poem to some degree. Moreover, if the emotions and theologies presented in the Book of Job are in any way a reflection of the social and theological milieu of the day, then those who want the Book of Job to be an answer to the problem of evil perhaps find themselves in good company.¹⁵ However, as previously stated, mere desire cannot shape the purpose of Scripture, even if that desire is reflected in the books themselves. Therefore, at least two questions are still in need of an answer: (1) “If Job, Job comforters, and potentially the Joban poet display a desire to vindicate God in

¹⁵ I am assuming the date of Job to be between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.

the midst of apparent evil (c.f. theodicy), then how can the book *not* be a theodicy?” and (2) “If Job is not a theodicy, what *is* it?”

Chapter 1: Flawed Attempts at Theodicy

Recognizing the flaws that afflict theodicean interpretations for the Book of Job is dependent on one’s criteria for a successful theodicy, which requires a basic understanding of theodicies. According to J. S. Feinberg, a theodicy is an argument, written or otherwise, which attempts to “resolve the problem of evil for a theological system and demonstrates that God is all-powerful, all-loving, and just despite evil’s existence.”¹⁶ Stated simply, a theodicy is an attempt to justify the choices of God to humankind. A successful theodicy, according to Feinberg, has six basic features: (1) responds to the logical consistency of a theological position, (2) possesses relevancy to the specific problem presented, (3) remains compatible with the theology it assumes, 4) deals expressly within the realm of logical consistency, (5) adopts an axiom with regard to moral agency and blameworthiness, and (6) resolves apparent contradictions in theology through claims that God cannot remove said evil.¹⁷ Using these six features as a litmus test, the reader can begin to comment on the validity of different theodicean interpretations of the Book of Job.¹⁸

Job’s Theodicy

Beginning with the first point, Feinberg states, “Most attacks on theistic systems charge that their key theological claims, e.g., God is omnipotent, God is all-loving, and evil exists in a

¹⁶ Walter A Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 1184.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1184 – 1185.

¹⁸ A difference exists between a theodicy and mere defense.

world created by God, taken together are self-contradictory. *The theodacist's task is to structure an answer that demonstrates that these propositions taken together are logically consistent.*"¹⁹

Therefore, if the Joban poet wrote the Book of Job in order to resolve the problem of pain, it is up to him to construct an answer within the book describing how consistency might be maintained within a theological system that claims both the omni-qualities of God and the existence of suffering. If this is indeed the purpose of the book, then the premise will maintain, perhaps even strengthen, its believability in the midst of critical interaction. The Joban poet has provided more than a sufficient amount of material to test the validity of the aforementioned thesis. Indeed, both Job and his comforters attempt to reconcile their theology with Job's apparent suffering, albeit in different ways. The theodicies constructed by both Job and the comforters provide the material for the litmus test; each will be judged accordingly.

A God without Goodness

Prior to his suffering, Job would have comfortably held to the wisdom teachings of his day, expressed more specifically by the "friends," namely that God is fair, just, and all-powerful causing everything that happens in the world. Therefore, so long as Job maintained his health and wealth he could justifiably maintain his theological system (i.e. God's omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and his innocence). However, when Job began to suffer, and suffer terribly, he could no longer make sense of all three propositions together, which forced him to reconcile the reality of his suffering by denying one of three premises: God's power, God's goodness, or his own righteousness.

For Job, cursing God was not an option (2:9-10). He would neither abandon his belief in God's power (12:13-21), nor proclaim himself guilty (31). Two things were certain to Job: God's

¹⁹ Ibid.

power and his own innocence. However, this presented a problem not just for Job but also for all humanity. In light of his suffering, Job must consider that perhaps God does not operate exactly the way he once thought. Job must now weigh the reality of his predicament against the ostensible certainty of his theology and come to a new understanding. Job's answer, his theodicy, is found in Job 30:21-22, which reads, "'I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me. You have become cruel to me; with the might of Your hand You persecute me.'" In other words, Job assumes the validity of his theology of the world and his presumption that things work according to a system of universal justice. However, God is so powerful that He is not subject to the rules of fair play. Rather than reconsider his theology of retribution in his moments of suffering, Job answers the question "Why do good people suffer?" prior to the epilogue by abandoning his belief in God's objective sense of justice and goodness. In his eyes, the only way to reconcile God's existence with the reality of his own suffering was to make God both over and distinct from human understandings of morality and justice (9:24). However, Job does not construct a new theological system that allows for such a move; admitting later that much of his lament was the mere results of a man in pain (6:1-5). Indeed, Job affirms many of the general theological assumptions of his comforters just not in this particular case. Therefore, Job's attempt at reconciling God's existence with the reality of his own suffering existed largely despite his theological system not because of it. Indeed, one could rightly argue that Job's pain was the primary cause of his words more so than his reason, which calls into question the level of sincerity in his newfound "belief" in God's goodness (or lack thereof). By responding in this way, *Job has failed to display that his theological propositions taken together are logically consistent*. Indeed, for Job, the only way he could maintain his belief in God was to abandon God's goodness and in the absence of

constructing a new theological position (i.e. Voluntarism), Job fails to meet Feinberg's first earmark of a successful theodicy.

Feinberg's second point claims, "A successful theodicy must be relevant to the problem of evil it address. . . The theodacist must construct a system relevant to the problem of evil confronting him or her."²⁰ Job answer is consistent with the type of evil he faces. However, Feinberg's second earmark exists as a necessary but insufficient aspect of a successful theodicy. Recall that Job has, in some sense, abandoned his belief in God's goodness.

Feinberg's third point argues, "The theodacist must construct a defense of God's ways as they are portrayed in his or her theological position."²¹ Again, while Job does construct a defense of God, it does not remain consistent with his theology. This is most clearly seen when Eliphaz accuses Job of being unwilling to apply his own teachings (4:1-7). Job, responding in chapter 6, does not deny Eliphaz' specific accusation, but rather implies that his teachings do not apply in this particular circumstance. This further highlights Job's "failure" in providing a solid theodicy. Indeed, a theodicy is of little help to humankind if it only applies to one person who may or may not be real. It does no good to take Job or the "comforters" explanations in isolation as a means of literary cohesion because the intent of the book is the prerogative of the author not the characters in his story.

Point four states, "The problem of evil in its various forms is always a problem of logical consistency, and as such is interesting only for theologies that incorporate a notion of God's omnipotence according to which he may do any logical consistent thing. If one holds that God can do anything whatsoever, even actualize contradictions, then there is no sense in talking about

²⁰ Ibid., 1184

²¹ Ibid., 1184

the logical consistency.”²² While Job does not explicitly state a belief that God may actualize the logically inconsistent, he does imply it. This inference stems from how the friends phrase certain statements, which seem to imply that Job still holds to a theology that sees God as good, despite his statements to the contrary (again, perhaps Job is merely speaking from pain as opposed to reason). For example, Eliphaz states, “*Remember*: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?” or the rhetorical way Bildad asks Job, “Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?” (Job 4:7 emphasis added; 8:3). The rhetorical flourish of Bildad makes little sense if Job has completely abandoned God’s goodness. Therefore, by claiming that God can do evil, Job has constructed what no rational theodicy may construct: logical inconsistency.

Point five highlights the absence of responsibility for those who act under compulsion or constraint. This does not appear applicable to Job’s attempts at reconciling his predicament. Indeed, there appears to be little doubt in Job’s mind that it is God, and only God, who is responsible for the circumstances he now finds himself in. While the Satan does appear to be goading God into a wager, one could hardly argue the Satan had so much power over God that He acted out of compulsion or constraint, not to mention Job has no knowledge of the wager. This point will be revisited later.

The final characteristic of a successful theodicy, according to Feinberg, is one that “attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction by arguing that God, in spite of his omnipotence, cannot remove the evil.”²³ For example, one might argue that considering God cannot perform

²² Ibid., 1185.

²³ Ibid.

the logically inconsistent that it is impossible for him to accomplish two opposing ends simultaneously. Therefore, if God desires free will, which can lead to certain evils, it is not likely that He can successfully eliminate the evil without destroying that which He means to maintain, free will. Such an argument appears altogether lost on Job. Indeed, Job does not argue that God *cannot* destroy evil but rather that God capriciously *chooses* not to destroy evil. Based on Job's theodicy, prior to the epilogue, God remains guilty for the evils of this world and there is nothing we can do but hope for death.

Job has failed to provide a satisfactory answer for why good people are allowed to suffer. Indeed, Job's answer is that God is cruel, but we should worship Him anyways, which is neither palatable nor acceptable to any honest seeker of truth. Indeed, such an interpretation introduces a plethora of philosophical concerns, flies in the face of various other passages in Scripture (see above), and makes little sense considering Job's own theology and the context surrounding his ultimate repentance in the epilogue.²⁴

Theodicy of the Friends

Job is not the only one left scrambling for an answer. While he lies in a state of pure agony, the "comforters" begin to construct their own theodicies. The friends, having no inside knowledge of Job's circumstance, though perhaps equally confounded, respond much differently from Job. Unlike Job, the response of the friends is not one that dismisses God's goodness, but rather one that dismisses the evil nature of Job's suffering. For the friends, Job's sufferings are not the result of the capricious actions of a cruel God but rather the punitive actions of a just

²⁴ "It could be argued it is a firm religious requirement that the believer trust God absolutely and obey him unconditionally, and that this sort of trust and obedience would be morally unwarranted and improper unless God was held to be necessarily good." Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, 1st ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 59. The implications being that if God was not good, all sorts of moral fall-out would occur. Therefore, philosophically speaking, to abandon God's goodness creates more problems than it solves.

God. When asked, “Why do people suffer?” the friends might quickly retort, “Because sinners deserve punishment!” Stated simply, suffering is not an evil to be lamented but rather a discipline to be embraced (5:17). Therefore, suffering, according to the theology of the friends, exists as the mere punitive, albeit good, expressions of God’s justice, and as such, do not endanger God’s moral standing. Formally known as “retribution theology,” the theology of the friends essentially affirms the notion “one reaps what one sows.” Therefore, suffering (even extreme suffering) only *appears* evil. From a heavenly perspective, suffering is merely the result of God’s expressions of divine justice: an attribute worthy of praise.

Practically speaking, the arguments of Job’s comforters are much better than the arguments offered by Job himself. Unlike Job, the comforters present multiple, logically sound arguments, which, arguably, succeed in reconciling God’s goodness and power with the reality of Job’s terrible suffering. The friends also carry with them the support of sound biblical teaching (i.e. Exod 20: 5-6; Deut 32:25; Prov 24:12; 28:10; Nah 1:2; Gen.18: 25, Ps 68:11-12, etc.).²⁵ Moreover, they offer logical consistency, which meet Feinberg’s criteria: relevancy to the type of evil presented, fairness to the theology of each party, and answer the paradox of why God does not stop the apparent evil, despite being capable. The only problem is that the theodicies of the friends depend solely on the guilt of Job, which, according to God himself, is not the case. Indeed, Job is not guilty but rather “blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil,” (Job 1:8). To suggest otherwise is to read past the text though this does not mean that some have not tried.

²⁵ Worth mentioning is that just because the friends’ distinct ways of reconciling God’s ways with Job’s suffering does not apply in Job’s case does not mean they are wrong. Wisdom and understanding is more than the mere reading of a proverb. It must be coupled with the ability to read the situation alongside the proverb.

Certain individuals have attempted to discredit or devalue the righteousness of Job in an attempt to reconcile God's actions with Job's afflictions. Arthur Jacobson, for example, has posited Job to have been a "Man without a penchant for love" who possessed "pagan temptations."²⁶ Perhaps this particular aspect of the Joban story is in need of clarification, yet if the Christian is to take the Scriptures seriously, God's proclamation of Job as "blameless – a man of complete integrity" must be upheld (Job 1:8). Without Job's innocence, the entire story makes little sense. Commentating on the innocence of Job, Francis I. Anderson agrees, claiming, "Job was right, but not self-righteous, to insist on his own integrity, to complain that his suffering was undeserved, and to demand from God Himself an explanation of how justice was to be found in such unprovoked torture. The Book of Job loses its point if the righteousness of Job is not taken as genuine."²⁷ Therefore, despite providing a theologically sound treatise on the existence of suffering, the friends fail to address the primary issue at hand. Indeed, the question is not "Is Job guilty?" but rather "Why do the *righteous* suffer?" As Job has shown us, suffering is not exclusively reserved for the wicked.

The Joban Poet

Every attempt, by both Job and his comforters, to create a working theodicy for the sufferings of the righteous crumble at both the sheer weight of evidence and the words of God Himself. Indeed, the dialogue between Job and his friends does little, if anything, to bring the reader one step closer to an answer for why God allows good people to suffer, leaving the relationship between Job and theodicy as tenuous, at best. In light of these failures, the Book of Job, as a theodicy, appears less than likely. However, one perspective remains unexplored: the

²⁶ Arthur Jacobson. "Job's Justice," *Cardozo Law Review* 34 (2015): 988-989.

²⁷ Francis Anderson, *Sitting With Job*. Edited by Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 183.

author's perspective. The possibility remains that despite the aforementioned failures of both Job and the comforters, the Joban poet may yet have us see his book as an answer to the problem of pain. Perhaps he provided certain contextual clues that exist outside the conversations of Job and the comforters, which, if taken together, lend themselves toward an understanding of the Book of Job as a theodicy.

This possibility is not entirely out of the question, and as such, worthy of exploration. Indeed, if one is honest about the nature of the interpretive enterprise, one will realize that certain contextual clues are not always easily recognizable, not at first anyways. In light of this, certain individuals might become motivated to argue that recognizing the theodicy of Job requires that the reader take into account not only the dialogue but also the prologue, epilogue, and overall framework of the book. Philip Yancey, author of "A Fresh Reading of the Book of Job," is one of these individuals. According to Yancey, the Book of Job is an invitation for you and me to accept our suffering as we "join the struggle to reverse all that is wrong with the universe."²⁸

Philip Yancey

Yancey begins his argument by encouraging readers to adopt a cosmic perspective as they read the Book of Job. According to Yancey, God's wager with the Satan (Job 1:6-12), the resulting sufferings of Job, and the cosmic setting of both the prologue and epilogue exist as contextual clues, which lend themselves towards a theodicean interpretation of the Book of Job. That said, Yancey does claim, "Job is not really about the problem of pain."²⁹ However, despite this affirmation, much of what Yancey goes on to teach exists in clear contrast to that claim. This is most clearly seen within the culminating moments of his essay, which amounts to an account

²⁸ Philip Yancey, *Sitting With Job*. Edited by Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 148.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

that shares important features with a typical greater-good theodicy. Indeed, the Joban poet, according to Yancey, attempts to alleviate the problem of pain by showing that God allows people to experience suffering so that a good, of cosmic scale, might obtain.

Yancey begins this argument by inviting the reader to shift the focus from what seems to be a struggle between Job and God, to the more substantial, but often overlooked struggle going on behind the scenes: the struggle between God and Satan, in which Job plays a vital role. Yancey, discussing the wager found in the first chapter of the book, claims, “Yes, there was an arm wrestling match, but it wasn’t between Job and God. Rather, *Satan* and God were the chief combatants, although, most significantly, God had designated the man Job as his stand-in. The first and last chapters make clear that Job was unknowingly performing in a cosmic showdown before spectators in the unseen world.”³⁰ Therefore, according to Yancey, the primary purpose for the Book of Job is to teach that the actions of the faithful, more importantly, the cosmic consequences of the faithful in action are inseparably linked with the existence of suffering. Confirming this interpretation, Yancey states, “Why, then, is Job suffering? Not for punishment. Far from it – he has been selected as the principal player in a great contest of the heavens.”³¹ Worth mentioning is that this interpretation either applies to everyone or merely Job. If it applies to everyone, it is normative and capable of being understood as a theodicy. If it is a narrative text that only applies to Job one must wonder if, or even how, such a story might apply to the modern sufferer and if it does not, why did Yancey write an entire article on the subject?

Yancey furthers his thesis by drawing parallels between the wager between God and the Satan (1:6-12) and other passages in Scripture. Referencing Revelation 12, Yancey likens Job’s

³⁰ Ibid., 144

³¹ Ibid., 142.

role in the cosmic struggle to that of the pregnant woman in verses 1-6. Job's suffering, according to Yancey, is not unlike the faithful actions of the pregnant woman, which, in the midst of great tribulation, deal a decisive blow to the red dragon, Satan. The implication being that the suffering was justified because of the good obtained. In other words, "ends justified the means." In regards to Job, Yancey makes the argument that his sufferings were, not unlike the pregnant woman of Revelation 12, the result of a great battle for the maintenance and strengthening of both his faith and the faith of every living person. Indeed, Job's faith in the midst of suffering had profound consequences in the unseen world that, perhaps, in its absence might not have obtained. It is worth quoting Yancey here at length:

Hence what seems like an "ordinary" action in the seen world may have an extraordinary effect on the unseen world: a short-term mission assignment causes Satan to fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10); a sinner's repentance sets off celestial celebration (Luke 15); a baby's birth disturbs the entire universe (Revelation 12). An ordinary person in the seen world, Job was called upon to endure a trial with cosmic consequences. Job affirms that our response to testing *matters*.³²

It is unclear whether Yancey believes the tribulations of Job were actual events, but his thesis is unmistakable: God allowed suffering to obtain in the lives of Job, Job's children, and Job's servants so the faith of Job might be used as a weapon against the unseen enemies of God's ultimate plan of redemption. Therefore, the enduring principle, the lesson that the church ought to bring home after reading the Book of Job (according to Yancey) is that God allows suffering so our faith might be used to frustrate the plans of Satan. This is most clearly seen towards the end of Yancey's article where he states, "I have come to see Job's trials as a crucial test of human freedom. We want to believe that the thousand choices we make each day somehow count. And the Book of Job insists that they do. God has granted to ordinary men and women the

³² Ibid., 145-146.

dignity of participating in the Great Reversal which will restore the cosmos to its pristine state.”³³ Adding, “When tragedy strikes, we will live in the shadow, unaware of what is transpiring in the unseen world. The drama that Job lived through will then replicate itself in our individual lives. Once again, God will let his reputation ride on the response of unpredictable human beings . . . the Wager is to develop us.”³⁴ Therefore, to the question, “Why does God allow good people to suffer?” Yancey might respond, “So that we might fulfill our role in the actualization of the Great Reversal.” The Great Reversal, according to Yancey, is the actualization of God’s promises, which is a good worth the pains of our suffering.

PART II: A THEODICY NOT QUITE RIGHT

Yancey begins his essay with the assertion “Job is not really about the problem of pain,” which is odd, considering he follows up this claim by sharing an interpretation which, to all intents and purposes, reads very much like what he claims the book is “not really about.”³⁵ If the Book of Job is not about the problem of pain then it seems likely that no answer exists within the pages of book for the question of why people suffer. Yet, despite this, Yancey seems compelled to provide one. Despite this tension, Yancey’s argument remains, which, despite claims to the contrary, is an argument calling every reader to view his or her suffering as a holy honor; a sign of participation in the battle for the Great Reversal. This argument views a person’s participation in battle as a good to such a degree that it justifies the choice of God to allow the types of suffering described in the prologue of Job. Stated simply, the sufferings of Job were justified because of the good that came of it.

³³ Ibid., 147-148.

³⁴ Ibid., 147.

³⁵ Ibid., 142.

Regardless of Yancey's claim to the contrary and for reasons stated above, his interpretation calls on the reader to see the Book of Job as a greater-good theodicy, which, according to Bruce Little, is any theology claiming that "God allows only the evil from which He can bring about a greater-good or prevent a worse evil." Adding, "[Greater-good theodicy] has not only proven to be unconvincing, but also has in fact committed the theist to a very questionable position that unnecessarily requires him to prove more than is possible."³⁶ Using Bruce Little's definition as a lens, one can easily recognize Yancey's interpretation as a greater-good theodicy. Moreover, if theodicies, like Yancey's, suffer from such fundamental flaws, as Little suggests, then this severely limits the possibility that any biblical interpretation that hinges its accuracy on the validity of such a theodicy is even capable of accurately reflecting the purpose of the book. Notice it does no good merely to suggest that God *could* operate in such a way, which I concede. Indeed, the question is not "*Could* God bring a greater-good out of the evil of Job's tremendous suffering" but rather, "Is the best understanding and application of the Book of Job one that emphasizes the purpose of suffering in the life of the good?" To which I respond, "No." Indeed, this interpretation fails for both philosophical and contextual reasons.

Chapter II: Philosophical Weaknesses of a Joban Theodicy

Beginning with the philosophical flaws, one would do well to commit to memory Little's definition of a greater-good theodicy, which reads, "God allows only the evil from which He can bring about a greater-good or prevent a worse evil." Therefore, if Yancey is correct, the Joban poet would have you and I believe in a God who allowed the physical abuse of Job (2:7), the murder of both his children and his servants (1:14-16; 19), the destruction and theft of his property (1:14-16), the emotional abandonment of his family (2:9), and the ridicule of his friends

³⁶ Bruce A Little, *God, Why This Evil?* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Books, 2010), 2.

(4-25) all for the sake of one man's actions (or the consequences of those actions). Also worth mentioning is that Yancey does not limit this paradigm to the story of Job. For Yancey, this is an enduring principle; you and I, in the midst of great suffering, have been given an opportunity to participate with God in His plan for ultimate redemption, and we ought to be thankful. Such an understanding, according to Yancey, ought to alleviate the pains of suffering.

While I do not agree with Yancey entirely, his argument is not void of insight. Doubtless God *could* use suffering to provide His creation with an opportunity to participate in His ultimate plan for redemption. Admittedly, I believe God likely acts in this way. For example, one's bravery in the midst of suffering might lead an onlooker to seek out the source of that bravery (i.e. Christ), which might result in his or her reconciliation with God. However, there exists a great chasm between saying that God can provide opportunities *in the midst of suffering* and saying that suffering is *in and of itself*, the opportunity God provides. The former suggests that God is capable of redeeming suffering while the latter suggests that God desires and perhaps even needs our suffering to occur.

The flaws of such an understanding are palpable even for those with nearly no educational means to recognize them. One specific flaw of this and other greater-good theodicies lies in the sheer burden of evidence it places upon itself in the midst of extreme forms of suffering. Indeed, it would appear that in a post-Marxism, post-holocaust, post-9/11 world, the task of finding a greater-good in the midst of such tragedies lie, as Little suggests, outside the reach of the theodicist. In regards to the Book of Job and, by extension, Yancey, in order for the Joban poet to deliver a successful greater-good theodicy he would have to show Job's sufferings were not only necessary but also show that the resulting good could have only obtained as a result of those sufferings. Out of such an objective come two irreparable problems: (1) it posits a

necessary evil and (2) shows a certain good as an objectively more substantial end than the evilness of its means.

The importance of language must be stressed on this occasion because the word “greater” can be easily lost when placed within conversation of greater-good, sovereignty, and divine blessing. The theodicy in question should not be conflated as a commensurate-good theodicy or a better-for-some theodicy. Rather it calls for the belief in an objectively better result than the evilness of its means. Any strength that might be had towards delivering a palatable interpretation of the Book of Job is immediately lost when the interpreter requires that the reader believe in a God who is dependent upon evil to bring about His plans. Such a mindset creates a bizarre world in which the obedience of Adam and Eve would have somehow thwarted the plans of God. Little, commenting on the evidence needed to both prove the necessity of a particular evil and to measure the degree of any related good, states, “In the end, one must realize that no objective measure exists, and in addition, there is no way to determine (at least in many cases) the causal relationship between the evil and the good. It is in light of such difficulties that a credibility problem arises for the theist if this is his answer to the existence of evil.”³⁷

To posit a necessary evil is to say God *needed* Job to suffer so He could use Job’s faith as a weapon against Satan. Such an accusation is, at the very least, a challenge to both God’s omnipotence and to the moral faculties of every mentally capable and morally sensitive human being. Indeed, in what sense can any knowledgeable individual say that God *needs* human beings in order to bring about the actualization of a new heavens and new earth? If Yancey dodges the charge by claiming God does not *need* men in order to achieve victory but rather God merely desires human beings be *involved* in that victory, then he has succeeded only in making Job’s

³⁷ Ibid., 3.

suffering unnecessary for the actualization of God's ultimate plan. If Job's sufferings were unnecessary then God knew this yet allowed Job to suffer anyways. To claim that God sent terrible suffering to the feet of Job (including the death of his children), despite not having to, ought to be much too big a pill to swallow for any morally aware individual. This is *not* to say that God does not possess certain prerogatives that we do not. However, with great fear and trembling, I submit to you that there exists certain moral lines that a good God simply cannot cross. To the charge that "The Bible just contains harsh realities," I offer the words of David Baggett:

This is the large grain of truth in John Locke's recognition that, though the Bible is entirely reliable, reason can help us understand it rightly. This doesn't mean that its contents have to be knowable a priori, but its teachings can't so fundamentally grate against our rational or moral deliverances that our belief is simply rendered irrational or immoral. That's the path of dogmatism and fideism, and that's where a simplistic hermeneutic that excludes the relevance of philosophical considerations can land us.³⁸

Furthermore, if the point of the Book of Job is, as Yancey suggests, to provide its readers with a prophylactic for suffering in the form of a teaching that claims our faith, even in the midst of terrible suffering, is a holy honor; one that deals decisively with the powers of evil, then it fails entirely to describe why faith apart from suffering is not equally capable of achieving those same decisive blows. This is the second charge to the necessity of the evil. Indeed, what is it about Job's suffering that allows his faith to become effective? Recall that Job did not become faithful through suffering, rather Job was loyal "like no other man" *before* his suffering. Why, then, was Job's prior faith incapable of achieving the same ends? What is it about Job's tenuous faith in the midst of great suffering that is so much more effective in battle than that of his steadfast faith while he was both healthy and wealthy? If no difference exists, Job was made to suffer for nothing, which, again, calls into question God's benevolence. Notice it does no good to argue, from, for example, some

³⁸ David Baggett and Jerry L Walls, *Good God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76-77.

misguided understanding of Isaiah 55 that the greater-good in question lies beyond our ken, because this only further reinforces Bruce Little's claim that "there is no way to determine (at least in many cases) the causal relationship between the evil and the good."³⁹ Therefore, in light of the philosophical difficulties of understanding Job as a theodicy, one ought to consider other potential purposes for the Book of Job. Moreover, the flaws of greater-good theodicies, in general, were discussed so an interpretation finding fault in Yancey's greater-good (GG) theodicy while claiming other GG theodicies might still be applicable to the Book of Job fall equally short.⁴⁰

That said, I understand the desire to maintain a perception of order in the world, as Kushner stated, human beings want to "make sense of all that happens. They convince themselves that God is cruel, or that they are sinners, rather than accept randomness."⁴¹ However, to insist that the Book of Job exists as an affirmation of strict order within the universe is philosophically untenable. Indeed, the flaws of Yancey's interpretation becomes increasingly apparent when one considers exactly what it is that he is suggesting. Yancey would have us believe that God teaches through the Book of Job that we ought to be happy in our suffering, namely because you have been given a holy honor: the honor to fight the forces of evil, alongside God. However, Job, if nothing else, proves that happiness is *not* the response of a sincere sufferer. Job was not happy; rather he toed the proverbial line between lament and blasphemy, yet, despite his emotionally charged claims, God counted Job, not the friends, as righteous and as speaking rightly of Him. Immanuel Kant, in his essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials*, had this to say about Job's comforters, "Job speaks as he thinks . . . his friends, on the contrary, speak as if they were being secretly

³⁹ Little, 3.

⁴⁰ Again, the point here is that GG theodicies do not work in the Book of Job. This is not to say they do not work at all. Though that may be the case, it is not my present concern.

⁴¹ Kushner, 46.

listened to by the mighty one, over whose cause they are passing judgement, and as if gaining his favor through their judgement were closer to their hearts than the truth.” Adding, “Hence only sincerity of heart and not distinction of insight; honesty in openly admitting one’s doubts; repugnance to pretending conviction where one feels none, these are the attributes which, in the person of Job, have decided the preeminence of the honest man over the religious flatterer in the divine verdict.”⁴² This further suggests the GG theodicy, offered by Yancey, suffers not only philosophical weaknesses but also biblical weaknesses as well.

Chapter III: Biblical Weaknesses of a Joban Theodicy

Recall the framework of Yancey’s interpretation, which suggests God allowed the sufferings of Job so Job might view them in light of the chaotic scenes of the unseen world. According to Yancey, there is a lot going on behind the scenes that lies outside Job’s knowledge. Job’s faith in the midst of suffering, for example, carries with it the possibility of real salvific consequences (c.f. Great Reversal). If Job could only understand this, he might grow to appreciate his suffering as a reminder of God’s relentless power expressed over the forces of evil. After reading Yancey’s interpretation, one almost expects to hear God say, “Who is Job to doubt my power? There is a lot going on, here! He could benefit from a little suffering in his life. Then he will know that I am still God.” However, what does the Bible say? Does the Joban poet offer a reading that lends itself towards such an interpretation? The short answer is no. The careful reader will likely recognize that at no time does Job question God’s omnipotence. Rather, Job considers the possibility that perhaps God is *too* powerful. Indeed, the Joban poet is explicit in the way he portrays Job’s understanding of God’s omnipotence. Job states in 12:13-18:

But true wisdom and power are found in God; counsel and understanding are his. What he destroys cannot be rebuilt. When he puts someone in prison, there is no escape. If he holds back the rain, the earth becomes a desert. If he releases the waters, they flood the

⁴² Kant, 33.

earth. Yes, strength and wisdom are his; deceivers and deceived are both in his power. He leads counselors away, stripped of good judgement; wise judges become fools. He removes the royal robe of kings. They are led away with ropes around their waist.

This does not sound like the words of a man who doubts God's power. Therefore, if the answer to "why do I suffer" is simply "God's power requires that His attention be focused on areas other than human suffering" then the Joban poet has offered little in regards to an answer, because this is precisely what Job has lamented for much of the book. Considering that the Joban poet has been revered as "A well-educated man, familiar with the Jewish and non-Jewish literature of his time," such an interpretation, one that requires the reader to believe in the mishaps of the author, is unlikely at best.⁴³

Interacting with an interpretation very similar to Yancey's interpretation, Matitiahu Tsevat, author of *The Meaning of the Book of Job*, states, "its faults are so fatal, and glaring at that, that the fact of its wide acceptance must in itself be regarded as a problem in the history of the interpretation of the book."⁴⁴ He adds, "Although the complexities of the governance of the world have not been Job's concern, we are given no reason to doubt his readiness to recognize them. They are not, however, the issue, nor is God's ability to keep things going."⁴⁵ Worth noting is that even if Yancey did not intend to limit the greater-good to merely Job's apparent participation in the Great Reversal but also meant to include Job's subsequent appreciation and understanding of God's power and responsibility to the greater concerns of the universe (as a part of the greater-good), Yancey's interpretation still fails precisely because Job never doubted God's sovereignty, a fact on clear display within the dialogue between Job and his comforters. It

⁴³ Matitiahu Tsevat, *Sitting With Job*. Edited by Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 199.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

seems unlikely that God, giving his loving nature, would bring extreme suffering to the feet of Job in order to teach him something he already knew.

Harold Kushner also recognizes certain contextual problems with positing an interpretation for the Book of Job that resembles one's like Yancey's greater-good interpretation. Kushner states, "Is God saying that, as some commentators suggest, that He has other considerations to worry about (i.e. the Great Reversal), besides the welfare of one individual human being, when He makes decisions that affect our lives? To say that is to say that the morality of the Bible, with its stress on human virtue and the sanctity of the individual life, is irrelevant to God, and that charity, justice, and dignity of the individual human being have some source other than God."⁴⁶ Indeed, Scripture is full of passages that highlight the importance of human life (i.e. Gen 1:26-27; 9: 5-6; Ps 8: 4-5; Exod 21:12; Deut 27:25; Prov 6: 16-19).

Furthermore, the morally aware Christian must consider one more thing, a seemingly non-negotiable moral failure infecting most greater-good interpretations of Job beyond redemption. Even if one were to concede much of what Yancey argues, which is a rather large if, one cannot, and must not, concede that God would take the lives of Job's children so their father might come to some divine realization, even if that realization could not have occurred in the absence of their deaths. David Baggett, in the book *Good God*, discusses certain moral prerogatives of God, which likely exist given His nature as a Perfect Being. While Baggett admits to the difficulty of saying exactly what actions are and are not morally permissible for an Ultimate Being, he does firmly claim that some actions exist outside the moral capabilities of such a Being. Baggett describes these types of actions as moral "non-negotiables," which consist

⁴⁶ Kushner, 42.

of, for example, the torturing of innocent children for the fun of it. To such a charge, Baggett states, “In general, what God can’t do is anything in diametric opposition, irremediable tension, or patent conflict with our most nonnegotiable moral commitments. God can’t, for instance, issue a command for us to torture children; but he may well be acting in accord with moral perfection when he, say, allows death to take place in a fallen world.”⁴⁷

At this point one might abruptly state, “Dr. Baggett states that God could maintain his perfection if He merely *allowed* the death of Job’s children. It was Satan who killed Job’s children, not God. Indeed, God merely allowed their deaths to occur, which is His prerogative.”⁴⁸ While it may be possible that the deaths of Job’s children were merely the result of their living within a fallen world, the description of the wager between God and the Satan found in the first chapter of the Book of Job seems to suggest otherwise. Yes, God *can* and likely *does* legitimately take life; this much is clear. However, it is not merely the events in and of themselves that warrant concern but rather the *circumstances* surrounding those events. Indeed, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that a good God could be goaded into killing innocent children so that one man might respond favorably towards a particular goal (c.f. the Great Reversal).

Chapter 1 appears to describe God actively sending the sufferings of Job in the form of the Satan. In light of this, it would be a mistake to suggest that the Joban poet does not consider, and therefore does not want us to consider also, that God is, indeed, responsible for Job’s suffering. This presumption is most clearly seen in 1:16, which reads, “While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, *The fire of God* fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you,” (emphasis

⁴⁷ David Baggett and Jerry L Walls, *Good God*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 135.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

added). Most notable here is how the lone survivor describes the chaos he observed as coming from “the fire of God.” The presence of fire in the Bible is used almost exclusively to describe God’s divine presence within the created space. 2 Kings 1:12, for example, sees Elijah use these exact words to describe not evil or Satan, but the very presence of God, stating “But Elijah answered them, ‘If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.’ Then *the fire of God* came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.”⁴⁹ Certainly, Elijah would not have us believe that God answered him through a divinely directed display of evil (from heaven nonetheless). Therefore, why should the fire of God sent from heaven to deliver the sufferings of Job be thought of as being any different? It should not.

The astute philosopher might offer a word of caution against stressing God’s direct responsibility. Indeed, he or she might point to author Dennis Kinlaw who writes in *Lectures in the Old Testament* that the Old Testament writers, in their zeal to emphasize monotheism, ran the risk of making it seem like God himself was the author of evil.⁵⁰ According to Kinlaw, once we see the point is to emphasize that ultimately it is God who is in control, we can see that the language is best understood as suggesting that if something bad happens, it is because God chose to allow it.⁵¹ This is an excellent word of caution, but altogether irrelevant to my point.

I am well aware from a philosophical point of view, one can respond to my point about “the fire of God” by arguing God’s omnibenevolence precludes him from directly causing

⁴⁹ Similar examples of this are found in the following verses: Exod 13:21; Deut 4:33; 5:24; 5:25; 5:26; 18:16; Ezek 28:16; 2 Pet 3:12; Rev 4:5 to name a few.

⁵⁰ Dennis F Kinlaw and John N Oswalt, *Lectures in Old Testament Theology*, 1st ed. (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Worth noting is the very real possibility that at least some of the Old Testament writers were not monotheists in the strictest sense of the term. Certain passages in Scripture suggests a shared belief in many gods, all of whom were subservient to Yahweh (i.e. Ps 86:8; 95:3; 96:4; 97:9; Josh 24:2, 14-15).

certain events (and the events of the prologue likely fall into that category) but God's nature is not my concern here, nor does it appear to be the concern of the Joban poet. My concern, rather, is with the *story of Job*, and how that story *portrays* God. As Peter Enns states, "It is not the God *behind* the scenes that I want to look at, but the God *of* the scenes, the God of the Bible, how he is portrayed there."⁵² Indeed, it is important to recognize the very real possibility that how God *is* and how God, at times, *portrayed*, in the Bible, are not always the same. Doubtless, one could use a sound philosophical understanding of God's nature to direct one's interpretation of the Book of Job but I believe, rightly, I think, to do so would be to read past the text, which can lead the reader to miss important literary clues placed strategically throughout the book. Peter Enns reminds his readers:

There are diverse portrayals of God in the Old Testament. He is, on the one hand, powerful, one who knows things before they happen and who causes things to happen, one who is in complete control. On the other hand, he finds things out, he can feel grieved about things that happen, and he changes his mind. If we allow either of these dimensions to override the other, we set aside part of God's word in an effort to defend him, which is somewhat of a self-contradiction.⁵³

In the case of the Book of Job, God is portrayed as being directly responsible. To suggest otherwise is, in my opinion, a dishonest mishandling of the text. Yet do not forget, lest you despair, "All Scripture is . . . profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16) even those parts that make readers feel uncomfortable. Indeed, the Joban poet portrays God as responsible for a reason and, as previously discussed, that reason is *not* so the reader might infer into God's divine attributes. Rather, the Bible portrays God in this way as a rhetorical move that advances the narrative of the story and, in retrospect, alludes to the Christ event (a point that will be discussed later).

⁵² Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 106.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 107.

Some, who insist on defending God, might make the argument from silence that while Job was innocent, his children and servants were not. Perhaps they, not unlike the Egyptians, deserved the fate that befell them. This is unlikely for one simple reason: Job often prayed for the sins of his household. Indeed, Job 1:5 reads, “And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate [his household], and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, ‘It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did continually.” Therefore, it seems unlikely that Job’s children, as Bildad suggested, were the recipients of a deserved divine punishment (Job 8:4).

The remaining conclusion, and the most likely, is the Joban poet wanted his readership to view God as responsible, in some sense, for the chaos that befell the righteous Job. This is neither revelatory nor controversial within the realm of evangelical Christianity. Francis I. Anderson, commentator on Job and author of “The Problems of Suffering in the Book of Job,” echoes the Joban poet’s verdict, stating, “There can be no doubt that it is God, only God, who is responsible for all that happens to Job. It cannot be blamed on ‘Nature’ or the Devil, for these are but His creatures.”⁵⁴ Recall that God’s responsibility in this case does *not* speak of any perceived moral fault but rather the literary developments of an intriguing plot; portrayal not nature.

It is at this moment the reader might object, stating, “You just argued that God is morally incapable of killing innocent children. Yet here you are stating the opposite. You would like us to somehow believe that God cannot actively cause terrible suffering to befall his innocent children while simultaneously believing that God actively caused the terrible sufferings of both Job and his children.” To which I would respond, “Yes.” Admittedly, such a paradox is a

⁵⁴ Francis Anderson, *Sitting With Job*. Edited by Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 183.

problem for the reader but it is not an intractable problem for those willing to reconsider the primary purpose of the Book of Job. Remember this paradox; it will be revisited it later.

Chapter IV: Concluding Thoughts on Job as Theodicy

Three different theodicies for the Book of Job were explored and each found wanting. Job attempted to reconcile the existence of God with his suffering by proclaiming the death of God's goodness. Yet biblical teaching, coupled with an understanding of God's nature, deals harshly with such a claim. Job's friends, turned tormentors, insisted that Job was guilty and earned his pain. However, such an affirmation crumbles under the words of God Himself. Philip Yancey argues against adopting either of the aforementioned theodicies but only because, according to him, the *real* theodicy lies in the subtext. Even if this were the case, which is a rather large if, certainly the Book of Job is not *only* about theodicy.

The whole point of addressing the flaws of a theodicean interpretation of the Book of Job is to decide whether the Joban poet intended for his readers to understand Job's story as an answer for why good people suffer. If such an interpretation crumbles at the weight of evidence against it, the prudent Christian ought to pursue a different perspective. Indeed, if the objective purpose for the Book of Job is to provide an answer for why good people suffer, it necessarily follows that it cannot fail in this task (c.f. 2 Timothy 3:16). This is not to say the biblical authors are incapable of being misunderstood. That is something different entirely and not applicable to this particular conversation. It is to say, rather, the Book of Job, as Scripture, cannot fail in the sense that $2+2=5$ fails.

The Book of Job is not merely an enigmatic theodicy but rather the Book of Job, understood as a mere greater-good theodicy, is akin to $2+2=5$; it is a fundamentally flawed interpretation and as such ought to be discarded. Indeed, one could go as far as to say the Book

of Job appears as a polemic against the over-zealous use of theodicy. Recall, God rebuked Job's friends for their response. Whatever the case, the Book of Job, as Scripture, cannot fail in the way $2+2=5$ fails. Therefore, the thinking Christian must take it upon himself to abandon any interpretation of the Book of Job that seeks to justify God's choices to men and replace it with an interpretation more apt to the standards of Scripture.⁵⁵

PART III: RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY

Before moving forward, one would likely benefit from a recap of exactly what brought us to this point. Starting from the beginning, one recognizes the Book of Job places on full display the realities of the human-predicament: a well-known tension between a belief in God and the existence of suffering in the lives of the righteous. This tension is so palpable it leaves both the reader and the characters of Job's story scrambling for a solution that reconciles two ostensibly contradictory realities: the existence of a good God and the existence of suffering. While both Job and his comforters provide possible answers, neither is able to successfully resolve the issue and the reader concludes the book with potentially more questions than when he or she began. Indeed, at the end of the Book of Job, the primary issue of suffering seems altogether unresolved, which is, in a sense, precisely the point. N. T. Wright states, "The book of Job remains, in its own terms, as a monument not only to astonishing literary skill but to the theological pursuit of answers that refuse to be put off, the theological insistence that to 'solve' the problem of evil in the present age is to belittle it, and the theological celebration, in the teeth of the apparent

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, in his essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials*, describes Job's friends as budding theodicyists; choosing justification over sincerity. Kant states, "[The friend's] malice in pretending to assert things into which they yet must admit they have no insight, and in simulating a conviction which they in fact do not have, contrasts with Job's frankness - so far removed from false flattery as to border almost on impudence - much to his advantage. "Will you defend God unjustly?" he asks, "Will you give his person [special] consideration?" "Will you plead for God? He shall punish you, if you secretly have consideration for persons! - There will be no hypocrite before him!" Kant argues that God rebukes the theodicies offered by the friends in favor of Job's genuine sincerity. Kant's conclusion exists as further evidence against a mere theodicean interpretation.

evidence, of Israel's God as Creator and Lord of the world."⁵⁶ Indeed, the Book of Job does not seek to "solve" the problem of evil because to provide pat answers for why bad things happen to good people succeeds only in betraying a genuine lack of appreciation for the seriousness of the issue.

To all intents and purposes, it appears as if the Joban poet has highlighted a significant problem and then failed to provide the reader with any recognizable solution. However, considering the nature of Scripture, these concerns raise a question about the purpose of the book; namely, how could the purpose of a piece of Scripture fail to achieve what it set out to do? The best and most likely answer to this question is the Joban poet *never set out to provide an answer for why good people suffer*. Indeed, the Book of Job, as Scripture, has not failed in achieving its purpose but rather we, the reader, have imposed upon the Book of Job a false purpose. This raises more questions: If we have been asking the *wrong* questions, what is the *right* question? What is the real purpose of the Book of Job? What is the Joban poet trying to teach us?

I believe the answers will come not from insisting the Book of Job be an explanation for why good people suffer, but rather from a genuine recognition of the Joban poet's concerns regarding the strict application of retribution theology. Indeed, I believe the Joban poet is most concerned with providing an argument against a strict application of retribution theology. Admittedly, such an interpretation is not as exciting as an answer for the problem of evil but, as we will get into later, no less profound. If the interpretation offered here does not seem as obvious as one might expect from a book in the Bible, it is only because of how relatable Job's story is to nearly every human being. Indeed, many know the sting of losing a loved-one or the

⁵⁶ N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2006), 71.

pain of receiving ridicule from those whom you expect only love. Such terrible realities stand out to us like a sore thumb; they demand our attention, and with a swelling sense of injustice, we, alongside the suffering Job, cry out for an answer. However, despite the tremendous amounts of suffering on display within the Book of Job, the suffering itself exists as the mere setting in which book's purpose may be successfully delivered and understood. Indeed, the sheer importance of the rebuke would likely be lost if it were ever removed from the context of Job's suffering.

Consider for a moment, perhaps counterfactually, that such an interpretation is the correct one. Now strip from the Book of Job every morsel of suffering yet keep the rebuke. The reader is left with an argument without evidence. Indeed, in the absence of the wager and of Job's suffering the reader is given nothing in support of Job's argument. The modern Joban commentator might just as easily champion the friends, while proclaiming Job a liar. Moreover, imagine that after the events of the prologue the Satan decided not to strike the house of Job. As a result, Job maintains his health and wealth and one day, on a random visit, the friends observe all that Job has acquired. The friends are amazed and posit Job's fortune as a sign of his great righteousness. However, Job disagrees, stating rather that his fortune is in no way a measure of his righteousness but rather he, or any other righteous man, might become poor and destitute. The three friends and Elihu are astonished that Job would suggest such a thing and they swiftly challenge any such notion. Even if this version of the Book of Job ended with a divine rebuke of the friends, the importance of the message has been undercut; its relatability robbed.

The point in all of this is to drive home the fact that in the absence of suffering, the gross display of Job's comforters would have never shown itself. Stated simply, if you remove suffering from the Book of Job, every character in the poem, Job included, would have likely

continued in their faulty and destructive understandings of how the world works. It is important to understand the high degree of suffering Job endures is indicative of the degree of importance placed upon the theological need of the rebuke itself. The Joban poet wants to deliver a story that will make even the most stoic of individuals fall to their feet in sympathy for the suffering Job, and while on their knees see something they could never imagine: Job's comforters choosing to relegate the love of their friend as secondary to their flawed theology of God's sovereignty. It is as if the Joban poet is screaming, "This is how deeply the theology of universal retribution has infected the minds of my generation and God wants it to stop!"

Lindsey Wilson, in an essay on the message of Job, states, "[Job] does not explore why there is suffering, nor the quandary of innocent suffering, but rather the question of how a person can respond in the midst of suffering. However, this is really to assert that suffering is simply the *setting* in which the issue of the book is raised . . . suffering clarifies and isolates the central issue of the faith (emphasis added)."⁵⁷ Considering the importance and emphasis behind the Joban poet's concerns regarding retribution theology, I can think of no greater vehicle to deliver such an important correction than through suffering. Indeed, suffering provides every aspect needed for understanding how deeply this theology had entrenched itself within the minds of God's people and exactly how destructive it could be. Best seen in the actions of the friends who, rather than love and comfort Job, choose to believe in something they could have neither knowledge nor proof: Job's guilt.

The conversations between Job and his friends are reminiscent of a lesson on credibility illustrated by C. S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. During a game of hide-and-seek, Lucy, one of the four main characters of book, discovered a seemingly ordinary wardrobe existed as a

⁵⁷ Vanhoozer, 386.

door into another world, the world of Narnia. After a short adventure, Lucy hastily returns to her siblings, proclaiming her adventures in Narnia and the wardrobe that made it all possible.

However, Lucy's siblings do not believe her, which breaks her heart and leaves her crying for much of the day. Finally, at dinner, the owner of the house, an astute professor, resolves the issue. Peter Kreeft illustrates this resolution well in his book, *Between Heaven and Hell: A Dialogue Somewhere between Death with John F. Kennedy, C.S. Lewis, and Aldous Huxley*, which reads:

The professor asks Peter, How well do you know Lucy? (Quite well). And how well do you know the universe? Are you sure that such things can't possibly happen? Has science or history proven its impossibility? (Well no) Why then it's quite plain: either Lucy is insane, or lying, or telling the truth. If you know her well enough to know she isn't insane or lying, and you don't know the universe well enough to be sure she couldn't possibly be telling the truth you had better believe her. Simple logic.⁵⁸

Doubtless, C. S. Lewis is creating an argument that revolves around the claims of Christ and the reality of the supernatural. However, the argument could just as easily apply to the dialogue of Job and the friends. Indeed, replace the above-mentioned characters of Narnia with God, Job, and the comforters and you essentially have an alternate reading for the epilogue of the Book of Job. For example: *God asks the friends, "How well do you know Job?" (Quite well). "And how well do you know the universe? Are you sure that retribution theology is universally valid? Has science or history proven that the innocent never suffer?" (Well no) "Why then it's quite plain: either Job is insane, or lying, or telling the truth. If you know him well enough to know he isn't insane and not prone to lying, and you don't know the universe well enough to be sure he couldn't possibly be telling the truth you had better believe him. Simple logic."* Worth mentioning is that it is quite telling that an allusion meant for Christ is equally applicable to the story of Job. Remember this point; it will be discussed later.

⁵⁸ Peter Kreeft, *Between Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 52.

Chapter V: Tenuous Theology; Tenuous Relationships

The severity of the tension between Retribution Theology and the Book of Job is honestly derived from the source of the theology's teaching. Indeed, the tension between a belief in God and the existence of suffering in the lives of good people finds its source from, among other places, the strained moral intuitions and limited understandings of human beings, and, perhaps more importantly, the teachings of God Himself. The Old Testament introduced the idea of blessings and curses being inextricably linked to the obedience and/or disobedience of God's chosen nation, Israel. From its inception at Mount Sinai, the Abrahamic Covenant introduced a theology of retribution that would quickly become a fundamental aspect of Jewish theology. So much so that thousands of years later, Jesus' own disciples, perhaps unwilling to separate the suffering of others from their apparent sin, showed confusion over how suffering obtained in the lives of those around them. At one point asking, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?" to which Jesus responded, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:2). Jesus' response is telling of at least two things: (1) A strict application of retribution theology had become a tradition that continued to thrive within the Jewish community and (2) Jesus saw retribution theology as something incomplete, something flawed and in need of correction.

Job as Polemic

While Jesus highlights certain issues with retribution theology in the New Testament, he is not the first to challenge its categorical validity. The author of Ecclesiastes, for example, notes what appears to him as the complete absence of individual retribution within the world he observes. Indeed, the author looks everywhere and can seemingly find no consistent correlation between suffering and sin or goodness and prosperity. Every attempt to do good or to pursue

wisdom, according to the author, appears “meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 1: 2). The Joban poet, perhaps desiring to build on the observations of those presented in the Book of Ecclesiastes presents the story of Job as a sort of case study for the situations described by the author of Ecclesiastes. According to the Joban poet, the author is correct; the world does not reflect a divine governance of universal retribution. In light of this, one could argue, rightly I think, the purpose of the Book of Job is to present a polemic of sorts against the strict application of retribution theology, which had become, and would remain, a prevalent theological disposition within the Jewish community.

Matitiah Tsevat agrees. Indeed, he is committed to the idea of Job as polemic. In his essay, *The Meaning of the Book of Job*, Tsevat states, “The primary theme [of the Book of Job] is the suffering of the innocent. For the overwhelming majority of readers and commentators this is, and always has been, the problem of the book” adding, “...only the elimination of the principle of retribution can solve the problem of the book.”⁵⁹ Tsevat then provides the reader with a three-step approach for recognizing the Book of Job as a polemic against the perversion of retribution theology.

Tsevat’s first step involves a personal championing of the “total conceptual content” of the Book of Job over and above each individual verse. According to Tsevat, this perspective, which views the Book of Job as a whole, lends itself towards an accurate understanding of its purpose, more so than any verse-by-verse exegesis of the text. Stated simply, the meaning resides in the proverbial forest canopy rather than its floor. The second step is to “seek verification of the answer [for the meaning of the book] in the text of the divine address.” Finally, one must apply “two controls to the answer, one external to the address, the other to the

⁵⁹ Matitiah Tsevat, *Sitting With Job*. Edited by Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 211.

book.”⁶⁰ An appropriate application of Tsevat’s three-step process should lead the reader towards an affirmation of the thesis, a recognition of the Book of Job as a rebuke of retribution theology.

In accordance with Tsevat’s first step, one begins his or her interaction with the Book of Job by searching for an overarching theme consistent with the whole of the text. Interacting with Job in such a way reveals one pervasive worldview directing the entire narrative. Specifically, a rigid worldview based on a system of rewards and punishments (c.f. retribution). Indeed, the worldview of universal retribution permeates every corner of the story and exits as the fuel for the progression of the story’s plot. Right at the beginning, the conversation between God and the Satan suggests retribution theology had become a problem in need of correction. The Satan introduces the story, “Satan replied to the Lord, ‘Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has and he will surely curse you to your face!’” (1:9-11). The Satan is suggesting a human’s loyalty to God, even the loyalty of the greatest human on earth, is rooted in selfish desire rather than holy love.

When one recognizes anti-retribution rhetoric as the driving force for the book, an important feature of the Book of Job becomes increasingly clear through the natural progression of the plot. Consider the Satan, who, after “patrolling the earth, watching everything that is going on” returns to God with a revelation: retribution theology had become a plague pervading every corner of human thought. Indeed, humankind had come to believe one’s lot in life to be causally determined by one’s moral action. According to the Satan, those humans following God’s moral law appear to be doing so only because of their belief that good will be repaid with good, not, as

⁶⁰ Ibid., 210.

God would like to believe, out of their love for Him. God disagrees with the Satan, pointing to Job as a counter example, stating, “Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears Me and stays away from evil” (1:8). The Satan is unconvinced, arguing that it is not God whom Job loves but rather God’s blessings. Essentially, the Satan is saying to God, “I’ll prove that human righteousness is motivated by their flawed understandings of the world and not their love for You. Let me strip Your most loyal follower of his blessings; let me challenge Job’s most fundamental beliefs about the world and You will see that I am right.”^{61 62}

Proceeding from the Satan’s challenge, the Joban poet leads the reader to draw a rather unexpected conclusion: the Satan, in his limited knowledge, was in some sense correct (though also incorrect). Indeed, while Job’s love was genuine, retribution theology *had* pervaded much of human thought, which presented the heavenly court with a problem in need of a solution. This problem is most clearly seen when Job, in light of his unyielding belief in retribution theology, began to question God’s goodness while many others had begun reducing God to an impersonal Distribution Center of good and bad lots; something needed to be done. The severity of this conflict, as previously mentioned, is on full display within the dialogue between Job and his comforters. The problem is so severe that the solution, a rebuke of retribution theology, is described as being delivered by God Himself (Job 38:1).

⁶¹ I believe it worth mentioning that depending on how one interprets the dialogue between God and the Satan, one could easily recognize concern rather than malice in the tone of the Satan, who, considering the nearly non-existent knowledge of the New Testament Satan within the minds Old Testament authors, may not be the same being as the fallen angel, Lucifer. Longman and Enns, *Dictionary*, 336-337, provides a helpful discussion on the role of the Adversary in the Book of Job.

⁶² If Job is not an Israelite, as some scholars have suggested, all the worse for conflating the Satan of Job with the New Testament Satan.

Tsevat recognizes a similar progression through the Book of Job. He begins his approach by echoing the observations of the Satan found in 1: 6-11, stating, “[Retribution theology] pervades the world. Job and the friends hold fast to this belief because they have been raised in it; because everybody has it; because man has an intense need to abide by it. The need is so great that he goes to the remotest extremes to uphold it.”⁶³ Tsevat also interprets the epilogue as a divine rebuke of the perverse applications of retribution theology, which, according to Tsevat, presents an affirmation of my interpretation, thus fulfilling Tsevat’s second step. Tsevat argues that God’s constant use of words like “foundation,” “basis,” and “cornerstone” are His way of highlighting the unknowable blueprints of the universe.⁶⁴ God does not do so in order to prove His power over Job or to merely insinuate He has more important things to worry about (i.e. The Great Reversal) but rather so that He might shake free, from Job, a worldview that has made Him appear as One who aims “poison arrows” against His most loyal followers (6:4). Tsevat, referencing different passages within the epilogue, states, “God leads Job through the macrocosm and microcosm, but nowhere does Job see justice . . . but we are not left with a negative argument alone,”⁶⁵ adding:

The divine address contains some passages that have not, it seems to me, received due attention. It is striking that the description of the inanimate world, comprising almost all of chapter 38, is interrupted by an evaluative and teleological proposition centering on man (38:12; 15). This can only mean one thing: there is no provision for retribution, nor any manifestation of it in the order of the world. The dawn of every day provides an occasion to punish the wicked, but this possibility is not in practice realized and is therefore not in the plan of the world. This is, in effect, God’s polemic with Job.⁶⁶

⁶³ Tsevat, 211.

⁶⁴ Unknowable to Job

⁶⁵ Ibid., 212.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The final step in recognizing the Book of Job as a polemic against retribution theology (Tsevat's 3rd step) is to apply two controls to the proposed answer: (1) the inside knowledge the reader possess and (2) the historical context of the time. The inside knowledge the reader possesses is the knowledge of Job's righteousness. The reader knows Job did not suffer in retribution for his sins. Tsevat agrees, stating, "The prologue, for one thing, shows that in the one exemplary case with which it is concerned, divine justice, retribution, does not enter into the heavenly considerations. Against this reading of the whole book in light of its prologue it may be argued that . . . allowance should be made for a narrative feature which exists purely for the sake of the plot and is probably not intended to have a bearing on the ideas of the book."⁶⁷

The second control revolves around the dating of the book, which, admittedly, is difficult to pinpoint but as Tsevat states, "The overwhelming majority of scholars, for a variety of reasons, date the Book of Job between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C."⁶⁸ If such overwhelming academic agreement is to be taken seriously then one must attempt to apply the cultural contexts of the aforementioned dates into one's interpretation of the Book of Job. If one does so, the conclusions are nothing short of profound. This is because the period between the 4th and 6th centuries happens to be the time when retribution theology, which had previously been applied only corporately, began to be applied to the individual.⁶⁹ Tsevat, highlighting the correlation between the message of the book and the theological mindset of the day, argues the Joban poet's radical denial of individual retribution "neatly fills" the gap in the history of thought on the problem of divine justice. The Book of Job concludes with a realization, by Job,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 213.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 214.

⁶⁹ Corporate retribution allows for large groups of people (i.e. Israel) to eventually see the justice they deserve (i.e. exile/return to the Promised Land).

of the well-known but often forgotten truth concerning God's creation: it is fallen. Therefore, the church, alongside Job, must come to this newfound knowledge in full repentance of any theology that insists upon a rigid application of universal retribution, lest we too view God as a cruel archer with poison arrows.

But Why?

Kevin King impresses upon his students the importance of providing every sermon and every lesson with an answer to the question, "so what?" As a reader, you might be asking yourself the same question. You might, for example, agree with the conclusions yet struggle to find any reason to care. You might ask, "What is the primary take-away from the Joban poet's rebuke of retribution theology?" Doubtless, the importance of the answer lends itself to the importance of the message. To the original question, one might respond, "In order to correct a faulty theology." This seems unlikely. Indeed, if this were a sufficient answer to the question, one would expect the Bible to be much thicker than it currently is. Rather, in order to answer the question, "So what?" the reader must search outside the immediate context for something deeper than what is offered within the pages of the Book of Job.

While pondering a potential answer, consider the following scenario: When a father teaches his son not to stick his hand in a fire it is not simply because the father dislikes the act of placing one's hand in a flame. There is meaning behind the father's lesson; namely, fire can cause tremendous amounts of pain and damage to the human body. Moreover, a son's suffering is not an abstract concern for his father. The father is not simply concerned about a fire causing tremendous amounts of pain and damage to just *any* human body but rather he is concerned that the fire in question will cause tremendous amounts of pain and damage to his *son's* body. The specificity of the father's concern points to something meaning alone cannot convey, purpose.

Purpose is more than the mere sum of its parts; purpose provides a glance into the motives and feelings of the author and makes each lesson personal to those involved.

Out of this realization comes a somewhat obvious distinction: meaning and purpose are not the same. In the case of the father, he provides his son with a lesson, “Do not stick your hand in the fire.” The meaning behind this lesson ultimately revolves around the potential damage fire can cause to the human body. However, the purpose of this lesson, which is the safety and overall well-being of the son, highlights the father’s love for his child. Not unlike a father, the biblical authors, inspired by God, have a purpose behind their teachings. What is this purpose? I believe the purpose is to bring creation to a better understanding of their Creator.

Purpose Verses Meaning

While I would argue Matitahu Tsevat has correctly assessed the *meaning* of the Book of Job, I believe he has yet to realize its *purpose*. Indeed, Tsevat, in *The Meaning of the Book of Job*, has not answered Dr. King’s question. So in response to the question, “So what?” I offer one simple consideration: If the world was indeed, as Job and his comforters believed, governed by a system of universal retribution, Jesus Christ should have never hung from a cross. Stated simply, Israel needed a strong rebuke of retribution theology, from God Himself no less, lest they label Christ a sinner and miss the salvific opportunities given through of His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is the answer to Dr. King’s question.

The Book of Job, though constructive in its own right, does not exist in vacuum. Indeed, the Book of Job, all of the Old Testament for that matter, must be read in light of New Testament revelation. 2 Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” Notice the use of the word “and” in the later part of the verse: “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting *and* training in righteousness.” It is

that *all* of Scripture can be *all* of these things (i.e. lesson, rebuke, training, etc.) simultaneously. Therefore, it appears fair to say that a proper interpretation of certain biblical passages requires more than just an understanding of its own content but also certain situational elements from either outside the Bible or from other areas within the Bible itself. Proverbs, for example, teaches its readers not to answer a fool according to his folly, lest they be just like him (26:4) but Proverbs also teaches the exact opposite: *Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes* (26:5). While one might confuse these two verses as contradictory teachings, a more robust understanding is not that one verse is true while the other is false but rather *both* are true within different circumstances. Indeed, some fools need to be ignored while others need to be answered. This is the paradox of wisdom, which requires more than the mere reading of a proverb; it requires a reading of the situation. Not unlike Proverbs, theodicies and retribution theology are, at times, appropriate for the situation, but sometimes they are not. The application of any theology, retribution or otherwise, requires an apt understanding of its tenets but also, and perhaps more importantly, an apt understanding of the context in which the theology is being applied.

Much like the aphorisms of Proverbs, whose application require a knowledge of things outside of the content of the book, the story of Job calls the reader to look beyond its pages so that he or she might successfully deduce its full purpose and use it for “teaching, rebuking, correcting *and* training in righteousness.” This is because the Book of Job, indeed the entire Old Testament, is meant to be read in light of the New Testament Reality. While read in isolation, the Book of Job can, at most, reflect the dangers of faulty theology but when placed in the context of the Christ event, the purpose of the book becomes nearly unmistakable. Indeed, Christ adds purpose to its meaning and meat to its bones; it enables what in Job is a minor Old Testament

theme, arising as a necessary corrective in the context of real biblical truths somehow cast wrongly, into what in the New Testament is a major theme at the heart of the Gospel.

Recall that while the meaning behind the Book of Job is one that offers a polemic of sorts against notions of individual retribution, this is not its purpose (if it is, it is certainly not its *only* purpose). The purpose, or rather the goal of the Book of Job, is Christ. This is not to say Christ is superficially “found” in every verse of the Joban story. It is to say, rather, as Christ taught along the Emmaus road, the Book of Job, along with the rest of the Old Testament, is fulfilled through Jesus Christ as messiah.⁷⁰ The Book of Job fulfills this call *through* its rebuke of retribution, which, had the religious leaders of the 1st century successfully abandoned, might have drastically altered the Jewish understanding and recognition of Jesus as their messiah. When read in light of the New Testament, both Job and the entire contents of the book that bears his name provides much more than the book could ever hope to offer in isolation. Indeed, when read in light of the Christ event, the Book of Job takes on a completely new depth: among its other purposes, it both describes and signals the coming Jesus Christ.

PART IV: A THEOLOGY NOT QUITE RIGHT

Again, one purpose, if not the main purpose certainly a significant one, of the Book of Job is to provide a firm rebuke of a rigid understanding and application of retribution theology: the notion that sin and suffering are like smoke is to a fire; as Eliphaz argues, “You know, as well as I do, that only the sinful suffer,” (cf. Job 4). Yet, as God would explain in the later chapters of the book, suffering’s relationship to sin is not to be thought of as smoke is to a fire. One does not imply the other. By the Almighty’s admission, Job was blameless, upright, feared

⁷⁰ Luke 24:44-46 describes Christ “opening up the Scriptures” and teaching his followers how the OT pointed to Him as messiah. While the Book of Job is not mentioned specifically, there is no reason to believe this book ought to be excluded from Jesus’ lesson on that day.

God, and fled from evil; a man whom no greater existed on the earth (Job 1:8). The emphasis and re-emphasis, by God, of Job's righteousness and swift rebuke of the friend's rigid understanding and application of retribution theology is profoundly suggestive. The narrator sets the stage; God himself affirms the righteousness of his servant, of whom he is well pleased, promptly allows His servant to suffer, and rebukes those who would attribute those sufferings to some unknown sin, all while evoking the wonders of creation.

Applying Francis Watson's "Christocentric" approach to interpreting Scripture, the reader will likely notice themes of suffering and servanthood as they appear to point towards the ultimate fulfillment in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. While this certainly appears to be the case, a more interesting aspect of this dynamic is discovered in God's rebuke of a rigid understanding and application of retribution theology. The significance of the word "rebuke" can easily be overlooked. This is an unfortunate mistake. Indeed, it is in God's specific rebuke that the readership can begin to see the intimations of a divine authorial intent, which places Job in the company of David and Moses.

Charles H. H. Scobie describes the English term as, "too tame a translation; what [rebuke] signifies is the exercise of power over the forces that stand in the way of the fulfillment of God's purpose."⁷¹ Again, it must be emphasized exactly what God is rebuking here. "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have *not spoken of me what is right*" (Job 42:8; emphasis added). God is specifically rebuking the overzealousness of the friend's theology. Why this rebuke? God could have just as easily rebuked the friends for improper counsel, their refusal to practice any principle deriving from the command to lay one's life down for a friend, their aversions to love, or the lack of respect they showed for a fellow

⁷¹ Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 241.

teacher, or all of the above. Yet this is not what God deems in need of rebuke. A reexamination of Scobie's elaboration of the word "rebuke" proves profoundly beneficial to the significance of God's specificity.

If God is indeed rebuking the friend's theology, and I believe he is, God is, according to Scobie, exercising power over the forces that stand in the way of the fulfillment of His purpose. What could an inability to recognize innocence in the midst of suffering stand in the way of that also exists as a fulfillment of God's purpose? Perhaps the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, the fulfillment of the Davidic kingship, the long awaited messiah, Jesus Christ. Such an understanding does not appear to be too great a leap, nor should it be. In the absence of God's rebuke, the friends would have likely continued in their rigid application of retribution theology, to the extent that, had they lived into the 1st century AD, treated Christ in the same manner they treated their innocent friend, Job. Before Israel could accept a suffering messiah, it needed to first understand the instrumental necessity of suffering for the sake of redemption, which is on full display in the life and ministry of both Job and Jesus Christ. Again, this does not preclude the existence of other insightful messages within the Book of Job. Rather it is merely the emphasis of one unappreciated epistemic and theological insight, which I believe is one of perhaps many profound messages residing within the Book of Job.

Chapter VI: A Fresher Reading of the Book of Job

The sufferings of the righteous Job exalt God's strength through weakness, and cry out for fulfillment in the life and ministry of the ultimate suffering servant. A theological interpretation of the Book of Job could easily lead one to see the person of Job as a type, or prefiguration, of Christ. Worth mentioning is the Book of Job does not belong to the dead, but rather the living bride of Christ: the Church. Proclaiming Christ as one of the central goals of the

Book of Job is not a mishandling of the text but rather, as we will see later on, an enriching approach to the Old Testament modeled by the apostles themselves. Indeed, the Book of Job is just as much a property of the Church as any other New Testament contextualization, and the parallels are stark. Job, for example, was called righteous by God, a servant of whom He was well-pleased (1:8); Christ is righteousness fulfilled, God's own *son* of whom He is well pleased (Matt 3:17). Job was called truthful (42:7); Christ is truth fulfilled (John 14:16). While Job was made destitute so God's will might be known to the nation (42:10), Christ *chose* to become destitute so the Father would be known to the world (John 3:16). Job was rejected by those closest to him; Christ was rejected by both his family his followers (John 1:11). Job's afflictions were redeemed for the edification of his friends and family; Christ's afflictions were redeemed for the reconciliation of the world. The typology here is palpable.

Christological Significance for the Book of Job

Interestingly enough, the word "servant" used in Job 1:8, "And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my *servant* Job...'" is found elsewhere in the Old Testament, most notably in the messianic passage of Isaiah 42:1, "Behold my *servant*, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations (emphasis added)." "Behold my servant;" these words do not merely point to a historical or even ideal Israel. The surrounding context of the passage makes it clear that the servant spoken of in Isaiah 42 is an eschatological servant: an individual who exists as the fulfillment of the ideal Israel. Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers states the following:

"Elect" is another of the words with which Isaiah has fashioned the theology of Christendom. It meets us there four times (45:4, 65:9, 22), and is echoed and interpreted in the voice from heaven of Matthew 3:17. That voice fixed on the human consciousness ever expanding and conscious reproduction of the chief features of Isaiah's picture.

Disciples like St. Matthew learnt to recognize that likeness even in what might seem to us subordinate details (Matthew 12:17-21).⁷²

The term applied to Job can also be found in both Num 12:7-8 and Ps 89:20. Each is a reference to the servant of the Lord, the former in reference to Moses while the later references King David. Each existing, in part, as a prefiguration of the coming messiah.

David as a Type of Christ

Few evangelicals would argue against David , as king, typified Christ. Indeed, several passages suggest the existence of profound allusion between King David and Jesus Christ (i.e. Ps 2:6; Rom 11:26; Dan 4:3, 34, etc.). While Samuel elected David to be king of an ancient and temporary Israel, God the Father elected Jesus Christ to rule as King over a timeless and everlasting Israel. Worth noting, the role of the king in the ANE was to promote peace, avoid chaos, and heal the nation. Recall that I have connected evil with chaos and while I do not believe chaos is all there is to evil, the case could be made it is a part. In light of this, I believe part of the image of Jesus as king, in charge of the temple, so associated with kings, was to make peace by calming the storms of chaos, which typically resulted in the nation returning to the presence of God and receiving a holy blessing. The story of Job reflects well the relationship between God, king, and nation and the cycle of repentance, return, and blessing.

Furthermore, with no earthly king for Job to appeal, at least none we know of, he had no option but to appeal to the King of Kings, God Himself, which bears resemblance to Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane. God heard Job's cry and calmed the storms of chaos through the royal and priestly act of leading Job back into His presence, all while invoking the wonders of creation, which the temple, God's dwelling place, is often thought to reflect. God reminds Job that the earth is His temple and the divine chaos plaguing him demands a type of peace no earthly king is

⁷² Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

capable of providing. Indeed, divine chaos requires a divine peacemaker; it requires Jesus Christ, God Himself.

Furthermore, 2 Sam 5:2 appears to allude to David's role as king being twofold. "In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, you shall be *shepherd of my people* Israel, and you shall be *prince over Israel*" (emphasis added). David is to shepherd the people and reign over them. He is to protect, feed, and direct the people of Israel. What David provided for in a season, Christ brings in perpetuity. Worth mentioning, though purely conjecture, are the similarities between both Job and David's confounded expressions regarding God's concern for humankind. David states, "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Ps 8:4). Job states, "What is man that You magnify him, And that You are concerned about him?" (Job 7:17). If nothing else, the similarity in these two expressions is an interesting coincidence. Either way, the dynamic between God, king, and nation is on full display throughout the Joban story, suggesting profound Christological significance.

Moses as a Type of Christ

In addition to David typifying Christ, Moses is also placed in this realm. Points of resemblance between Moses and Christ are presented to the Bible's readership within the text itself. Deuteronomy 18:15 states, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" (ESV). Moses was anointed by God to be a leader and a prophet for His people. Moses' words were binding, as if they were the words of God himself. Christ was sent in a similar way, yet Christ's authority was his own. Christ was indeed a prophet, he was also the fulfillment of Moses' commissioning. If Moses and

David are thought to typify Christ, in any way, through their role as a servant of the Lord, the evidence should count Job as among them.

Dual Authorship

Scobie, in his book *The Ways of Our God*, highlights the dualistic nature of biblical authorship. While each individual author had his or her own prerogatives and motivations for writing, standing behind each human author is the Holy Spirit with his own prerogatives and motivations. Theological interpretation of Scripture is one of the greatest tools for deriving a biblical authors meaning and perhaps more importantly, God's purpose. Therefore, while the Joban poet may not have considered his poetry to have possessed Christological significance, the Holy Spirit guided him in such a way that the future church might benefit greatly.

The Unavoidable Suffering

Scripture often testifies to the necessity of blood as a propitiation for sin (i.e. Lev 17:11; Heb 9:11-18; John 19:30; 2 Cor 5:21). While this speaks specifically, it also speaks proverbially. After the fall, suffering had become a necessary aspect of reconciling all of creation to the Creator (c.f. the Christ event). That is to say outside of God zapping his creation into a state of perfection, which may or may not have been, or currently be, within God's capabilities, suffering is likely to be the only remaining means of ultimate reconciliation. This necessity is most clearly seen when Christ, despite his appeal in Gethsemane, is made to suffer and die on a cross. N. T. Wright states, "To look at the larger context of the whole canon of Scripture, there may be something to be said for seeing the Book of Job as an anticipation of the harrowing scene in Gethsemane, where the comforters again fail and creation itself goes dark as the monsters close in around the innocent figure who is asking what it's all about."⁷³

⁷³ Wright, 71.

Wright's claim suggests that God, in some sense, chose that the Via Dolorosa could be the only sufficient means of reconciliation. This would have been a radical concept for 1st century Jews, perhaps even more so than for you and I. However, it should not have come as a surprise, a heartbreaking shock, perhaps, but not a surprise. This is because the notion had already been introduced in the Book of Job, specifically within the dialogue between Job and God. Moreover, God's personal rebuke of retribution theology (c.f. meaning) in the Book of Job suggests a profound importance, held by God Himself, for challenging the worldview of both Job and his comforters (universal retribution), which would likely play a future role in the theological misconceptions of His own earthly sufferings (c.f. Matt 12:24).⁷⁴ Indeed, it was within the whirlwind that the Joban poet, alongside the Holy Spirit, set the stage for the Christ event by proclaiming a reality that necessitated a suffering messiah.

A skeptic might argue that God could have prevented His own earthly sufferings while also bringing about the development of human sanctification and reconciliation in this life. However, on what grounds does the critic make this assertion? If he or she draws entirely from the perspective of God's power (c.f. righteous zapping), then his or her assertion is, at the very least, conceivable. Indeed, if God's primary concern is to convey His power than perhaps He does simply zaps his creation with righteousness. However, God is certainly not obligated to act in this way. Moreover, the Bible appears to suggest that God prefers *not* to act in this way. Indeed, the entire biblical story is one of God actively seeking out and incorporating humankind into his divine plans (i.e. Job in the whirlwind).

⁷⁴ Assuming divine foreknowledge, God would have been aware of his coming crucifixion, even during the days of Job. Knowing the importance of His message, it was equally important that Job's decedents recognize Him as righteous despite His terrible suffering.

The book of Exodus, for example, shows God bringing Israel out of bondage not through a single overwhelming act of divine power but rather through the commissioning of Moses. “And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exod 3:9-10). This passage represents merely one of many examples in which God expresses his personal nature through the commissioning of an individual. Philip Yancey’s interpretation of Job, as flawed as it is, highlights the truth of this particular premise: God involves Himself with people. The expression highlights God’s intentions as sustainer and redeemer; acting within creation, using the tools of creation, in order to redeem creation. Moreover, if the world is not governed by a system of divine retribution, as the Book of Job suggests, it is not likely that God *can* remove all suffering from the world, nor could he even remove the worst kinds of sufferings. If he did, the result would be either the annihilation of humanity, ending all suffering by ending its source (creation), or its perpetual separation from the presence of the Lord (Christ never dies on a cross). Bruce Little elaborates:

Suppose we represent [suffering] in the world by X and varying degrees of suffering by X+1, X+2, X+3 and so forth, where the higher number associated with X, the greater the suffering. X+3 is worse than X+1. For arguments sake, let us also assume that X+5 is the worse suffering imaginable to man. Man requests that God prevent X+5. The request is for God to prevent the evil before it happens. This means it will never have been a part of the human experience. Assuming God prevents X+5, the worst evil imaginable will then be X+4...Taken to its logical conclusion, the request would not stop until God has prevented all suffering...In the end, the possibility of God eliminating all horrific evil and suffering is not a real possibility regardless of how good it sounds in a sentence.⁷⁵

When applied specifically to the character of Job, Little’s argument further highlights the connection between Job and Christ. Acting as a type of John the Baptist, acting as a type of Christ, Job was a harbinger of Christ’s ministry as a suffering servant. Again, without a swift

⁷⁵ Bruce A. Little, *A Creation-Order Theodicy* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005), 164.

rebuke of this misconstrued application of retribution theology, the church would have been unwilling to receive a suffering servant as their messiah. Notice that it does no good to argue the disciple's negative reaction to their messiah's death undermines this argument, as it applies to the book of Job, because it was not until after Christ's death that the disciples were given the full revelation of the Old Testament's relationship to Christ (Luke 24: 13-35). Moreover, if God were to prevent every suffering, Job would have remained blind, Christ would have never hung from a cross, and humanity's relationship with the Father would remain broken. Therefore, the necessity of suffering appears intact, unavoidable, and inescapable, yet, in the face of the fall, paradoxically beautiful. However, as previously argued, the Book of Job does not provide an answer for why good people are allowed to suffer; only that they will suffer, because the fallen version of the world is yet to be governed by divine retribution. The prologue of the Book of Job reminds the reader that the world God created has somehow become capable of tremendous evil, and the innocent are not immune to this reality. Moreover, the Book of Job speaks not only of suffering in general; it speaks to the sufferings of Job specifically, which, if I am correct, present a new depth and appreciation for the Book of Job as a prefiguration to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Job's sufferings in particular point to Christ's suffering as a propitiation for sin. Recall the prologue in the Book of Job, which appears to describe God sending chaos to befall the righteous Job. While this likely highlights the reality that God created the world, which has subsequently fallen and, as a result, been made susceptible to great evil, I do not believe this is *all* that is on display here. Indeed, I believe, as Anderson suggests, there is a very real importance, in this particular case, in recognizing God's ultimate responsibility in some real sense. One might object, arguing that to blame God for the sufferings of Job in the prologue, in

light of the fallen world, which the Satan clearly highlights, is akin to blaming the gun-maker for the deaths of a mass shooting. While I agree, I believe to stop there is to miss a profoundly important revelation.

For the moment, assume, perhaps counterfactually, the responsibility for Job's sufferings lies entirely on the shoulders of God; indeed, God's hands are stained with the taint of theft, destruction, murder, and every other terrible atrocity described in the Book of Job. Assuming this premise, why would God prevent the sufferings that He Himself sent? Recall earlier in the essay when I concluded that God's perfect goodness precluded Him from actively sending evil to befall the innocent. Despite this, Anderson argues the Book of Job is relatively clear, that is, "It is God, only God, who is responsible for all that happens to Job." Even if Anderson overstates this case, there is still something of a paradox, which becomes clear when Job is expressly understood as a representation and prefiguration of Christ. Indeed, while God's own goodness and laws of morality preclude Him from sending chaos to befall the innocent, they do *not* preclude Him from taking that chaos upon Himself. Anderson states, "That suffering can be voluntary and vicarious is one of the most amazing and liberating of all the truths of Scripture. The patient endurance of wrong can conquer evil by love. . . In the extreme of self-giving, suffering can be redemptive."⁷⁶ When viewed in light of Christ's suffering, the once winceful passage of Job 1: 6-18, the apparent wager and the sending of chaos, a difficult passage for many, is made into a beautiful picture of God sending chaos upon Himself for the sake of others. Indeed, when the Satan tried to explain just how fallen humankind had become, the Father pointed to his *servant* (i.e. Job 1:8; c.f. Num 12:7-8; Matt 12:18), and said "not Him." "For even

⁷⁶ Anderson, 186.

the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many," Mark 10:45.

Ezekiel 18:20 reads, "The child will not be punished for the parent's sins, and the parent will not be punished for the child's sins. Righteous people will be rewarded for their own righteous behavior, and wicked people will be punished for their own wickedness." God will not force one man to bear the sins of another; this would go against justice and therefore against God Himself. However, a man can *choose* to bear the sins of another and in doing so show profound grace, mercy, and above all, love. Anderson states, "That the Lord Himself has embraced and absorbed the undeserved consequences of all evil is the final answer to Job and to all the Jobs of humanity. As an innocent sufferer, Job is the companion of God."⁷⁷ The best way to interact with "the wager" and the poet's description of God having actively participated in Job's suffering is not to hastily defend God's innocence (Theodicy). To do so is to read past the text and share in the rebuke of Job's comforters by defending God at the cost His message. God calls us to do neither. In light of this message, reading the Book of Job as an allusion to the Christ event appears not only beneficial but also prudent for the modern Christian. Indeed, when Job is understood as a representative figure, a "stand-in," as Yancey suggests, for Christ, the difficulties of the prologue vanish. The Book of Job, understood in this way, can be embraced *because* of the events of the prologue and not merely despite them.

Worth mentioning is that an absence of systematic retribution in the world does not preclude God from blessing obedience and cursing disobedience. Indeed, much of the Bible is a testament to the opposite (i.e. Deut 30:19; 1 Tim 5:8; Jer 17: 5-8; Ps 46:1; Prov 25:26, etc.) However, these verses represent individual cases in which God has personally interacted within

⁷⁷ Ibid., 188.

creation to bring about a specific result (i.e. a curse or a blessing). As such, the reader should exercise caution and reluctance when using these verses to construct doctrinal positions.

Creation Language

The creation language used in the epilogue also appears rather telling. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* states, “The speeches from the whirlwind thus dramatize God’s superior knowledge and power. A thoroughgoing paradox underlies the speeches: on the surface they prove God’s transcendence (his superiority to the human and natural worlds), but they simultaneously demonstrate his immanence (his closeness his creation and presence in it).”⁷⁸ Imagery that demonstrates both power and immanence has profound Christological allusion.

Additional Parallels

Furthermore, assuming God’s prerogatives, one can conclude, rightly I think, that God is not concerned only with his power as Creator but rather God, a holistic Being, is concerned with every aspect of his role as Creator. The details of how such a God acts within creation, as illustrated above, demands upon the reader, a sincere consideration towards the entirety of creation, which is exactly what God brings to the attention of Job in the concluding passages of the book (38-41). Bruce Little, expressing a similar understanding of God’s prerogative, states, “As we have seen, God’s work within creation is not just about his power. When answering [could God prevent all evils?] the entirety of creation must be considered since everything is interconnected in some way.”⁷⁹ This is no mere coincidence. Job, and the friends, assume a rigid understanding of retribution; the friends often claim the measure of one’s suffering is unquestionably commensurate with the sin in one’s life. Yet God’s allowing of such suffering in

⁷⁸ Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 454.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

the life of the righteous Job cannot be understood this way. Why? One reason is to prepare Israel for the details of the suffering servant of the New Testament, their messiah, so they might reflect upon the teachings of Job and, as a result, refrain from attributing the sufferings of Christ to some yet discovered sin.⁸⁰

Job, a righteous man, is abused by those who closest to him. He is rejected by the authority of his time, made to suffer, and pushed to embrace his condemnation. Yet, despite all odds, Job retains his innocence, and the Father, for all to see, restores him to glory. If this is not a parable for the messiah, I am not sure what is. To the charge that God would have made this interpretation more noticeable, I offer the words of Tsevat:

The answer of God, presenting a doctrine as radical as it is new, a doctrine in diametrical opposition to the teaching of tradition, may never have been tolerated or persevered for us but for the protection of its form, its eschewal of the direct categorical pronouncement . . . the very radicalism of the book's answer, shattering a central biblical doctrine and a belief cherished in ancient Israel, would itself demand the protection of a veil.⁸¹

Chapter VII: The Validity of Theological Interpretation

Doubtless, not every passage or verse is to be understood as a direct and explicit reference to Christ, and the Church should be careful when seeking to typify any biblical character when the text does not warrant such a move. Indeed, the honest interpreter would be remiss not to take the advice of, for example, G.R. Osborne when he states, "One must not seek types where the context does not warrant them. As in all exegetical study, we want to arrive at the authors intended meaning rather than a generalized subjective interpretation."⁸² However, in

⁸⁰ The dating of Job is often contested, and while Job, in particular, appears to have existed during the time of the patriarchs, the Job poet appears to share important characteristics with those who lived and taught during the times of Solomon.

⁸¹ Tsevat, 215.

⁸² Walter A Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 1223.

light of full revelation, the dualistic nature of the Bible's authorship, and the community's desire to prepare all future generations to apply and contextualize the message of Scripture, seeing Christ as the fulfillment of the Book of Job does not appear an unjustified leap.

Furthermore, the aversions to embracing typology do not appear as warranted as Osborne and those of his ilk would have the church believe. Scobie, for example, sees the "risk" of typology as inconsequential, claiming rather that the use of typology can have a profound impact on the understanding and appreciation of the Christ event. Highlighting this importance, Scobie states, "Though often called into question as a valid method of interpretation, much recent study, not least on the part of literary critics, has recognized the pervasive influence of typology as one of the major factors providing continuity amid the diversity of Scripture."⁸³ To the efficacy of typology he adds, "The rehabilitation of typology is an important aspect of the canonical approach that leads both to a deeper appreciation of much traditional interpretation of Scripture and to a deeper understanding of the unity, or better, the continuity *inherent* in Scripture."⁸⁴

Furthermore, the use of typology for rhetorical purposes does not detract from the historicity of the events or the persons understood to typify Christ, as some might suggest, nor does it devalue the immediate context. Typology, as Scobie suggests, exists as tool for producing a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and to that end, typology works, and in the case of Job, it works rather well. Moreover, rhetorical use of the Old Testament is a method that can be traced back to the apostles themselves. Paul, for example, in Romans 5, describes the curse of Adam, which, according to Paul, Adam was given a command (do not eat), he disobeyed, and as a result sin was handed down to everyone. However,

⁸³ Scobie, 89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

this description does not reflect the account given in the Book of Genesis. Rather, the curse of Adam, according to Genesis, states merely that death, pain, and toil will become part of the human experience. At no point does the author of Genesis suggest that because of Adam's actions in the garden, sin is now unavoidable. Rather, the entirety of the Old Testament narrative appears to be a testament of the exact opposite. Indeed, Israel is given a law and *expected* to keep it. Yet, despite having a robust knowledge of Scripture, Paul is compelled to use the Genesis account in a way that makes Christ the goal of its story.

While some might argue the interpretative methods employed by the apostles should not be employed today; I am not convinced. Indeed, any argument that suggests the church should not emulate the apostles appears, at the very least, counterintuitive. However, to be fair, this does not invalidate such an argument and those opposed could just as easily highlight the counterintuitive nature of reading *into* a text (eisegesis) as opposed to deriving meaning *from* the text (exegesis). While I affirm both the validity and the importance of proper exegesis, this does not absolve me from viewing God's command to "rightly handle the word of truth" in light of the apostles interpretive methodology. If the apostles did it why *shouldn't* I? The typical answer is, "The apostles were justified in handling the Old Testament in the ways they did specifically because they were apostles, inspired by God, and thus had the authority to do so. We are not inspired, and therefore do not share the same interpretive liberties as the apostles and thus cannot follow their example."

This answer fails for at least two reasons: (1) the answer assumes that apostleship and inspiration justify an "odd" handling of Scripture and (2) the answer fails to recognize that the interpretive methods of the apostles were not unique to them. Indeed, what aspect of apostolic authority allows these individuals to break seemingly basic rules of interpretation? It seems

counterintuitive to suggest that inspiration motivates an individual to belittle the message of the text. Shouldn't being in a state of divine inspiration lead one towards a *more* serious approach to the text? In the absence of any strong evidence to contrary, it appears one could just as easily argue that it is precisely because the apostles were inspired that we *should* follow in their example. In regards to the interpretive enterprise employed by the apostles, Peter Enns, author of *Inspiration and Incarnation*, states, "[The apostles] interpretive methods and interpretive traditions are well documented in other Second Temple texts. They do not interpret the Old Testament in odd ways because they are apostles and they do what they want. They do what they do because they are first-century biblical interpreters who are heirs to a long and vibrant history of interpretation," adding, "We cannot appeal to apostolic authority to avoid the problems caused by apostolic hermeneutics."⁸⁵ While I understand an apprehension for welcoming the types of interpretations offered by the apostles, there is nothing explicit within the text that prohibits such a move. On the contrary, the New Testament provides numerous examples of inspired individuals championing a methodology of interpretation that viewed Christ as the goal of much, if not all, of the Old Testament (i.e. Matt 2:15 & Hos 11:1; 2 Cor 6:2 & Isa 49:8; Gal 3:15-29 & Gen 13: 14-17; Rom 11:26-27 & Isa 59:20; Heb 3:7-11 & Ps 95: 9-10).

Again, in the absence of any strong evidence to contrary, it appears one could just as easily argue that it is precisely because the apostles were inspired that we *should* follow their interpretative example. Moreover, no such evidence to the contrary appears to exist. Therefore, placing Christ as the goal and center of the Book of Job, for example, is not only warranted but also prudent in light of New Testament revelation. Note this does not absolve the Church from its responsibility to practice discernment. The author of Hebrews, for example, implores his

⁸⁵ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 146.

audience to study the word diligently so they might be able to discern good from evil (Heb 5:11-15). Likewise, a deep understanding of the revealed word of God, both written and otherwise, is important so the Christian can recognize when unalterable lines have been crossed, while keeping in mind that it was Christ, on the Emmaus road, who first taught that the Old Testament Scriptures were about Him: “Then he said, 'When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, ‘Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day’” (Luke 24:44-46).

CONCLUSION

The righteous sufferer stands nearest to God; the Delarosa has become the pathway to a reconciled relationship with the Lord. Job illustrates this well for the sake of the messiah. If indeed, suffering exists as an instrumental necessity of sanctification within the creation-order, post-fall, we can see Job typifying Christ well through his role as a suffering servant.

Unknowingly, Job stood at the front of the battleground and exemplified his role as a servant of the Lord. Job stands as an Old Testament John the Baptist, paving the way, and pointing to the identity of the messiah. If any meaning behind the suffering of the righteous is lost in Job, it is certainly made clear in the Christ event.

Applying Watson’s “Christocentric” approach to interpreting Scripture has done exactly what Scobie believed it would; it has deepened the appreciation and understanding of the Scriptures and provided continuity between testaments that likely could not exist in its absence. With the risk of sounding presumptuous, the day described in Luke 24, probably consisted of a lesson about the necessity of Job’s suffering, God’s goodness, and a thorough allusion to Christ

himself. Luke 24:25-27 shows Christ continuing and heightening his role as divine teacher, post resurrection. After His death and subsequent resurrection, Jesus pours over the Scriptures and proclaims to his disciples the reality of his relationship to the prophecies, both near and far, direct and indirect, found within the events and messages of the Old Testament prophets. This was due, in part, as a response to the disciples' morose and disoriented disposition following the crucifixion event (v. 20-21). Christ's purpose behind this Old Testament survey, albeit partially, was to highlight the blueprint-like features of the Old Testament, which was, and remains, the key to understanding Christ as the messiah. Indeed, Christ appears to affirm Francis Watson's claim that a proper understanding of, and biblical faith in, Christ, requires a "Christocentric reading" of the Old Testament. It appears rather profound, and telling, that while Christ undoubtedly went through a significant amount of material with the disciples that day, it was his emphasis on the messiah's suffering that was chosen to be recorded in the book of Luke (Luke 24:26). Could the Book of Job have been included within Christ's instruction that day? It is certainly a possibility. Indeed, there exists no greater example of Isaiah's suffering servant, prior to Christ, than Job.

While the Lukan account does not mention Job specifically, by comparison, the similarities of these two suffering servants are stark. Similar to an expected anticipation of an anthropos messiah deriving from multiple Old Testament references to divine anthropomorphism, the anticipation of a suffering messiah could have been similarly derived from the account of the righteous sufferer, Job. The question of "How could the innocent Messiah be allowed to suffer and die?" is more easily understood and reconciled when placed within the context of the sufferings of Job and the subsequent response of God. Indeed, the story of Job exists, in part, as an adumbration to the full revelation of the life, ministry, and death of

Jesus Christ. The introduction to the idea of righteous suffering, the comparisons of Christ and Job, similar understandings of the “Servant of the Lord,” the Bible’s use of the word “servant,” and subsequent fulfillments through Jesus each point to Job as a prefiguration of Christ. The above-mentioned considerations each represent a compelling aspect of a comprehensive whole, which argues that the story of Job can only be understood and appreciated when it is read through the lens of Christological typology. In the end, the best answer for questions about the meaning of the Book of Job, as this paper has argued, is that Job profoundly announces the coming of *the* suffering servant, Jesus Christ.

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