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THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK OF JOB

There is a great deal of confusion about the real meaning and significance of the Book of Job, and even about the identity of the man Job himself. But this book was intended by God to give us some vital insights, which are usually missed by most people.

The most commonly heard view in the churches of God is that Job had an enormous problem with self-righteousness, and that God allowed all the problems to come upon Job in order to force Job to confront his self-righteousness, and to deal with it. Apparently even Job's three friends could not get Job to face up to his self-righteousness, and it required God's direct intervention to eventually get Job to see what his real problem had been all along.

But this is not a particularly accurate picture. Let's take a closer look at the man Job.

IDENTITY OF THE MAN JOB

A basic point of understanding the Bible is that from the time of Genesis chapter 12 onwards God had narrowed down His direct dealings with mankind to dealing with Abraham and Abraham's descendants. After Abraham's son Isaac had begotten his two sons Esau and Jacob, God restricted His direct dealings with mankind to dealing with the man Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, and with Jacob's descendants, who became known as Israelites.

Specifically, from after the time of Genesis chapter 50 right up to the time of the end of the Old Testament, God limited his direct contacts with mankind to the Israelites, and to people who had become absorbed into, or at least come into contact with, the nations of Israel (e.g. Rahab and Ruth). [Comment: I am speaking here about God working with people to help them develop their characters, not about specific instructions to certain kings, like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, or to the false prophet Baalim, etc., which instructions had nothing to do with leading those people to salvation.]

It was only from after the time of the ministry of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, that God expanded His direct contact with human beings to include specifically "called" people from nations other than the nations of Israel. Thus Jesus Christ's commandment to His apostles to teach ALL NATIONS from then onwards (Matthew 28:19).

Without direct contact with God (but with automatic exposure from birth to Satan's ideas and standards) it is simply not possible for any human being to be "perfect and upright", as far as God is concerned. Being "perfect and upright" before God goes a whole lot further than merely being "a basically good person" by human standards, something that no doubt many people have attained in the course of human history. Being "perfect and upright" before God also PRESUPPOSES access to the information that God had revealed to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants. It presupposes a knowledge of God's "laws" and God's "commandments" and God's "statutes" and God's "charge", all the things that Abraham had faithfully observed during his life (see Genesis 26:5).

The point to understand is that after Genesis chapter 50, and prior to the time of the New Testament, OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL THERE WAS NO HUMAN BEING ANYWHERE ON EARTH TO WHOM GOD ALMIGHTY WOULD HAVE REFERRED AS "PERFECT AND UPRIGHT"!

Let's now look at the man Job.

Esau and Jacob were brothers. The sons of Esau were the cousins of the sons of Jacob. Now Genesis 36:4 identifies ELIPHAZ as a son of Esau. And Genesis 46:13 identifies Job as a son of ISSACHAR. So Eliphaz and Issachar were cousins, which means that Eliphaz was the cousin of JOB'S FATHER. This establishes a relationship between Job and the chief of his three friends.

Genesis chapter 46 records Jacob's extended family moving down into Egypt, and at that time Job was a young boy. Job's father Issachar, the fifth son of Leah, was at the most a year or two older than Joseph, who was 39 years old at that point in time. With Issachar thus being 40 or 41 years old at that time, his third son Job may have been around 10 years old.

There were exactly 430 years from the time when God made a covenant with Abraham being 99 years old (Genesis 17:1) up to the time of the exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 12:40-41). But from Abraham being 99 years old to the time when Jacob moved to Egypt with Jacob being 130 years old (Genesis 47:9) there were exactly 191 years (i.e. 130 + 61), since Jacob was born when Abraham was 160 years old.

This means that when Job as a young boy moved to Egypt with his father Issachar and with his grandfather Jacob, that was exactly 239 years before the exodus (i.e. 430 - 191 = 239).

At the time of his trial Job was already an older man and the father of 10 grown children. He was certainly older than Elihu; and Job had been accustomed to dealing with influential men (Job 29:8-10, 25). It is not unreasonable to suppose that Job may have been around 80 years old when his trials came upon him. Job 42:16 tells us that he lived for 140 years after his trials. Thus his total lifespan may have been around 220 years. That would have meant that Job died approximately 30 years before the exodus, at the time when Moses was still only about 50 years old, keeping the sheep of his own father-in-law, Jethro, and living fairly close to "the land of Uz".

So the Book of Job took place approximately around the time when Joseph died, or shortly after Joseph's death. This was still many years before the Israelites were forced into slavery by the Egyptians. It was only in the second half of the 140 years after Job's trial that Israel's slavery in Egypt actually started.

It is likely that as a young man, or at any time before approximately age 60 years, Job had left his father's house in the land of Goshen, and had settled somewhere to the east of Egypt, in an area known as "the land of Uz", named after one of the grandsons of Shem (see Genesis 10:22-23). That was the general area where some of Job's father's cousins (i.e. descendants of Esau) had settled. There Job had become prominent and extremely wealthy. Job had also brought with him a knowledge of the God of his grandfather Jacob. And he very conscientiously applied that knowledge to the way he lived his life.

Now let's look at the Book of Job.

GOD NEVER LIES!

There is a premise that I accept as above question. And that premise is that God Almighty never lies! God does not stretch the truth. When it comes to evaluating a person's character, then God will always state the truth! God never exaggerates the level of a person's standing in His sight!

When God Himself refers to someone, anyone, in an unqualified way as "upright" or as "perfect" or as "righteous", then I take that statement as a fact beyond question at that point in time. Things could change in the future, since future conduct is subject to free will and free choice. Likewise the past is past,

and upon genuine repentance God is willing to blot out our past guilt (Isaiah 1:18-19; Psalm 103:3; etc.). But for the present there is no reason or justification for questioning the accuracy of God's statements of this nature about anyone.

In the Book of Job God made the following statement to Satan:

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that [there is] none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:8)

This verse tells us the following:

- 1) At that point in time Job was ALREADY a servant of God.
 - 2) There was at that point in time no other servant of God alive anywhere on earth, who was of the same stature before God as Job. This tells me that Abraham was dead, as were also Isaac and Jacob, and very likely also Joseph. And it was before Moses became a servant of God. With this statement God was not trying to establish some kind of hierarchy amongst the greatest of His servants alive at that point in time. It was simply a matter that the other great servants of God identified in the Bible were either already dead, or they were not yet alive. God's statement that "there is none like him in the earth" helps us to identify the time period when these events took place.
 - 3) Job was "a perfect man" before God. The Hebrew word here translated as "perfect" means "upright, undefiled, living in integrity", etc. The same Hebrew word is used to refer to Jacob in Genesis 25:27, before Jacob got involved in deceiving his own father Isaac. (In that verse the Hebrew word is translated as "a PLAIN man", disguising to some degree that this is really an assessment of Jacob's character at that time.)
- The use of this word "perfect" by God Himself to describe Job at this point in his life (the same word is also used to refer to Job in the opening statement in verse 1) tells us that AT THIS POINT OF HIS LIFE JOB WAS NOT IN ANY WAY "SELF-RIGHTEOUS"! If Job at this stage of his life had been extremely self-righteous, as is so often inferred by preachers, then God would assuredly not have referred to Job as "perfect".
- 4) Job was "an upright man". There simply was no character flaw in the sight of God, and Satan certainly didn't know of any character flaw that Job might have possessed.
 - 5) Job also had the right kind of fear of God, something God here specifically acknowledged. The right fear of God is also something that Satan can recognize in a person, by the way that person responds to Satan's temptations. Thus Satan would also have been aware of this fear of God in Job.
 - 6) Job also "eschewed evil", meaning that he "avoided and shunned and departed from evil".

All of these attributes that God listed for Job were for real! None of these attributes was exaggerated by God. What we have here is the description of THE IDEAL MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD!

As far as his dedication and conviction and commitment to God's laws and God's way of life were concerned, Job in his relationship with God was streaks ahead of you and of me, and of Mr. Armstrong, and of any member in any of the churches of God today. Job was the model Church of God member. And there weren't any character problems that had gotten the upper hand over Job. Job was in control of his life, and as far as God was concerned, Job was making an excellent "job" of it!

Does this mean that Job had been perfect from early childhood onwards? Not at all. Job himself made the following statement, in chapter 13, long before his friends stopped arguing with him.

For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess THE INIQUITIES OF MY YOUTH. (Job 13:26)

It is not a matter that Job had always been perfect. Here he freely acknowledges what he refers to as "the iniquities of his youth". But at some point he had come to repentance; he had changed his attitude towards God. And upon genuine repentance God had indeed blotted out the sins of Job's youth, even as God will do exactly the same thing for you and for me. And once those things are blotted out, for Job and for us, then they are no longer mentioned by God. So God's description of Job was not necessarily a reflection of Job's past, but simply an assessment of Job's present standing in the sight of God.

Job's motivation for obeying God was right and pure. There was nothing self-righteous about Job's submission to God and His laws. There were no character flaws, and had he died at that point in time, then he would have been assured of being in the first resurrection. That is what God's assessment in verse 8 implies.

A LOOK AT SATAN'S MODUS OPERANDI

Satan had nothing to criticize Job's conduct and Job's response to God's laws and instructions. So in the absence of any REAL flaws in Job's life, Satan simply resorted to IMPUTING A WRONG MOTIVE to all of Job's faithful obedience to God. Satan accused Job of obeying God out of a totally SELFISH motivation. Satan knows that God does not accept obedience that is selfishly motivated (that is something you already know, right?), and IF his accusation was true, THEN taking away from Job everything that Job held near and dear would bring Job's (supposed) selfish motivation out into the open.

With this accusation the odds were greater than a million to one that Satan was right! That is because Satan had in one way or another been able to expose this selfish motivation in all other human beings alive at that point in time. So why should this factor not also have been true for Job?

But Job was truly unique in the way he had responded to every single attempt to get him to act selfishly, that Satan had thus far thrown at Job. Satan claimed that Job's resistance to attempts to get him to act selfishly was due entirely to the three "hedges of protection" (see Job 1:10) that God had established around Job and his family. These "hedges" really did protect Job from all attacks that Satan might have directed at Job himself, or at Job's family, or at Job's possessions. The only route of attack that had been open to Satan all along was attacks aimed at Job's mind ... and all of those attacks had thus far failed miserably. Job had remained resolute and steadfast in his submission to God.

Now the point is that at this stage in Job's life Job did NOT obey God from a wrong or selfish motivation! His motivation was pure, as it should be for all of God's people in any age. The motivation Satan wrongly imputed was totally without cause or foundation.

We all know what happened next. God gave Satan permission to take everything away from Job. And Job proved quite conclusively that his obedience to God was indeed pure, and without any kind of selfish motivation. The conclusion of this episode was:

IN ALL THIS JOB SINNED NOT, NOR CHARGED GOD FOOLISHLY. (Job 1:22)

Now the point we should keep in mind here is that these trials were all WITHOUT CAUSE! There was

nothing whatsoever that Job had done to deserve any of these losses. Job was an innocent man who had been falsely accused by Satan. It was neither self-righteousness nor anything else that warranted Job having to endure these trials. Job really was completely innocent. And God Almighty acknowledged as much when Satan again appeared before God.

Notice:

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that [there is] none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, TO DESTROY HIM WITHOUT CAUSE. (Job 2:3)

After having endured the loss of all his wealth and all his children, Job was still a faithful servant of God. Job was still UNIQUE (i.e. "there was none like him in the earth") in the way he had responded to these staggering trials that had been thrown at him by Satan. He was still perfect and upright; he still feared God and he still shunned evil.

Note God's statement that Job "STILL HELD FAST HIS INTEGRITY"! That is an enormous recommendation from God Himself! That is something all of us are supposed to do all the time, in good times and in bad times, TO HOLD FAST TO BEING MEN AND WOMEN OF INTEGRITY! And Job did this even in the face of enormous adversity. Job had remained true and committed, and in a right attitude towards God, as expressed in his statement "the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

Notice also God's statement to Satan regarding "you moved Me against him, to destroy him WITHOUT CAUSE". There was nothing whatsoever that Job had done that merited these trials coming upon him. He was truly an innocent victim of Satan's vicious attack. At this point there were no problems of any kind with Job's actions or attitudes, as far as God was concerned.

That is what God is telling Satan, and God does not lie!

Now we all know the rest of the story. Job didn't stay that way. He did buckle to some degree. He did get into a wrong attitude, and he said things that he should not have said, and he then later repented of these things.

Before we look at some of those things, let's take another look at the man Job.

A GIANT OF A MAN!

Let's look at the Book of Ezekiel. In chapter 14 God is speaking to Ezekiel in verses 12-23. God is speaking about bringing extremely severe punishments upon rebellious human beings, including things like famines, pestilence and warfare. The evils will affect, with very few exceptions, all people alive then. The seven verses from verse 14 to verse 20 specifically mention three men who have stood out as giants in their commitment and dedication to God. God's point is that even such deeply committed and dedicated men would under those conditions not be able to save even their own children; only they themselves would be protected because of their righteous conduct.

Notice verse 14.

Though these three men, NOAH, DANIEL, and JOB, were in it, they should deliver [but] their own

souls BY THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS, saith the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 14:14)

And also verse 20.

Though NOAH, DANIEL, and JOB, [were] in it, [as] I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall [but] deliver their own souls BY THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Ezekiel 14:20)

God was speaking these words to Ezekiel in the 500's B.C. And out of the approximately 3500 years of human history at that point in time, God selected these three men as the most outstanding examples of commitment to God. God very clearly attributes "righteousness" to these three men. God didn't include Abraham or David in this list; God just mentioned Noah, Daniel and Job.

Noah was UNIQUE in his age; he was the only one who "found grace in the eyes of God" (see Genesis 6:8), because of his total dedication to God. Daniel was likewise UNIQUE (by that time his three friends had been long out of the picture, and were very possibly already dead) in his dedication to God. And at Job's time there also was "NONE LIKE HIM IN THE EARTH". All three of these men submitted their lives to God without help or moral support from a nation or priesthood or clan or family around them. They lived by God's laws and standards in the face of enormous odds amongst a people who did not believe in the true God.

Now Job is included in this list not just because he came to repentance at the end of the Book of Job! Job had already been repentant before the first trial ever struck him. God included Job in this short-list because of the way Job had lived his adult life before his trials, as well as because of the way he lived his life after his trials.

[As an aside: the Bible shows us various glimpses of how the kingdom of God will be structured. For example, there are the three "fathers" (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and then there are the twelve apostles, each ruling over one of the tribes of Israel. One interesting point from the reign of King David is that he had a group of "mighty men", men who were totally committed to serving David, men who did not hesitate to lay their lives on the line for David. The top spots were "three mighty men" (see 2 Samuel 23), and the whole group was made up of around 40 mighty men. I wonder if God's reference in Ezekiel 14 to Noah, Daniel and Job is not a reference to God's "top three mighty men" in the Kingdom of God, because of their commitment, and the character these three men developed under extremely trying conditions? That would be a parallel to the structure King David established in his kingdom.]

Consider Job.

He was "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3). He was the wealthiest man around, and he was on a par with the kings in that area. Now it was an accepted practice for kings and wealthy men in that society to have MANY WIVES, and usually also many additional CONCUBINES. Yet Job had ONE wife, and one wife only. Why was that? Why did Job not have at least some concubines, in addition to his one wife, when he was even wealthier than the kings around him?

I believe that Job UNDERSTOOD that, while God permitted polygamy, it was not really God's desire for a man to have more than one wife. And because of his desire to please God, Job deliberately chose to have only one wife, and to not have any concubines.

As Job said about himself:

I MADE A COVENANT WITH MINE EYES; why then should I think upon a maid? (Job 31:1)

The point is that Job HAD SET HIS MIND to not even think about having sex with any woman other than his wife. That was a most unusual mindset for a man whose peers accepted it as perfectly normal and legitimate to have a number of "maids" as concubines. Even the patriarchs (i.e. Abraham and Jacob) had accepted such conduct as normal, as did also the kings of Israel, including King David. Note that Job is NOT speaking about not committing adultery; that was obviously not acceptable. No, Job is speaking about not allowing his mind to desire any "maid" that he in his position could easily have had available to him.

Job was a man who didn't just ask: what does God ALLOW me to do? He asked himself: what would God LIKE me to do in this matter? And as far as any sexual relationships were concerned, Job understood God's desire for a man to have just one wife . He understood the principle of Matthew 19:4-8, that "from the beginning" it was God's intent for a man to have an intimate relationship with only one woman. And Job lived his life according to that principle.

Job 31:1 is not some kind of boast Job made. It is a factual statement about how Job had resolutely set his mind. He was a man of real character. It might be difficult for us, with our constant exposure to pornography and to immoral conduct (TV, books, magazines, movies, billboards, etc.) to believe that someone actually succeeded perfectly in always resolutely rejecting any and every immoral thought that Satan might have thrown at him; but that's exactly what Job had succeeded in doing. That's one of the factors WHY God said to Satan that there was nobody else like Job, anywhere on earth. To at least entertain thoughts of sexual conduct outside of marriage, even if not actually physically acted out, is one of the MAJOR ways Satan tempts us human beings. And Job had resisted these temptations perfectly. The man was unique!

Now let me give you a speculation.

A SPECULATION

Approximately 2400 years had elapsed since God had created Adam and Eve. And here finally, after millions of human beings had lived and died, was ONE MAN who tried his best, in the sincerity and integrity of his heart, to actually THINK OUT what form of conduct and behavior God desires from us in every single area of life. Job went beyond obedience to the obvious laws and commandments of God. He went a notch above that.

Now while God had worked with a number of people before Job's time (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, etc.), and while these people had clearly submitted their lives to God, God NOW in Job had a man who did all that also, but who actively thought ahead, and therefore REFRAINED FROM certain "pleasures" that God had allowed along the way. And Job refrained from those things because he realized that he really SHOULD "make a covenant with his eyes" to control any wrong and selfish thoughts that would enter his mind.

So God now had a man who was the way that God had hoped Adam and all human beings would have turned out, a man who was desirous of wanting to learn and then live by God's standards and wishes, a man who was deeply committed to wanting to implement all of God's wishes in his life.

God wanted to find out how far Job's commitment and dedication would REALLY go. So God allowed Satan to "push" Job to find Job's limits (just like God had "pushed" Abraham to test Abraham's limits). There had never been any question regarding Job's commitment to God. But now God was going to test Job's response to totally unfair and undeserved treatment. Would he cope with that also?

And from after chapter 3 we see where Job cracked. Yes, he had a breaking point. He got into a wrong attitude, and he said many things that he really should not have said. There was something he did not yet understand; and that is that God will indeed at times allow His faithful servants to be exposed to totally unfair and undeserved trials and persecutions. Job did not yet understand that there is a purpose for having to deal with such undeserved treatment, something later people like the Apostle Paul understood quite clearly.

And once God confronted Job, Job got the real picture, expressed in his statement "but now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5). And Job repented of the attitude he had allowed himself to get into, and for the foolish things he had allowed himself to say.

From Job's experiences God learned how long someone, who has the best possible frame of mind to start with, can hold out when exposed to the total and unrestrained onslaught of Satan, without any access to help from God (except that Satan could not take Job's life). Job's experiences demonstrated that without help from God even "the best" human being was no match for Satan's perverse and relentless attacks. When Job buckled, it showed God that EVERY human being would buckle under the identical conditions. It showed God that, in order to level the playing field, man would need access to help from God, and man would also need access to God's "protective hedges", just to cope. God had offered that needed help to man right from the time of Adam, in the form of access to "the tree of life". While mankind in general had been cut off from that access to God's Spirit, God had nevertheless made that help available to all of His servants all along (i.e. to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, etc.).

What Job's experiences proved conclusively is that this added help from God really WAS absolutely vital to the process of leading human beings to salvation, and that NOT A SINGLE HUMAN BEING would ever cope without access to this help from God.

Job was the test case to prove this beyond any doubts. And just because Job did buckle under the pressure that was put on him (and he then repented), that did not prevent God from acknowledging Job as one of God's "three mighty men" in Ezekiel 14.

God also determined that if any of His true servants were in future exposed to trials of a similar severity, then they would ALWAYS have access to help from God in such situations, provided they would avail themselves of that access to help. The trial might be similar in nature, but that access to God's help would totally alter the picture. As the Apostle Paul explained:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but GOD [is] faithful, who WILL not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also MAKE A WAY TO ESCAPE, that ye may be ABLE TO BEAR [IT]. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

God allowed Job to go through his trials WITHOUT ACCESS to a way of escape, and it is not a surprise that Job wasn't able to bear it. And God greatly rewarded Job for having done as well as he did, obviously only after Job had repented of where he had gone wrong. Adding 140 years to Job's lifespan after his trial represented an enormous blessing from God, a blessing extended at a time when nobody else on earth was still living up to even 150 years of age. Giving Job another ten children at that stage of his life was also an enormous blessing. And from having previously already been the greatest and richest man in the east, God DOUBLED the wealth Job had possessed previously, another enormous blessing from God. These blessings represent God's rewards for Job having dealt with being exposed to destruction "without cause" (again Job 2:3).

[Comment: God also blessed Noah with an extremely long lifespan. Noah lived to be 950 years old at a time when nobody else (apart from Shem) reached even 500 years of age. And Daniel must also have

lived a very long life for the period he was living in. Daniel was already a teenager around 20 years before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, and he lived through the whole Babylonian empire, to where he was still a prominent leader at the time of the Medo-Persian King Darius (Daniel 6). So all three of the "mighty men" God named in Ezekiel 14 were blessed with a long life.]

I hope we can see that this is a somewhat different picture from the typical explanation that Job's trials were for the purpose of exposing his self-righteousness. But let's continue.

JOB'S FRIENDS HAD SPOKEN FOR SATAN!

Notice something God said to Job's three friends, after that Job had repented of these things.

And it was [so], that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for YE HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF ME THE THING THAT IS RIGHT, AS MY SERVANT JOB HATH. (Job 42:7)

Do we grasp what God was saying here? At no stage had Job's three friends said what was right in the sight of God! Did you always believe that their arguments were valid? When God said to them: "you have NOT spoken of Me the thing that is right", God was saying, to put it bluntly: All you three men did in all your arguments is present SATAN'S REASONING! And the things you said to Job were not correct, no matter how good some of your statements may have sounded. You three were simply furthering Satan's attacks on Job by provoking Job.

But notice also the last part of God's statement. God said: My servant Job HAS SPOKEN CONCERNING ME THE THINGS THAT ARE RIGHT! Can we see that? But obviously some of the things Job had said were wrong (like cursing the day of his birth, etc., recorded in chapter 3). So WHAT was God saying and referring to with this statement?

This brings us to the main purpose of the Book of Job.

THE REAL PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Many people think that the first two chapters of the Book of Job are devoted to exposing Satan's attacks on Job, after which Job then spends most of the rest of the book self-righteously defending himself, stubbornly refusing to admit any real faults. After all, of the next 29 chapters only 9 chapters (making up 211 verses) are devoted to Job's three friends speaking, while 20 full chapters (making up 513 verses) are devoted to Job defending himself and his righteousness.

But this perspective of the Book of Job is not really correct.

The truth is that the main purpose of the greater part of this book is to give us A COMPLETE EXPOS OF HOW SATAN ATTACKS GOD'S PEOPLE!

Here is how Satan attacked Job:

1) Satan had repeatedly tried to tempt Job with any number of sins, by presenting wrong thoughts to Job's mind. Satan had already done this even before he appeared before God in Job 1:6. These attacks on Job were identical to the way Satan attacks all other human beings as well. These attacks had all been presented without any kind of added physical pressure, thanks to the three "hedged" that God had placed around Job. And Job had effectively resisted all of those attacks.

2) THEN Satan obtained God's permission to take everything away from Job, which Satan wasted no time in doing. So the second level of Satan's attacks on God's people is "to take things from us". Such attacks will almost always expose a certain amount of selfishness on our part. And selfishness is something God wants us to root out of our lives. Job had also effectively coped with this "second level" of Satan's attacks, and he had resisted the temptation to get into a wrong attitude towards God.

3) THEN Satan obtained God's permission to afflict Job with physical pain and suffering. We might think of this as the "third level" in Satan's attacks on God's people. This form of attack adds enormous pressure when it comes on top of the previous levels of attack. And most of us in God's Church would very likely stumble to some degree or other under such pressure, if we hadn't already stumbled previously. But Job held strong, and also resisted this "third level" of Satan's attacks.

These three levels of Satan's attacks had all been put into effect before the end of the second chapter of the Book of Job.

4) And after chapter 2 we THEN see LEVEL FOUR OF SATAN'S ATTACKS ON GOD'S PEOPLE!

It was this fourth level of Satan's attacks that caused Job to stumble and to sin. And this fourth level of attack is AIMED EXCLUSIVELY AT THE MIND!

Satan had shot all his big cannons at Job. They had all impacted very heavily on Job in PHYSICALLY DISCERNIBLE WAYS, and Job had suffered heavy losses: wealth and health and his children had all been taken away from him. But Job had not buckled, and Satan had not made any inroads into Job's commitment to God. There was NOTHING MORE, from a physical point of view, that Satan could throw at Job. Satan had no other guns left that he could use to physically affect Job. But while Satan had no other means available to affect Job in a physical way, all of those attacks served as the preparation for now unleashing his level four attacks on Job.

Level one attacks and level four attacks may seem to be almost identical. But they differ as follows: level one attacks focus on trying to get the human mind to lust and to covet. Level one attacks focus outwards, getting us to want to have things that are "out there". Level four attacks, in contrast, focus inwards. They focus on the unfair treatment we have received; they focus on people not really appreciating our efforts and service and sacrifices and commitment. Their aim is to get us to feel sorry for ourselves, and ultimately to become bitter and resentful of life and everything that affects us.

Level four is a far more serious condition than level one.

Level one attacks would include things like stealing and committing adultery, because we gave in to lusting and to coveting. We wanted to get something for self. While these things are obviously wrong, they are not directed against God, and they can readily be repented of. [Comment: By "readily" I do not wish to imply lightness or flippancy. Such sins don't necessarily cause us to get into a wrong attitude towards God, which would make it difficult to come to repentance, something that is a very real difficulty with certain other sins.]

Level four attacks, in contrast, create bitterness and resentment in us, BECAUSE OF something that has happened to us, or because of the way we are treated in some situation or other. Level four attacks create self-pity in us. We feel sorry for ourselves, and ultimately our resentment and our bitterness are directed AGAINST GOD HIMSELF, because it is "God's fault" that life is treating us unfairly. And when our sins involve a wrong attitude towards God Himself, then it is always far more difficult to repent of that.

It should be clear that Satan's overall goal is to get ALL human beings to get to the stage of "level four",

to where our sins involve a wrong attitude towards God Himself. That is a far more dangerous situation than the one where a sin is committed out of weakness and on impulse.

These four stages of Satan's attacks on especially those with whom God is working are clearly exposed in the Book of Job.

SOME EXAMPLES

Let's notice some details regarding Satan trying to attack Job, by speaking to Job through his three friends. But let's also keep in mind that the people who are being used by Satan to get at someone else almost always don't realize that they are being used by Satan. That was the case with the Apostle Peter (see Matthew 16:23), and that was also the case with Job's three friends. In both cases the people concerned (i.e. Peter and Job's three friends) really believed that the things they were saying were right and helpful. That is the same way Satan got through to Adam, by speaking to Adam through his wife Eve (who offered Adam the forbidden fruit).

In the case of Job's three friends they really intended to comfort Job and to show their concern and their sympathy (Job 2:11). But it didn't turn out that way. How did Satan do that, deceive Job's friends into attacking Job instead of encouraging him? Actually it was quite easy for Satan.

Satan got Job's friends to accept FALSE PREMISES, which on the surface sounded so good and right! Satan got Job's friends to accept as correct fundamental concepts that are in fact wrong, concepts that Satan wants people to accept as correct. Once Job's three friends had accepted completely wrong premises, it was assured that they would never get to the right answers.

The first time Eliphaz speaks, he presents the following premise:

Remember, I pray thee, WHO [EVER] PERISHED, BEING INNOCENT? or where were the righteous cut off? (Job 4:7)

This is a very subtle twisting of the truth! It is correct that GENERALLY SPEAKING the righteous and the innocent are protected. But it is Satan who wants us to believe that this is AN ABSOLUTE STANDARD IN THIS PRESENT AGE! And when Eliphaz's statement is taken as an ABSOLUTE premise, then it will inevitably produce some false results.

The innocent CERTAINLY perish in some cases, and the righteous CERTAINLY are cut off in some cases. That was true for Jesus Christ; it was true for Abel, it was true for John the Baptist, and it was true for ALL of God's servants who were persecuted and slain. Jesus Christ explained this point quite clearly.

Blessed [are] they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when [men] shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall SAY ALL MANNER OF EVIL AGAINST YOU FALSELY, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven: for SO PERSECUTED THEY THE PROPHETS WHICH WERE BEFORE YOU. (Matthew 5:10-12)

And Stephen understood this point equally well.

WHICH OF THE PROPHETS HAVE NOT YOUR FATHERS PERSECUTED? AND THEY HAVE SLAIN THEM which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now

the betrayers and murderers: (Acts 7:52)

From God's statements to Satan in the first two chapters, we know that Eliphaz's premise was also wrong when applied to Job. God made very clear that Job was innocent!

So here is one of Satan's devices in deceiving human minds: apply a generally right principle (or one that at least sounds right) to the wrong person or to the wrong circumstances.

With this one simple statement ("remember I pray you, who ever perished being innocent") Eliphaz has set the stage for him and his two friends to completely misjudge Job's situation. The premise sounded good, but it was false! And God's anger was kindled against Eliphaz (Job 42:7).

Now notice what Eliphaz said next.

In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then A SPIRIT PASSED BEFORE MY FACE; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image [was] before mine eyes, [there was] silence, AND I HEARD A VOICE, [saying], (Job 4:13-16)

What Eliphaz is here recounting is a vision that SATAN gave him. It wasn't God who passed before Eliphaz's face, it was Satan! Notice what this "spirit" told Eliphaz.

Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, HE PUT NO TRUST IN HIS SERVANTS; and HIS ANGELS HE CHARGED WITH FOLLY: How much less [in] them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation [is] in the dust, [which] are crushed before the moth? (Job 4:17-19)

What a diabolical attempt to discredit Almighty God!

Satan, the "spirit" which passed before Eliphaz in this vision, wants to portray God as someone who doesn't trust anybody, that He is always suspicious and expecting the worst! Satan's statements here are a gross distortion of the truth. As John 8:44 tells us: there is no truth in Satan! But notice that Satan said these things in a way that was intended to impersonate God; he made Eliphaz believe that this was coming from God. It is clear that Eliphaz accepted this false premise, because Eliphaz himself later repeats this point (i.e. "He puts no trust in his saints") in Job 15:15.

For a start, God does trust His servants! Never mistake testing with a lack of trust! God will test all of us, certainly. But at the same time we need to understand that in this present age it is ONLY THE PEOPLE THAT GOD TRUSTS that God actually exposes to specific tests. The people God doesn't trust He also does not bother to test. The greatest proof that God does indeed trust His servants is the fact that already upon genuine repentance God adds our names to the book of life. That's trust! Our names are added long before we in fact have demonstrated our trustworthiness to God. Yes, our names can still be blotted out (see Revelation 3:5), but they have already been added to the book of life based on trust.

Secondly, God does not charge His angels with folly! That accusation is simply not true! The only angels that God has charged with folly are Satan and those who followed Satan, the one who happened to be telling Eliphaz this false line.

When we understand that Eliphaz himself here reveals that SATAN had spoken to him (though Eliphaz was deceived into believing the message came from God), THEN it should put everything Eliphaz says

to Job into a totally different perspective. Eliphaz's speeches, and those of his two friends, are nothing other than the continuation of Satan's attacks on Job. They are level four of Satan's attacks.

AND THOSE ATTACKS CERTAINLY ACHIEVED THEIR GOAL, which was to provoke Job into a self-righteous attitude and a wrong frame of mind towards God.

Eliphaz's understanding of what God is like was grossly distorted. Satan also told Eliphaz the following statement, which Eliphaz foolishly believed:

They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding [it]. (Job 4:20)

The subject in verse 18 was "God's servants", remember. Drawing these conclusions in verse 20, based on nothing more than the fact of our mortality, is absurd ("satanic" might be a more appropriate word). Just because we are mortal doesn't mean that we are "destroyed from morning till evening" or that we will "perish for ever". This is pushing a totally wrong view of God's purpose for human life! These statements in verse 20 are an expression of the mind that has been "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). These statements are completely destructive and offer no hope of any kind. They are Satan's statements!

Did Satan ever deceive Eliphaz and his two friends!

So here is the point we need to keep in mind:

The entire speeches by Job's three friends, all nine chapters of them, are nothing other than Satan's continued attack on Job, with the explicit goal of trying to goad and to provoke Job into a self-righteous attitude, one of resentment and bitterness towards Almighty God. And it all started with those three men accepting the wrong premise that Satan had presented to Eliphaz in a dream or vision.

God wasn't angry with Eliphaz and his two friends because they had tried their best to show Job his real problem, but somehow hadn't been able to hit the nail quite on the head. God wasn't angry with them because they had made a sincere mistake. God was angry with them because they had allowed themselves to be used completely to do Satan's work, effectively provoking Job into sinning. And unless they changed, God threatened to "deal with them according to their folly", implying that they would die!

Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: LEST I DEAL WITH YOU [AFTER YOUR] FOLLY, in that ye have not spoken of me [the thing which is] right, like my servant Job. (Job 42:8)

God commanded them to take SEVEN bullocks and SEVEN rams for a burnt offering to show THE SEVERITY OF THEIR TRANSGRESSION! Consider that when "the whole congregation of Israel sinned through ignorance" and the sin later became known, then they only had to bring ONE bullock as a sacrifice (see Leviticus 4:13-14). So when God instructed Eliphaz to bring SEVEN bullocks, plus seven rams, we have an indication of just how seriously God viewed their part in Satan's attacks on Job.

Getting back to Satan using Eliphaz to attack Job:

Before his friends had arrived, Job had stayed in a correct attitude towards God, and Job had not said anything that was wrong or foolish (Job 2:10). So the first thing Satan wanted to do was force Job's mind

to focus on God's part in all of his troubles. That's the way Satan usually works, getting people to mentally dwell on the subject of their potential transgression. Satan has worked that way ever since deceiving Eve. Where Eve had been minding her own business, Satan forced Eve's mind to think about the forbidden tree by presenting a lie to Eve. Once Satan had focused Eve's mind on the tree of the perception of good and evil, it was an easy step to tempt Eve into also eating the fruit of that tree. Likewise, in order to get Job to be in a wrong attitude towards God, Satan first had to get Job to see God as involved in all his troubles.

The truth is that God was not at all involved in Job's troubles. Every single evil that had befallen Job was entirely due to something Satan had brought upon Job, albeit with God's permission. But now Satan has Eliphaz making totally false statements about God supposedly not trusting His servants and destroying them from morning to evening. Satan's intent with these false assertions was to force Job's mind to think about God as the source of his troubles.

In the dream or vision Satan had also said to Eliphaz: "shall mortal man be more just than God?". This is something Satan DELIBERATELY SAID (and which Eliphaz then duly passed on), in order to pressure Job into an attitude of self-righteousness. While Job had cursed the day of his birth, and while he vented his feelings about this in a wrong way, Job had thus far NOT made himself "more just than God". This statement here was designed to nudge and to coerce Job in that direction.

It's time we took a closer look at this matter of self-righteousness.

HOW SATAN TEMPTS US TO BE SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Obviously Satan is the one who wants us human beings to become self-righteous. So let's notice how Satan did this in Job's case.

1) Job started out with a right attitude towards God. He was faithful and obedient to God. He was not at all self-righteous at that point in time. God Himself freely acknowledged to Satan Job's integrity of character.

2) After Satan had launched various physical attacks on Job's possessions and family, Job still had not succumbed to any feelings of resentment or bitterness towards God. He was still not in any way self-righteous.

3) Satan then got Job's mind onto the subject of COMPARING a man's righteousness with God, by confronting Job with the statement "shall mortal man be more just than God?". This was a parallel to Satan's statement to Eve: "yes, has God said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). In both cases (i.e. with Eve and with Job) the obvious answer was "no", but in both cases it had the effect of getting the people concerned to think about the subject Satan wanted them to think about. And by adding the claim that God does not trust His servants, and even destroys them from morning till evening, Satan was putting enormous pressure on Job to conclude that God is simply not fair in the way He treats us, pressuring Job to become self-righteous.

4) Where Eve then started to think about the forbidden fruit, Job's mind was directed to thinking that all the troubles he was receiving were undeserved and unfair, as Satan had hoped Job would think.

5) But Job still wasn't self-righteous. So to pressure him further in that direction, Satan (through the agency of Job's three friends) then presented Job with COMPLETELY FALSE AND UNFOUNDED ACCUSATIONS! Satan had Job's three friends accuse Job of things of which Job simply was not guilty.

6) Now when we are faced with blatantly false accusations, it is perfectly acceptable to refute those false

accusations. Such refuting of false accusations has nothing to do with somehow being self-righteous. For example, if we are falsely accused of having committed adultery, there is nothing self-righteous about clearly resisting and refuting such false accusations.

7) BUT AT THAT POINT WE HAVE ALSO ENTERED THE DANGER ZONE!

8) It is extremely easy to slip from an emphatic "I simply HAVE NOT DONE what you are accusing me of" into an equally emphatic "I WOULD NEVER DO what you are accusing me of". The "I haven't done" statement is a factual and objective observation. But the "I would never do" statement is AN ASSESSMENT OF OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS! The "I would never do" statement has crossed over into the area of self-righteousness. And that line is very easily crossed.

9) Irrespective of what it is that we are falsely accused of, we should ALWAYS keep the principle of "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12) in mind. When we are falsely accused of some wrong conduct, it is very easy for us in our own minds to reach the assessment that we would never do such a thing, whether we verbalize that assessment or not. In such circumstances it is very easy for us to become self-righteous. The truth is that as long as we are still human, we are capable of doing any wrong that anyone else may have done, even when we have the best intentions to not engage in such wrong conduct (whatever it may be). We haven't done the wrong, and we don't intend to do the wrong, but nevertheless we are still very much capable of doing the wrong.

The Apostle Paul probably expressed this the best way:

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (Romans 7:15)

10) Being provoked by false accusations, coupled with the claim that God isn't fair in the way He treats His servants to start with, is probably the most effective way to get us to adopt a self-righteous stance. That's precisely what Satan here did with Job: Satan PROVOKED Job into becoming self-righteous. Provoking people into sinning is one of Satan's tactics. For example, Satan also provoked King David to number Israel, something that David should not really have done (see 1 Chronicles 21:1). And Satan tried unsuccessfully the same approach on Jesus Christ, to provoke Christ into saying things that He should not say (see Luke 11:53).

11) We all know that Satan is "the accuser of our brethren" (Revelation 12:10), but we easily overlook that Satan deliberately has someone accuse us falsely, in order to provoke us into a self-righteous response. It is not the false accusation that does us any harm. It is our potential self-righteous response to false accusations that is likely to harm us. Whenever we face false accusations, while it is perfectly acceptable for us to rebut those false charges, we need to understand that the explicit purpose of those false charges is to provoke us into a wrong response. That is why Jesus Christ "held His peace" when He was accused by false witnesses (see Matthew 26:60-63); He knew the high priest was simply trying to provoke Him with these false charges.

12) We need to actively guard our minds against ever allowing ourselves to feel that in some way God is not fair with us. That is an attitude Israel got into repeatedly, expressed in their proverb "the way of the LORD is not equal" (see Ezekiel 18:25, 29). That attitude is the main foundation on which self-righteousness is built.

Let's now look at the main method Satan uses to present false accusations against us.

THE PERVERSITY OF "CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE"

Every good author of a mystery story knows that his whole story hinges on someone correctly interpreting "circumstantial evidence", whether that is an Agathie Christie novel or whether it is a Sherlock Holmes story. Circumstantial evidence is always the key to unraveling the mystery. Mystery stories imply the lack of obvious evidence against the evil doers. And in the absence of any REAL evidence against the criminals it is a little clue here, and a little clue there, that eventually exposes the guilty party. Many of those "little clues" are nothing more than circumstantial points, but which require a considerable amount of "interpreting".

Now Satan is the accuser of God's people. Satan commonly resorts to using false accusations, as he had done in Job's case. When an accusation is false, then there obviously is no REAL evidence to support it, otherwise it would not be a false accusation. And in the absence of any real evidence, all Satan has available for mounting an attack is things that could be considered as "circumstantial evidence".

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE IS SATAN'S SINGLE GREATEST TOOL IN PRESENTING FALSE ACCUSATIONS!

The Book of Job is the classic exposure of this tactic. Job's three friends had no evidence of any kind that Job was in some way or other sinning. They had nothing at all! Yet they did not hesitate to accuse Job of the most wicked crimes.

In Bildad's first attack on Job we see that Bildad had accepted the same false premise that Satan had persuaded Eliphaz to accept, one of assuming Job's guilt in some area or other. Bildad said:

IF THOU [WERT] PURE AND UPRIGHT; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. (Job 8:6)

And in his first attack on Job Zophar openly, and falsely so, accused Job of lying. Notice:

SHOULD THY LIES MAKE MEN HOLD THEIR PEACE? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? (Job 11:3)

With nothing more than the circumstantial evidence of all the evils that had befallen Job, his three friends build up an enormous picture of all the evils that befall the wicked. And since all these things had actually come upon Job, therefore he OBVIOUSLY had to be guilty of heinous crimes. There was no other possibility, was their assertion. The case against Job, based solely on the misinterpretation of circumstantial evidence, kept growing to the point where Eliphaz eventually came out and just stated the following accusations very bluntly:

[Is] not THY WICKEDNESS GREAT? and THINE INIQUITIES INFINITE? (Job 22:5)

For THOU HAST TAKEN A PLEDGE FROM THY BROTHER FOR NOUGHT, and STRIPPED THE NAKED of their clothing. (Job 22:6)

Thou hast NOT GIVEN WATER TO THE WEARY TO DRINK, and thou hast WITHHOLDEN BREAD FROM THE HUNGRY. (Job 22:7)

Thou hast SENT WIDOWS AWAY EMPTY, and THE ARMS OF THE FATHERLESS HAVE BEEN BROKEN. (Job 22:9)

These are horrendous accusations against the man who God Himself described as "perfect and upright". None of these accusations were true. And there wasn't a shred of REAL evidence anywhere to support any of these false accusations. Yet Eliphaz did not hesitate to make such brazen accusations, based on nothing more than the circumstantial evidence of what had happened to Job. Eliphaz was doing Satan's work.

Circumstantial evidence allows people to draw conclusions by "reasoning out" supposed evidence. Circumstantial evidence is nothing more than an intellectual exercise, and usually a foolish one at that. People resort to reasoning out such supposed guilt precisely because they have no evidence for the accusations they wish to assert.

It is worthwhile to note that the laws God gave to Israel didn't make provision for convicting anyone based on nothing more than circumstantial evidence. Conviction required real, tangible evidence.

For example, the Book of Deuteronomy states two different situations for the case of an engaged woman having sex with another man. If the sexual activity took place "in a city" (i.e. in a built-up neighborhood where any shouting in one house can readily be heard in the surrounding other houses), then the sexual encounter is assumed to have been with the woman's consent, UNLESS she shouted for help. It is assumed that if the man intended to rape the woman, then she would have screamed for her life, and that would have been heard by people in the surrounding houses. In that case (i.e. when the woman screamed for help) the man is guilty and the woman is an innocent victim. If she did not shout for help, she is assumed to have been consenting to sex with the man, and therefore she is also guilty.

On the other hand, if the sexual activity took place somewhere out "in the fields", then it is ASSUMED that the woman would have cried out for help, but there was nobody around to hear her cries for help; and therefore she is innocent in the absence of any real evidence to the contrary. There is no provision for accepting circumstantial evidence against the woman (e.g. someone had witnessed the woman previously smiling at the man involved, in some situation or other, etc.). There is no tangible evidence that she consented to having sex with the man involved, and therefore she must be presumed innocent. See Deuteronomy 22:23-27 for the details regarding this judgment God gave to Israel.

The point is: God did not allow for circumstantial evidence against the woman in this situation. We could think of any amount of circumstantial evidence, designed to frame the woman (e.g. the rapist claiming that she consented, etc.), but God made no allowance for such circumstantial evidence.

Circumstantial evidence is first and foremost one of Satan's major tools in attacking the people of God, and in ascribing guilt to innocent parties. The Book of Job clearly exposes the enormous weaknesses inherent in "circumstantial evidence", and the diabolical misuse of such supposed evidence.

We live in an age where people INFER a vast number of things that have actually never been said or done. When a political leader makes a statement, people commonly infer something from the things he DIDN'T say, as well as drawing unwarranted conclusions from the things he did say. This happens all the time. Circumstantial evidence is almost never used in someone's favor, to exonerate someone who has been falsely accused. Rather, it is used overwhelmingly to try to place guilt on someone, where there in reality is no clear evidence available to prove guilt. That's precisely what the accuser of God's people wants: accuse us falsely in order to provoke us into a wrong attitude towards God.

The Book of Job should teach us that it is very easy indeed to misapply and to misinterpret circumstantial evidence. That happens all the time.

Now let's look at the things Job had said that were right.

THE RIGHT THINGS JOB SAID

Recall that in Job 42:7 God had told Eliphaz that Job had said "the thing that is right" concerning God. So what was God referring to?

The problem with the things Eliphaz and his two friends had said was that they painted a completely wrong picture of God. They portrayed God as always suspicious, someone who trusts neither His servants nor even His angels. They portrayed God as unfair. These three men had really presented Satan's perspective of what God is supposedly like.

Job, on the other hand, had a correct picture of God. And even though Job got into a wrong attitude, he never lost faith that God would at some point indeed sort everything out. For example, in Job 14:14-15 Job said: "all the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. You shall call, and I will answer you". And in Job 19:25 Job said: "for I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

Job didn't lose faith, and he didn't accept Satan's distorted view of what God is like. Job remained confident that he would have a part in the future God has planned, even though he was currently going through extreme trials. Job did have the correct picture of God.

But Job also said some things that were not right.

THE WRONG THINGS JOB SAID

After he had lost everything and been struck with boils from head to foot, his friends arrived. After they had respectfully kept silence for seven days, then Job really exploded in resentment towards what had happened to him. He launched into a tirade against the day of his birth, wishing that he had never been born.

While Job does make two references to God in this context (i.e. in chapter 3), saying that God should remove that day from the year, as if it had never existed (verse 4), and that for some people God blocks any escape routes from problems (verse 23), Job does NOT at this stage proclaim his own righteousness. Nor does he blame God for all his problems.

[Comment: It is interesting that Job's comment about God blocking any escape routes from our problems (Job 3:23) is specifically addressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:13, where Paul pointed out that God is indeed "faithful" in providing His servants with a way of escape from problems. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is the antidote to Job 3:23.]

This (not blaming God for his problems) is important to note!

At this stage (i.e. in chapter 3) Job is simply quite discouraged by all the problems he has had to endure. At this stage his response was not that much different from when Elijah got discouraged (see 1 Kings 19:4), and when Moses got discouraged (see Numbers 11:10-15), though Job's way of expressing this discouragement was not really right. In the instances with Moses and Elijah, it was God who encouraged Moses and Elijah. But in Job's case his three friends did just the opposite; they criticized him and falsely accused him of things of which he was simply not guilty, in that way PROVOKING him into an attitude of

self-righteousness.

So here is the point:

IF AT THIS STAGE HIS FRIENDS HAD REALLY ENCOURAGED JOB, SHOWING COMPASSION FOR HIS SUFFERINGS, AND ATTESTING TO THE INTEGRITY OF HIS CHARACTER, THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT THE REST OF THE BOOK OF JOB WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED. JOB VERY POSSIBLY WOULD NOT HAVE SAID ANYTHING WRONG TOWARDS GOD. NOR MIGHT HE HAVE BECOME SELF-RIGHTEOUS.

And furthermore, I believe that Satan was fully aware of this distinct possibility!

It was precisely because Job had already demonstrated such great commitment to God, and such great restraint against "charging God foolishly", that Satan resorted to the rather extreme tactic of giving Eliphaz a vision and speaking to Eliphaz, setting Eliphaz up to criticize and to goad Job, instead of encouraging him. Satan had to prevent Job's friends from doing what they had originally intended to do: to mourn with Job and to comfort him (Job 2:11). And in this Satan succeeded completely.

AND THAT IS WHY GOD WAS ANGRY WITH ELIPHAZ AND HIS TWO FRIENDS!

The principle here is that of Ezekiel 3:18, adapted to Job's circumstances.

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked [man] shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. (Ezekiel 3:18)

The principle is one of accountability here. Let's adapt the above verse to Job's circumstances as follows:

"When I say unto you, Go and encourage your friend who is suffering great adversity from Satan, if you do not encourage your friend, and your friend sins and never repents of those sins, then your friend shall die in his sins, BUT HIS BLOOD WILL I REQUIRE AT YOUR HAND."

That is the principle for why God was angry with Eliphaz and his two friends. God was holding THEM accountable for Job's wrong attitude and for the wrong things Job ended up saying. Their speeches had provoked Job into his wrong attitude.

That is why God commanded them to bring SEVEN bullocks and SEVEN rams for a burnt offering. Their part in Job getting into a wrong attitude was EXTREMELY SERIOUS, as far as God was concerned. They had really worked for Satan, not unlike Balaam who had also worked for Satan, when he advised King Balak to entice the Israelites into fornication, so that God might destroy them in His wrath. Balaam paid with his life for allowing Satan to use him in an attempt to trip up God's people; and Job's three friends were in a similar danger before God. But in their case God accepted Job's intercession for his three friends.

So let's understand this quite clearly:

By the end of chapter 3 Job has vented his discouragement. But he has not yet accused God, or proclaimed his own righteousness, or done anything other than expressing discouragement.

Discouragement itself is not a sin! Other servants of God also got discouraged at times. However, Job did express his discouragement in ways that were not really right.

At that point it was not at all a foregone conclusion that Job would cave in to Satan's attacks. But in his discouraged state Job was weak and very vulnerable to attack. Had his friends strengthened Job, the whole book might very well have been a different story.

But at that point Eliphaz followed through with the thoughts Satan had presented to him in a vision or dream. Eliphaz attacked Job's integrity, just like Satan had done before God in chapters one and two. It was exactly the same unjustified attack.

AND IT IS FROM CHAPTER 6 ONWARDS THAT JOB GETS INTO A WRONG ATTITUDE AND SAYS THINGS ABOUT GOD THAT HE SHOULD NOT HAVE SAID!

Yes, Job did become somewhat self-righteous. He succumbed to the provocation from his friends. Job fell for Satan's trap. And his friends carried the responsibility for Job's caving in to Satan's attacks.

Now consider the next important point, the fact that GOD actually spoke to Job.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD SPEAKING TO JOB

After Job had defended himself, and become self-righteous in the process, and had dared to criticize God, it was quite clear to God that Job could not cope against Satan's attacks indefinitely, if God did not also make some help available to Job.

Job had been a faithful and committed servant of God. He himself did not really realize that he had allowed himself to be drawn into a wrong attitude towards God. The whole process had been so subtle.

So God then confronted Job by speaking to Job out of a whirlwind. If Job would hold fast to his wrong attitude, then it was going to be the end of the road for Job. Instead of addressing any of Job's foolish charges, God simply spelled out His great power and majesty, showing Job how small and insignificant he really was (in one sense).

Once God started to speak to him, Job immediately realized that he had allowed himself to be provoked into self-righteousness and into criticizing God. He had no defense of any kind; instead he very quickly acknowledged "behold, I am vile". After God had further elaborated on the greatness of His power, Job freely confessed that he had said things which he didn't really understand, and Job concluded with stating "wherefore I abhor myself and repent".

God accepted Job's repentance, and Job was back in the relationship he had with God before his trials had come upon him. Now God speaking directly to Job, to help him to understand his true position, tells me that God was acknowledging that God had allowed Job to be pushed harder by Satan, without access to help from God, than anyone before. The unusual pressure Job had been exposed to was balanced by an unusual degree of help from God at the end. God is not unfair.

As already mentioned earlier, the tremendous blessings God gave to Job after these trials show how highly God valued the effort Job had made, and then also repenting for where he had caved in and acted foolishly.

God rewards faithful obedience. And God rewarded Job on a grand scale. So when anyone talks to you about Job's "self-righteousness", be sure you see that in the correct context. Yes, Job did end up becoming somewhat self-righteous, because, through the agency of his three friends, Satan had

provoked Job into becoming self-righteous. But Job had assuredly not started out that way, at the start of the book. At the start of the book Job was really the personification of the ideal member of the Church of God in any age.

The Book of Job clearly exposes "level four" of Satan's attacks on especially the people of God. We need to understand that Satan will do his utmost to provoke any of God's people into becoming self-righteous; and we need to be on our guard against this type of attack from Satan.

Frank W. Nelte