

ELIHU'S THEOLOGY AND HIS VIEW OF SUFFERING

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The Book of Job is essentially about God's relationship with humankind, specifically with a man named Job, and it revolves around two questions. The first question is introduced through the accusations of Satan (1:9-11; 2:4-5): Why do people worship God?¹ Satan suggested that the motivation for Job's worship and righteousness was "self-focused aggrandizement (Job 1:9-11)."² Elihu³ sought to show that Satan's thesis—that "all religious interest is ultimately grounded in self-interest, or worse, in mercenary commitment"⁴--is false.

The second question asks, How should people respond or react to God when He is silent and seemingly unconcerned about their problems? Therefore Elihu's theology is primarily related to Job's reaction to God, and the misunderstanding of the three antagonists and Job regarding their relationship to Him. Specifically Job questioned the operation of God's justice and ultimately God's own integrity, whereas the three questioned Job's claim of innocence and asserted God's right to exercise His freedom in the use of retributive justice. These two attributes, God's justice and sovereignty, were emphatically defended by Elihu.

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¹ See Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 219-32. Many observations in this article are drawn from this study, but will not be noted hereafter unless directly quoted.

² *Ibid.*, 219.

³ For a discussion of the authenticity of Elihu's speeches, see Larry J. Waters, "The Authenticity of the Elihu Speeches in Job 32-37," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (January-March 1999): 28-41.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 160.

ELIHU'S VIEW OF SUFFERING RELATIVE TO THE THEOLOGY OF GOD

In response to these two questions Elihu spoke first of God's sovereignty. God is greater than man (33:12); He is sovereign in His decisions and actions (34:14-15, 29), in His rule over individuals, nations, and the earth (33:14-18, 29-30; 34:13-15, 21-25; 37:13), and in His greatness (36:22, 26). His sovereignty is demonstrated in His creative work (32:22; 33:4, 6; 34: 14) and His control of nature, including the cycles of evaporation (36:27-33), rain (36:28; 37:6), the clouds, lightning, and thunder (36:29-33; 37:2-5, 11-12, 15-16), the cold, snow, and ice (37:6-10), extreme heat (37:16-18), and animals (37:8).

Elihu explained the relationship between the sovereignty of God and suffering by emphasizing that Job's life was under the control of the sovereign Creator God, who sustains life (34:13-15). Since God's decisions, actions, and dominion are autonomous, neither Job nor the three had the right to question God or presume on Him. However, Job and the three assumed that everything in God's universe ought to be explained to them (30:20) or known by them (15:8-10; 20:4). As a result Elihu declared, in essence, "There are some things you [Job and the three] will not understand, for you are not God."⁵ There will always remain some mysteries to suffering; therefore when believers suffer, they must maintain faith in the Lord.

A second attribute Elihu defended is God's "infinity, for He cannot be understood (36:26; 37:5, 15-16), seen by man (34:29),"⁶ or limited by space. A third attribute is God's eternity (36:26, 29), for He cannot be dated or limited by time. Elihu's purpose in emphasizing these three attributes was to move Job and the three from a focus on themselves and the problems surrounding undeserved suffering to the infinite God whose purposes are eternal and who knows exactly what He is doing. Before Elihu's intervention the debate had been anthropocentric and not theocentric. Elihu rectified that situation and injected a recognition of the divine into the discussion. Another purpose Elihu had in mind was to get Job and the three to understand that God is not limited in the way He deals with the suffering of humankind. God acts when, where, and how He has sovereignly decreed. This is not to discourage prayer or a humble, submissive, and righteous lifestyle, but rather to encourage a life of faith and trust.

The fourth and fifth attributes defended by Elihu are God's

⁵ *Ibid.*, 173-74.

⁶ Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," 221.

justice (34:12, 17; 36:3, 23; 37:23) and holiness (34:10; 36:23). He is perfectly just and holy when He judges sin (34:11), punishes sinners (v. 26), destroys the powerful (v. 24), acts impartially (v. 19), summons death (v. 20; 36:6), disciplines oppressive rulers (36:7), judges godless kings (34:30), and censures flattery (32:22). Elihu spent the greater part of his defense in affirming God's justice. The three antagonists' faulty theology and Job's insistence that God was neither exercising justice in the lives of others or in his own life (10:3; 12:6; 19:6-7; 21:7-15, 17-28; 24:12; 27:2) called into question God's justice and holiness. If Job's suffering were unjustly allowed by God, or if God's work could be reduced to a quid pro quo system, then God is no different from the false gods of the ancient Near East. Elihu maintained that God does not punish or reward on the basis of human terms (34:33). Therefore the proposition that God acts unjustly or that He is controlled by human logic is unacceptable. According to Elihu suffering has many purposes, all of which fall under the governance of the justice and holiness of God. To think otherwise diminishes God to "a god" and exaggerates suffering beyond its importance and promotes it to the prime factor of life, with all things revolving around its existence or absence (i.e., compensation theology).⁷

God's omniscience was also cited by Elihu. This sixth attribute affirms that God is aware of every movement of a person (34:21) and knows all that is in one's heart (v. 23). God sees the deeds of sinners and they cannot hide from Him (vv. 22, 25; 35:15). He is also cognizant of the righteous and their needs (36:7), for He is "perfect in knowledge" (36:4; 37:16). The silence of God was a major obstacle for Job, because it implied that God was unaware of his suffering or that He was distant and detached (13:24). Elihu demonstrated that God is actively involved in every area of a person's life and is aware of even inner motivations. Even in suffering, God does not detach Himself from His creation but is at work in that suffering to attract the sufferer to Himself (36:15-16). Since God is omniscient and aware of Job's suffering, He is also aware that it is undeserved. Therefore any apparent inaction or silence on God's part did not imply Job's isolation or God's ignorance and hostility.

The seventh attribute emphasized by Elihu was omnipotence. God is referred to as the omnipotent Creator (34:19; 35:10; 36:3), the Almighty Gods (32:8; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13; 37:23), and the

⁷ The terms "compensation" and "compensation theology" are defined later. a luck points out that 𐤁𐤍 is used thirty-one times in Job (including six times by Elihu) and only seventeen times in the rest of the Old Testament (ibid., 221-22). Also see R. Laird Harris, "The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God," in *Sitting with*

"mighty" One (34:17; 36:5). Twice, Elihu declared that God is "exalted in power" (36:22; 37:23). Rabbi Kushner insists that God is unable to prevent human suffering.⁹ This idea, however, was unacceptable to Elihu, Job, and the three, because "God's power was not questioned; only His fairness."¹⁰ Though Job did not doubt the power of God, he did deny God's willingness to use it on Job's behalf, and he even accused God of using His power against him (9:22, 30-31; 13:3; 16:7-12; 19:21; 23:2; 31:35a). For Job, "God's essence is 'power' and not 'justice;' he bends justice and rules with raw power (19:6f)."¹¹ For Elihu, to imply that God's allowance of Job's suffering was an action independent of His nature was an attack on God's justice. Elihu insisted that God's power was working for Job, not against him, even in his suffering and losses. Elihu wanted Job to put aside his preoccupation with his own vindication and righteousness and to realize that God alone had the power to deliver him (36:22-24; cf. 40:8-14).¹² The eighth attribute Elihu noted is God's love and mercy. His provision for His creation, Elihu pointed out, shows that He is gracious and merciful (37:13). He gives life to humanity (34:14-15), He forgives and restores (33:26-30; 36:10), He delivers sufferers in their suffering, speaks during oppression, and seeks intimacy with sufferers during their distress (36:15-16). Elihu also invited Job to consider God's merciful love, as seen in the actions of nature. When Job's wife suggested that he "curse God and die," Job replied, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (2:9-10). Elihu assumed that suffering was as much a gift from God as prosperity. Elihu also recognized that Job's occupation with his former blessings had clouded his mind to the lessons and intimacies related to hardship and adversity (33:24, 26; 36:15; 37:13b-14). The "fellowship of God is enriching, and...that fellowship may be found in adversity no less than in prosperity."¹³ Suffering is therefore the channel through which

Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job, ed. Roy B. Luck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 154-55.

⁹ Kushner says, "God would like people to get what they deserve in life, but He cannot always arrange it. Forced to choose between a good God who is not totally powerful, or a powerful God who is not totally good, the author of the book of Job chooses to believe in God's goodness" (Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* [New York: Avon, 1983], 42-43).

¹⁰ Philip Yancey, "Riddles of Pain: Clues from the Book of Job," *Christianity Today*, December 13, 1985, 80.

¹¹ Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 114.

¹² Elmer B. Smick, "Semeiological Interpretation of the Book of Job," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 147.

¹³ H. H. Rowley, "The Intellectual versus the Spiritual Solution," in *The Dimensions of Job: A Study and Selected Readings* (New York: Schocken, 1967), 126.

God dispenses His grace and love in a remarkable way and where His attributes are more clearly manifest to the sufferer.

ELIHU'S VIEW OF SUFFERING RELATIVE TO THE THEOLOGY OF HUMANITY

Job held traditional views regarding the origin and nature of humans. He acknowledged God as the Creator and Sustainer of life (12:10; 27:3, 8), particularly his own (10:8-11). Job noted that people are by nature frail (6:11-12), impure (14:4), wicked (3:17; 9:22, 24; 10:2; 16:11; 21:7, 16, 28; 24:6; 27:7, 13; 29:17; 31:3), godless (13:16; 27:8), and without hope (6:11; 7:6; 14:19; 17:15; 27:8). Job admitted that sin could occur in one's heart (1:5; 31:7, 9) or thoughts (31:1). Chapters 29-31 reveal that Job had a healthy respect for the consequences of sin and attempted to live righteously. Generally he agreed with his three verbal opponents that suffering is evidence of sinful behavior, but he also observed that contrary to the claim of compensation theology not all sinners suffer and not all righteous people are exempt from affliction (21:7-15, 17-18; 24:1-17).

Elihu described God's relationship to people in several ways. First, he depicted this relationship generally. Elihu spoke of God as the Creator of humankind (32:22; 33:4, 6; 34:19; 35:10), and the Authority over and Owner of human beings (33:6). Elihu maintained that human life is sustained by God (33:4; 34:20). He regarded people as formed from clay (33:6), made of flesh and bones (33:21; 34:15), lower than God (33:12; 36:23, 26), and destined to return to dust (34:10). People cannot condemn God (34:17, 29), see God (34:29; 35:14), or understand Him (36:26) or His ways in nature (36:29; 37:15-16).¹⁴ Elihu also said that human beings are spiritual creatures (32:8, 18; 33:3; 34:14; 37:1, 24). Concerning wisdom and spiritual knowledge, Elihu affirmed that wisdom does not come from age (32:4-5, 9) or human nature (32:5, 12-13; 36:29; 37:19), but from God alone (32:8, 19-20; 33:3-4, 15-16, 29-30; 36:10-13; 37:7, 14-15). True wisdom cannot be attained through tradition or effort, but is a gift from God. Therefore Job should entrust his situation to the authority of his Creator. Second, Elihu said God is intimately involved in the lives of human beings. God did not abandon humans when He created them (34:14-15). He is actively involved in the conduct of His people, and their ways are not hidden from Him (34:21-22). God communicates with people through dreams, visions, pain, and

¹⁴ See Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," 226-28, 230-31.

mediators (33:15-22, 26-29; 36:9-10, 15). God opens the ears of people to communicate His will and plan (33:16; 36:10, 16), and draws people to Himself (36:16). Elihu stated that God gives joy in life (35:10) and that He promotes or demotes people justly and I fairly (34:30; 36:7, 11). Therefore God was active in Job's suffering and struggle. The Lord was not Job's enemy (13:24; 33:10); He desired a deeper relationship with Job (33:26-30).

Third, Elihu described God's relationship with the righteous. God's might and power, he said, are involved in carrying out His plans and purposes for the righteous (36:5-7). God's relationship with them is unparalleled (vv. 5-6), and He is aware of all that happens to them (v. 7a). God does not oppress the righteous or do violence to righteousness (37:23b). Nothing happens to the righteous of which God is unaware; in this the righteous can be secure. God was involved in the life of Job and had a special interest in him as one of His righteous ones. Contrary to Job's accusations, God was not oppressing him or doing violence to him (37:23). Unlike readers who know the events of the prologue, Elihu accepted this truth by faith and encouraged Job to do the same. In reality the only enemy Job had to fear was himself, and suffering was revealing that to him (34:35, 37; 35:16; cf. 38:2; 40:2, 8). Job's suffering was more than Satan's insinuation against him. He was suffering to vindicate more than himself. He was vindicating God's trust in him. Elihu was saying that when suffering comes undeservedly, one should not react as Job did with accusation and self-defense. Instead the sufferer should "face it with trust [for] if he could know the cause, he too might find that he was serving God and was honored in his very agony."¹⁵

Fourth, Elihu described God's relationship with the wicked. Elihu recognized that people are sinners (33:17, 27; 34:22-27, 30; 35:12-13, 15; 36:9-10, 13-14), and are therefore held accountable to God (32:22; 33:26; 34:11, 30; 35:15; 36:10-12). For Elihu people are unable to deliver themselves and therefore need God's intervention and involvement (33:23-32; 36:15; 37:13). Even those who are mighty are ultimately subject to God (34:24). He knows their works (v. 25) and will overthrow them (vv. 25-26), because they have turned from following Him and have not regarded His ways (v. 27). They also cause the poor to cry out to God (v. 28). Furthermore God does not value an evil or proud person (35:12-13). Ultimately they are removed from their place (32:22; 34:24) and another is promoted above them (34:24). Especially pertinent to Job was the issue of pride (33:17; 35:12) and his accusation that God does not punish the wicked (21:7-16; cf. 35:12; 36:6).

¹⁵ Rowley, "The Intellectual versus the Spiritual Solution," 124.

The point Elihu was making is that God's retributive justice is still in effect regardless of the charges brought against it by a faulty theology or false accusations. People are accountable to God and are totally dependent on His grace for deliverance.

ELIHU'S VIEW OF SUFFERING RELATIVE TO THE THEOLOGY OF RETRIBUTION

For most ancient peoples, the quintessential principle of life was that God (or the gods) rule with predictive, moral, and compensative order.¹⁶ It was generally believed that the sovereign God/gods ruled His/their world, and that when necessary He/they would intervene in human history to reward the good and punish the wicked. Of course the Scriptures teach that God will ultimately punish the wicked and reward the righteous.¹⁷ It would seem that moral order in the world was and continues to be "one of those requirements of the human mind which God cannot fail to satisfy without appearing unjust."¹⁸

A belief held generally throughout the ancient world¹⁹ was "that there is an exact correspondence between one's behavior and one's destiny," and this principle "is known as the doctrine of retribution."²⁰ Generally in this view there was no room for the suffering of the righteous or the blessing of the wicked.²¹

Eichrodt asserts that a "deeply rooted belief in retribution" was found in Israel.²² Eichrodt's theology of the Old Testament

¹⁶ Rene Girard writes, "The idea of retribution [is] an essential aspect of every system of mythological representation [and it] dominates primitive religion" (*Job: The Victim of His People* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987], 122).

¹⁷ Jerome D. Quinn, "The Scriptures of Merit," in *Justification by Faith*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 84.

¹⁸ Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), cxxviii.

¹⁹ Robert Gordis states that the doctrine "was universally accepted throughout the ancient Near East, from the Nile to the Euphrates. The concept of family solidarity was joined to that of *lex talionis* ('measure for measure') and became a cardinal principle in the legal system of the ancient Babylonians, Assyrians, and Hittites" (*The Book of God and Man* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965], 137).

²⁰ David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1989), xxxix. Edward W. Glenny states it this way: "Retribution theology holds that there is an automatic connection between a person's deeds and state of being" ("How Well Do You Know God? The Dangers of Retribution Theology," *Searching Together* 23 [Spring 1995]: 14). Glenny's use of the word "automatic" would move his definition into the category of compensation theology.

²¹ Shimon Bakon, "God and Man on Trial," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 21 (1993): 22.

²² Walter Eichrodt considered retribution as one of the characteristic peculiarities that mark the Israelite religion: "Hence in Babylonia . . . we find a terrifying uncertainty about the principle of God's dealings with men; but the Israelite is cer-

was instrumental in popularizing the term "retribution." The term is so entrenched within present-day Old Testament theology that it seems advisable to retain that term to represent the biblical principle of retribution or retribution theology. The terms "compensation" and "compensation theology," on the other hand, designate the misconception of the biblical principle of retribution.²³

RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY

"Retribution" or "retribution theology" may be defined as deserved reward or punishment that comes to an obedient or offending party when a divine requirement, agreement, verbal promise, or covenant is kept or broken. That there could be verbal requirements or verbal agreements between God and people is clearly indicated by (a) the sacrifices Job offered (Job 1:5 and 42:8); (b) the phrases regarding God's "path," "command," "words of His mouth," in 23:11-12; (c) Job's oath of innocence and list of virtues in chapter 31; (d) Elihu's insistence that God is involved in individual human life (33:14-30; 34:14-15, 21-22, 25, 29; 36:5-12, 31; 37:13); and (e) God's speeches and the epilogue (chaps. 38-42).

Negatively, retribution is punishment for breaking a contract or covenant (verbal or written) that was relation ally or legally binding on two parties. Positively, retribution is reward for keeping the commands and requirements of that same contract or agreement. Retribution resulted from disobedience or obedience, anticipated by the offending or obedient party, when the verbal agreement, command, or covenant was broken or kept. It was therefore fair and Just both legally and morally.

However, the traditional wisdom of Job's day saw the concept of retribution as a fixed systematic formula for judging the condition of a nation or the life of an individual.²⁴ Therefore it lim-

tain that God in his turn will act toward him in accordance with those principles of law with which he himself is well acquainted" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, Old Testament Library, trans. J. A. Baker [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1:243]. The certainty of the Israelite, however, often turned to uncertainty when the formula did not follow the expected course. Koch points out that It may have been Gunkel who first recognized that from the beginning of Israel's history they held to a belief in retribution (Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983, 57].

²³ This is done with full awareness that the terms "retribution" and "compensation" could also be used interchangeably. However, it seems preferable to use the term "compensation" to represent the wrong doctrine, the wrong understanding, the misapplication, or the "hyperdoctrine" of retribution, while maintaining that the term "retribution" represents the biblical principles related to reward and "punishment from God.

²⁴ Roland E. Murphy states, "The book's most positive teaching is at the same time negative. the application to Job of the traditional theory of divine retribution is not

ited God to predetermined actions in dealing with people's responses to Him. People "seek an explanation of suffering in cause and effect. . . . They look backwards for a connection between prior sin and present suffering."²⁵

However, according to the Scriptures, within the true principle of retribution there is room for exceptions to a fixed formula for the working out of God's justice in the lives of His people.²⁶ "God's actions can at times suspend all dogmatic statements and theories about God's own inner workings."²⁷ This is not to say that He is capricious or that the principle of retribution contradicts His justice and freedom to act, but it does explain why people have attempted to develop fixed formulas by which to try to explain or predict God's actions.²⁸ Even so, retribution theology remains a tenet of God's justice and righteousness and does not violate God's mercy, love, and grace toward His people (37:13).

COMPENSATION THEOLOGY

"Compensation" or "compensation theology" is a belief system based on human observation, presumption, prejudice, and dogmatic traditional wisdom. Compensation is an airtight reward-and-punishment system related to performance of the individual within a set standard of assumed values. While there is evidence that God communicated certain requirements related to the true principle of retribution in the .Book of Job, there is no evidence the book that God followed this concept of compensation. God did not agree to the assumptions of Satan, the three counselors, or Job himself. There is no evidence of mutual agreement between the

relevant" (*The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Anchor Bible Reference Library [New York: Doubleday & Co., 1990], 34),.

²⁵ Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 68. As an example of this principle Andersen points to the man who was born blind "in order that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).

²⁶ This is also true in reverse. Righteous servants of God have suffered undeservedly, such as Joseph, Elijah, David as a fugitive, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Daniel. The New Testament also gives examples, such as Jesus Himself, the apostle Paul, the apostle Peter, and early-church believers.

²⁷ Koch "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" 82. Richard Rohr says, "The Book of Job proclaims from the beginning that there is no [fixed] correlation between sin and suffering, between virtue and reward. That logic is hard for us to break. This book tries to break it, so that a new logos, called grace, can happen" (*Job and the Mystery of Suffering* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 33).

²⁸ J. A. Loader says, "The Book of Job has no objection to a connexion (sic) of deed and consequence, but indeed objects to a doctrine of retribution into which reality is forced" ("Relativity in Near Eastern Wisdom," In *Studies in Wisdom Literature*, ed. W. C. van Wyk [Hercules, S.A.: N.H.W., 1981], 54 [italics his]).

Lord and Job, nor a verbal or written covenant that promised that the righteous would always prosper and never suffer. That is, Job and his three companions had made an assumption, but God had not validated it. Therefore it was neither legally nor morally binding on the Lord.

The terms "compensation" and "compensation theology" represent the fixed formula that became a distortion of the true principle of retribution. For instance Job's accusers, holding to compensation theology, communicated the idea that God is somehow under obligation to exact payment according to a principle that confines Him to the limitations of human interpretation of how good or bad a person is or acts.²⁹

Therefore compensation theology is presumptuous and prejudicial. It is presumptuous toward the Lord in that it demands that He act in accord with traditional wisdom. It is prejudicial toward human beings in that it classifies their relationship with God and their righteousness on the basis of having or not having material prosperity. Job's suffering and the prosperity of the wicked provide clear evidence to the contrary.³⁰ In contrast to compensation theology, the biblical principle of retribution is neither presumptuous (forcing assumptions from human wisdom on the sovereign God) nor prejudicial (favoring one person over another; 34:19). The proper application of retribution theology breaks down when wrong assumptions are placed on it. It then becomes a different theology, namely, compensation theology.

²⁹ This may also be referred to as "the traditional theory of retribution." J. Clinton McCann says, "By its rejection of the traditional theory of retribution, the Book of Job reveals a God whose essence is love, and thus a God who suffers with, for, and on account of humankind in the world" ("Wisdom's Dilemma: The Book of Job, the Final Form of the Book of Psalms, the Entire Bible," in *Wisdom You Are My Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Michael L. Barre, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 29 [Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997]. 21).

³⁰ See, for example, Job's remarks in Job 12 and 21.

Elihu's Theology and His View of Suffering
ELIHU'S INSIGHTS INTO SUFFERING
COMPARED WITH OTHERS' VIEWS

Ancient Near Eastern View

1. Worshipers held a general belief in some form of mechanical compensation: the automatic connection between one's deeds and state of being. Compensation was governed by the god(s) somewhat capriciously.³¹
2. This theology became a universal human philosophy of cosmic order for explaining individual destinies, suffering, and prosperity.
3. As a result of belief in this principle, misfortunes were always the result of sins and misdeeds. Sufferers were not therefore truly "innocent" but were ignorant and in need of enlightenment. (34:28; 36:27-31).
4. Therefore worshipers could expect reward and protection based on a life dedicated to their deity. Being "righteous" and "innocent," meant the person was obedient to the human explanations regarding the will of the deity. "Wise men" then became the interpreters of divine will on His prerogatives.
5. When suffering, the person (or sage) would simply acquiesce to the situation, because the god(s) were usually aloof and detached.
6. Since suffering was evidence of sin, the only recourse was to admit guilt, praise the deity, and plead for mercy. (36:22-26).

Elihu's View

1. Elihu held a belief in true retribution that was fairly and justly administered by God. It was not mechanical nor were one's deeds necessarily connected to its operation. God does not govern capriciously (34:10-12).
2. True retribution is a correction of the distorted views of human philosophy and is explainable only by God Himself (34:12-15; 36:5).
3. While the principle of retribution is observable, neither suffering nor prosperity is always predictable. Suffering is not always due to sin, nor prosperity to righteousness (36:6-8, 15; 34:14-15).
4. Reward and protection cannot be guaranteed by dedication of life to God. The righteous suffer undeservedly for purposes known to God. Being "righteous" or "innocent" means a person is obedient to the will of God. "Wise men" were to clarify and announce the will of God but not presume on His prerogatives.
5. Elihu agonized with the sufferer over the paradox of undeserved suffering and God's retributive justice (33:6). Also Elihu said God is personally involved in the lives of sufferers (34:14-15).
6. Since suffering is not always evidence of sin, sufferers are allowed to ask why, but not to blame God (33:12; 34:14-15).

³¹ For a discussion of the capriciousness of ancient Near Eastern gods, see Larry J. Waters, "Elihu's View of Suffering in Job 32-37" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1998), 218-63.

Satan's View

1. Suffering is a tool to use against both sufferers and God with the ultimate objective being that people curse God (1:9-11; 2:4-5).
2. Suffering is a tool to manipulate sufferers into doubting the goodness and justice of God.
3. Suffering generally has two objectives: to induce sufferers to blame God for what Satan does, and to motivate sufferers to sin.
4. Satan's objectives in his misuse of suffering are reinforced by the false principle of compensation.
5. Satan uses undeserved suffering to cause loss of perspective, disillusionment, and discouragement.
6. Satan used undeserved suffering to attempt to frustrate God's destiny for Job.

The View of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

1. Job's suffering was deserved; only the wicked suffer. Job was suffering; therefore Job was wicked (4:8; 11:6, 11; 18:5-21; 20:25-29; 22:2-11, 21-30).
2. Job's suffering was divine judgment or chastisement for sins committed before his suffering began (chap. 22).

Elihu's View

1. Suffering is allowed by God for His own purposes and for the benefit of individuals (33:14, 19, 23-24).
2. Suffering is allowed by God to strengthen sufferers' faith in the goodness and justice of God (34:12; 37:23).
3. Suffering has many objectives, all of which are designed to guide sufferers to a closer relationship with God and a better understanding of themselves and God (36:5, 22, 24).
4. God's objectives in His use of suffering are in perfect harmony with His gracious administration of the true principle of retribution (36:2-7).
5. Suffering is designed by God to sharpen perspective, correct weaknesses, and strengthen one's faith (33:15; 34:31; 37:13).
6. Suffering solidified a sense of God's destiny for the life of Job (36:22-37:24).

Elihu's View

1. Job's initial suffering was not deserved (Elihu limited his argument to present faults like pride; 33:17-18, 29-30). Job was not wicked, but he had sinned during ~ the debates and was in a precarious position (32:14; 33:12).
2. Job's suffering was not due to sins committed before the initial suffering began; rather he sinned in his speeches and attitudes (34:35-37; 35:16).

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| <p>3. The solution to Job's suffering was to confess his sin and repent; his prosperity was the motivation for repentance, because prosperity is always assured to the repentant (5:8, 27; 8:5; 11:13-14; 15:20-35; 22:21-23).</p> <p>4. The three held firmly to a traditional compensation theology that dictated the relationship between God and sufferers and obligated God to administer justice according to its precepts (chaps. 15, 18, 20, 22).</p> <p>5. The certainty of compensation theology was more important to the three than their duty to Job as friends and comforters during his suffering (6:14, 21; 17:1-5).</p> <p>6. The three drew wrong conclusions from Job's situation and thus made erroneous applications: (1) Job was sinful and therefore deserved suffering. (2) Job could have previously fallen unknowingly into sin, so suffering was deserved. (3) Job's suffering was disciplinary because of previous sin; therefore it was deserved.</p> | <p>3. The solution to Job's suffering was humble submission to God's work in his life. He was to return to being occupied with God and with what He was doing in his affliction. Prosperity is not the motivation for true repentance; it is only a possible consequence (36:8-15; 37:14).</p> <p>4. Elihu defended the true principle of retribution that was fairly and justly administered by God for Job's benefit (34:10-15; 36:2-26). God is not obligated by the interpretations of "wise men" or by the precepts of man-made theology (37:15, 19, 23).</p> <p>5. Elihu was concerned for Job, compassionately motivated to help him regardless of Job's conflict with traditional wisdom (33:4-7, 32).</p> <p>6. Elihu rejected the premise that all suffering is deserved. He affirmed that the cause for Job's original suffering was a mystery known only to God. However, Elihu realized that Job had sinned during the debates and that the continued suffering was allowed for several reasons that were irrelevant at the onset of his suffering (33:12; 34:10, 12, 35).</p> |
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Job's View

1. Job viewed his suffering as undeserved and unexplainable by the theology of compensation (9:21; 21:7).
2. Job associated his suffering with his past and related it to his present situation (7:17-20; 9:17-20).

Elihu's View

1. Elihu agreed and therefore concentrated on Job's present situation, offering no explanation for Job's undeserved initial suffering.
2. Elihu associated Job's suffering with the present and related it to his future (33:12; 34:10; 37:14).

3. Job observed that the righteous often suffer and the wicked often prosper, contrary to the belief system held by the three friends and to some extent by himself (chap. 21).
4. Job's suffering caused a dilemma in his thinking with regard to traditional wisdom. He was unable to reconcile his suffering with his exemplary life (7:20; 10:2; chaps. 29-31).
5. Though tempted by the offer of return of prosperity and social status, Job rejected this and maintained that, even though prosperity was given by God, it is not the incentive for service to God (he rejected all calls for his repentance).
6. Suffering caused Job to contend with God and to attempt to explain His actions by human reason (7:17-21; 9:22-24; 33:8-11, 13).
7. Suffering caused Job to misunderstand God's plan, accuse God falsely, arrogantly challenge God, and criticize the operation of God's justice.
8. Job's suffering made him anthropocentric, focusing on the injustice of his situation and the ramifications of his losses (chaps. 3, 29-31).
9. In Job's discourse on wisdom he recognized that it is possible to be closer to true wisdom during times of suffering and pain (28:20-22). But it is still God who gives the wisdom necessary to understand and deal with such suffering wisely.
3. Elihu agreed, but did not connect this to the false principle of compensation that viewed Job as wicked (view of the three) or that God was unjust (Job's view; 34:10, 12, 21; 36:5, 26).
4. Elihu, as a fellow human being, shared in the dilemma, but did not allow it to undermine his belief and trust in God's retributive justice (33:6-7; 37:23).
5. Like Job in the prologue, Elihu recognized that both prosperity and suffering can be gifts from God (2: 10). God, not circumstances, is to be the focus of one's life (36:24; 37:13-14, 24).
6. Elihu maintained that God's actions, though inexplicable, are perfectly good, just, and fair (34:10,12; 37:5, 23).
7. Elihu saw suffering as preventive, correctional, and educational. It was meant to clarify Job's misunderstandings-correct his false accusations, reveal his arrogance, and counter his criticism of God's justice.
8. Elihu presented suffering as glorificational, revelational, organizational, and relational. Job's suffering was to make him theocentric, focusing on God's justice and the positive aspects of his situation (35:5, 36:5, 22, 26; 37:14).
9. Elihu shared this conclusion with Job (32:7-9; 36:16; 37:24).

God's View

1. The reason or cause of undeserved suffering is known only to God, but the effect is felt by people, who are allowed to respond or react to their particular circumstances (38:4, 33).
2. Although people cannot fully understand the cause and reason behind suffering, God allows suffering to reveal defects that surface when believers suffer undeservedly (38:2; 40:2; 41:11).
3. God uses elements in nature (e.g., rain) for discipline or punishment, for His own pleasure and enjoyment, and as an expression of His covenant love (38:25-28).
4. God also rejected the inflexible theology of compensation, pointing the three friends and Job to the grace and sovereign operation of His retributive justice (41:10b-11).
5. Job's suffering was important to God, but Job was not the exclusive object of His concern; His purposes often extend beyond the needs of people (38:26-27).
6. The divine speeches influenced Job to repent of attitudes and sins developed during the debates mainly by causing him to concentrate on God's work in creating and sustaining the world (chaps. 38-41).

Elihu's View

1. Elihu similarly attempted to convince Job to respond properly to his situation rather than react to undeserved suffering (36:25-26; 37:5, 14, 23).
2. Elihu dealt directly with these faults and developed principles that were necessary for Job to comprehend and apply before God appeared (33:8-11; 34:5-6, 9; 35:2-3).
3. Elihu presented the principle of **ṭōṭ** ("loyal love") in 37:13. Rain can be viewed as an expression of God's judgment or of His grace and mercy.
4. Elihu did not answer Job according to the arguments of the three (32:14); he upheld the true principle of just retribution (34:10-12; 35:4-8). And he indicated that God provides for all people (36:31).
5. Elihu concurred (37:1-18).
6. Elihu recommended several actions that Job should take to advance beyond his occupation with his undeserved suffering: ponder and praise God's work (35:5; 37:14), and revere Him (36:24; 37:24).

7. Without the occurrence of underserved suffering Job would not have known and appreciated the magnitude of God's greatness (40:2) or recognized his own limitations (38:2).
7. This was one of Elihu's objectives throughout the discourse: to bring Job to a better understanding of the greatness of God (34:10-12; 36:5; 37: 14, 23) and to a humble position before Him (33:6; 37:24).
8. God's speeches demonstrate that He is the source of everything on earth (38:28), and He has control, ability, power, knowledge over nature all life (38:34-38). To understand undeserved suffering fully, one would have to be God.
8. Elihu agreed (37:6, 9-10, 15-16). He had made no pretense of understanding the preexistent reason or and cause for Job's undeserved and suffering. That knowledge rests with God alone.

CONCLUSION

Worshippers of the ancient Near Eastern gods, Satan, Job, and his : three antagonists—all these believed that suffering originated from a "tit for tat,"³² "measure for measure," compensation theology, which governs the correspondence between righteous behavior and prosperity, and sinful behavior and misery. However, Elihu showed that neither he nor God supported this theory. Under God's justice, suffering comes to people for several reasons, many of which are unrelated to compensation theology. Therefore Elihu uniquely declared that God's presence is seen precisely in the one place Job had claimed it was not, namely, suffering.³³ Suffering may be, and often is, God's voice to His highest creation. This in fact could be one of the most important contributions Elihu made to the theology of suffering: God speaks to humankind through various categories of suffering. And He is not limited to compensation theology.

Something apparently happened to Job while he was listening to Elihu. "With the help of Elihu, Job's confrontation with God became a revealing and healing experience, and he realizes that it is not only safe, but actually necessary to relinquish his insistence on his loyalty, his purity, his righteousness."³⁴ Prepared by Elihu, and then confronted by God (chaps. 38-42), Job refocused

³² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Tit for Tat: The Principle of Equal Retribution in Near Eastern and Biblical Law," *Biblical Archaeologist* 43 (Fall 1980): 230-34.

³³ David Arvid Johns, "The Literary and Theological Function of the Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job" (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 1983), 147.

³⁴ Walter L. Michel, "Job's Real Friend: Elihu," *Criterion* 21 (spring 1982): 32.

on God, recognized who he was in relation to his Creator, and understood the proper function of retributive justice. He ceased his insistence that God had acted with injustice, that he would approach God like a "prince," and that God had to act in a prescribed manner. Job was no longer overwhelmed by his suffering and the injustice of it; he was no longer verbal and defensive; he was no longer proud of his righteousness, orthodoxy, and purity; instead he was willing to let go of his security in a false theology.³⁵ Job's response to God, recorded in 40:4-5 and 42:5-6, demonstrates this observation. In his response he acknowledged two things. First, Job recognized a basic principle about his sin: "I am unworthy. . . I put my hand over my mouth. . .I will say no more" (40:4, NIV). Second, he recognized the nature of God and responded with a humility, love, and godly fear for God's sovereignty (42:1-2); he realized God's inscrutability (42:3); reflected on God's superiority (42:4); refocused on God's intimacy (42:5); and repented of serving God from wrong motivations or presumption (42:6).³⁶ Satan was silenced in chapter 42, because Job's response (42:1-6) proved that God's confidence in him was not unfounded (1:8; 2:3). Though God needs no vindication, the Book of Job shows that undeserved suffering, accepted and borne by a child of God, does, in a sense, vindicate God's gracious plan for His saints.

Crenshaw states that "true wisdom, like God, defies human reason."³⁷ Therefore true wisdom defies the wrong concepts of compensation theology, and when properly applied during undeserved suffering, godly wisdom becomes a living demonstration of God's grace. Job could say, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (42:5, NIV), partly because of the help of Elihu, who opened the way for Job to have a better understanding of God and His ways.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Steven J. Lawson, *When All Hell Breaks Loose* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 245--48.

³⁷ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1982), 123.

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