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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD  
AND THE SUFFERING OF MAN

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A Study in the Theology of Job & His Friends

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## INTRODUCTION

The age old question is raised, “Is God to blame for human suffering?” For many unbelievers it is this very notion which keeps them away from Christianity and compels them toward a rather low view of its God and His claims. The relationship between God’s sovereign rule of the universe and the suffering which is rampant upon the earth is a source of great perplexity among people of faith as well. When a child is born with a terminal illness, is that child’s condition the result of the sovereign choice of God? When a man or woman becomes bound to a wheelchair as the result of a debilitating disease, is that person’s condition the product of God’s judgment?

Such questions are indeed difficult to answer with any level of honesty and compassion. For the proponent of an incredibly high view of God’s sovereignty in human affairs, it would be altogether too easy to offer answers which reek for a lack of compassion. For ardent proponents of God’s love, it is equally easy to offer trite answers which do not satisfy the soul due to an overly whimsical tone. In what follows I will examine what the Old Testament Wisdom Book of Job has to say with regard to this matter. Specifically, I will examine and contrast the theology of Job and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu. I will seek to understand the perspective of these characters in what is perhaps the biblical account which gives mankind the greatest depth of insight into the nature of God’s dealing with His creation in their current state of routine suffering.

I lay no claims to having settled all aspects of this matter. It is my profound longing however, to offer a ray of hope, a glimmer of perspective, which I pray that God will use to encourage the reader toward a growing view of God’s provision of grace in the lives of believers. We do not always know why this happen the way that they do, but we always who we can turn to and where our trust is sure; in the outstretched arms of our savior.

Rev. Chris Surber

## JOB'S PRESTIGE

The book of Job opens with Job as a prosperous man who had great faith in God. "... This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil." (Job 1:1) In order to understand the theology of Job as it relates specifically to the problem of pain and evil, it is incredibly necessary to consider Job's theology prior to the time of his destruction. Job's reaction to the suffering which would befall him is intrinsically linked to his view of God prior to that time. Reactions are formed prior to the events which trigger them. Foundations are laid prior to full construction.

Job was a man who feared the Lord. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary, the biblical text literally says that he was "Without moral blemish," or "morally whole" and upright "straight" in the sense of not deviating from God's standards."<sup>1</sup> In Job we see that the suffering which befalls humanity is not reserved purely for the wicked or the unbelieving person or people. This is a motif that is consistently presented throughout Old and New Testament biblical theology. In the gospel of Luke 13:1-5 Jesus is asked about some Galileans who were murdered by Pilate and other people living in Jerusalem who apparently died during an accident which occurred during a construction project. The question is raised to Jesus, "Were these men worse sinners than others living in the same area?" Jesus answer was a plain spoken no. Rather than condemning those who were killed by government authorities or those who were killed by accident, Jesus exhorts all present to repent because similarly, they do not know when the time of their death will be at hand.

We live in a fallen world where Satan has deceived humanity into believing that God does not have their best interest at heart. "This is the foundation of all sin: the lie that God is untrustworthy, the lie that God is not altogether loving and that he doesn't have our best interests in mind."<sup>2</sup> The pain and suffering found in the world is not reserved only for the evil and wicked; experience tells us that all people from every background experience pain and suffering. The point that Jesus makes in Luke 13 is that the state of the world after the fall of mankind into sin is such that tragedy may befall anyone at anytime.

As a result of believing the lie of Satan, Adam and Eve fell into sin and we have not inherited their sin nature, alas we have also received our inheritance from them; a broken and fallen sin-filled world, where even the pure in heart often suffer pain, loss, sickness and disease. In this fallen world all people and all of creation is subject to the consequences of the fall. The fall is universal with regard to creation and specific in origin and scope with regard to humanity. No conversation regarding the theology of Job is complete without at least a cursory treatment of the sin problem which set the stage for Job's suffering and God allowing Satan to test Job. The sin problem is at the very core of the biblical perspective on suffering. Concerning the consequences of the fall of Adam and Eve, along with their progeny, Henry Thiessen writes, "That sin entered the world through Adam means that sin commenced its course in the race and man began to commit sin that human nature

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary, accessed via QuickVerse Platinum 2006, Victor Books, Hiawatha, Iowa, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, Gregory A. et al., *Is God To Blame?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 24.

became corrupt, and that man became guilty.” In the following section of his work he goes on to write, “Even inanimate nature is represented as suffering the curse of man’s sin.”<sup>3</sup>

The world is fallen as a result of human sin and rebellion toward God. As a result, even the righteous suffer. The curse of sin blankets the entire earth. While the Bible clearly teaches that none are perfect, in the life of Job we see a man of honesty, integrity, and true fear and worship of God coming under terrible suffering and pain regardless of his good works. Job’s account of suffering points us toward the observable reality that sin and its consequences are worldwide in scope.

## **JOB’S MISFORTUNE**

At the end of the very first chapter of Job we find the account of Satan’s accusation against the nature of Job’s godliness and integrity. Satan asserts that Job is only godly because he has been blessed of God. He further says that if the Lord should remove the “hedge of protection” which He has placed around Job, surely he will curse God to His face. Satan is allowed by God to come against Job upon the condition that he may only not harm Job directly. Satan comes against Job by causing all of his livestock and family to be killed. In the midst of such calamity, Job’s response is breathtaking.

“Then Job got up and tore his robe. He shaved his head, and then he threw himself down with his face to the ground. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will return there. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. May the name of the LORD be blessed!” In all this Job did not sin, nor did he charge God with moral impropriety.” (Job 1:20-22 NET) At the heart of Job’s view of God (his theology) is a complete and total devotion to the sovereignty of God. Inherent in his reaction to the news of his calamity, rather than raise his fist at God, Job immediately tears his robe as a sign of his great mourning and then turns his heart toward God. Job declares that the entirety of what he is and all that he has is the gift of God. His source of strength is God alone! “He wanted his God; he did not long to see Bildad, or Eliphaz, or Zophar, or any other earthly friend; but his cry was “Oh, that I knew where I might find HIM! that I might come even to his seat!”<sup>4</sup>

Job declares in no uncertain terms that he possesses nothing in this life except for what God entrusts to him. In times of calamity and uncertainty, we learn from Job that our task in this life is not that of a wealthy land owner, but that of a steward set to watch over what has been entrusted to us. The beautiful things in our lives are on loan from God. We are watchmen, not proprietors. Control in this life is an illusion. In an age of self-reliance, followers of Christ do well to consider the theology of Job in light of the common false belief that each of us is in full control of all of the things in our lives. Our possessions, our families, our very lives, are on loan from God. While it is a great challenge for all of us, I am

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Thiessen et al., *Lectures In Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 183-184.

<sup>4</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon et al., *The Suffering of Man & The Sovereignty of God* (Oswego, Illinois: Fox River Press, 2001), 197.

compelled to believe that it is our innate belief that goodness in the lives of those we love is our responsibility that often stops us from achieving that end.

In other words, while we cling to the good and beautiful and wonderful things in our lives, as though primary control resides in our own hands, our grip closes our vision to the reality that those wonderful things are ultimately in the hands of our Heavenly Father. It is often our addiction to control over our circumstances and our inability or unwillingness to surrender all of ourselves, including the good and beautiful things in our lives to God that leads us into the most desperate forms of despair and heartache. Tragedy in this fallen world is an unfortunate reality. *Our only and surest way to deal with misfortune is to the trust the God who has promised never to leave us or forsake us; the God who knows the beginning from the end and will ultimately restore this world to its intended splendor.*

In misfortune it is very easy to lose sight of one's theological perspective; that is one's understanding of the nature of God. In the face of adversity it can be very difficult for us to see through the dense fog of pain unto the God who sustained us in years past and sustains us even now. Faced with the decision to blame God or to continue to trust Him in spite of his circumstance, Job remained steadfast in his understanding of God's supreme value. Job's theology reflects well that of John Piper when he writes, "God is absolute and eternal and infinite. Everything else is dependant and finite and contingent. God himself is the great supreme value. Everything else that has any value has it by connection with God."<sup>5</sup>

When our lives are full of bliss, God is sovereign and in control of our lives. When we do not understand what is happening to us, God remains ultimately sovereign and in control of our lives. The point is not that God creates difficult circumstances in our lives in order to prove His sovereign reign over the earth or in our lives. The point is consistent with the core declaration of Job's theology; everything that we have and all that we are is contingent upon God's hand of provision and grace and He is worthy of adoration. God is our creator and sustainer. Even the very breath that we breathe from moment to moment is rightly understood as the gift of God!

Sin and Satan's rule over the earth through sin is the primary condition which has brought about the reign of suffering upon the earth and its presence in our lives. God's sovereign grace sustains us in the midst of this broken and imperfect world. In Job's response to his dreadful misfortune we learn that at the very center of his theology is a deep and abiding trust in the sovereign rule of God over the powers of Satan, in the immediate circumstances of life, and no doubt, a trust that in spite of his present calamity, the God who had sustained him all of the days of his life would not abandon him now. "If the Lord wills, we will live. And if he doesn't, we will die. God, not Satan, makes the final call. Our lives are ultimately in his hands... God is sovereign..."<sup>6</sup>

## **RETRIBUTION, THE THEOLOGY OF JOB'S FRIENDS**

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<sup>5</sup> John Piper et al., *Suffering And The Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2006), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 22.

After an unmentioned period of time, Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar arrive to show sympathy for him and to console their friend. Their initial time spent with Job shows the depth of friendship and love they held in common for Job. Upon seeing the level of despair and pain of Job, each man tore his robes as a sign of profound mourning. Then they sat in silence with their friend as they comforted him with their presence and silent identification with his pain. After seven days of silence Job breaks his own silence with a diatribe in which he laments his own birth and expresses his unfathomable suffering. Each man then offers his theological perspective with regard his particular understanding of God in light of Job's circumstances. In each man's offering we see that the overall theme is a theology reflective of a view of God as retributive and full of judgment. God is seen as only handing out punishment or allowing evil things in the life of those who have earned it. This theology stands in stark contrast to the actual blamelessness of Job.

Once Job has broken the silence, his friend Eliphaz is the first to speak. His manner of speech is at first mild; giving attention to Job's great reputation. Then he goes into a lengthy monologue where he asserts that good people are not judged by God, but aided by His hand, and that bad people are judged and hindered by God. In so doing, Eliphaz creates the same logical quandary that all of Job's friends create in their monologues in one way or another. The friends of Job create a situation where Job's righteousness necessitates the conclusions that either Job is hiding some secret sin or that God is not just. "This is the teaching that all the friends will affirm in one way or another. It is also Job's belief. They cannot say anything else without suggesting that moral effort is not worthwhile or that God is somehow unfair. But a terrible pitfall is not far away from all of them. The friends must infer from Job's suffering that he has sinned; Job must infer from his innocence that God is unjust."<sup>7</sup>

In Eliphaz statements he implies that God only punishes the wicked he underscores a theology which plainly views God as primarily retributive in nature. If God only punishes the wicked then he must invariably bless the upright; those who fear God. His practical theology is comparable to the hyperbolic statement found in Psalms 37:25 where the Psalmist writes, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." While the Psalmists seems to be making a sweeping poetic statement of encouragement to the believer, Eliphaz gives the rather plain impression that he is implying that Job must have secret sin if God is dealing with him in this fashion at this time in his life.

There are a great number of believers in the modern body of Christ who have been deceived into the very same theological perspective as that of Eliphaz and Job's other friends. This view is the "guilt-based" view of so many people who, for a lack of understanding of the universality of the sin curse upon the earth and the relative rule of Satan upon this earth, believe that when anything evil befalls them, whether it is the loss of a set of keys or a bout with cancer, God is judging them for their sin or shortcomings.

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<sup>7</sup> Francis I. Anderson et al., *The Old Testament Commentary Series, Job* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 120.

While this may very well be the case in some circumstances, clearly just as this is not the case with Job, it is not the case with many other people. While there is a prevailing motif of man reaping that which he sows with regard to moral choices the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, experience as well as the account of Job tells us that routinely this is not the case. Mankind suffers generally as the consequence of sin. The general state of brokenness of the world is the direct consequence of sin having entered into the world. Each specific instance of suffering is not necessarily brought about by the direct actions, good or bad, of the person afflicted.

“The Bible traces the entrance of suffering and evil into the world to the grand but terrible quality of human freedom. What makes us different from porpoises, muskrats, and grizzly bears? Alone, homo sapiens have been released from the unbreakable pattern of instinctual behavior. We have true, self-determining choice. As a result of our freedom, human beings introduced something new to the planet – a rebellion against the original design. We have only slight hints of the way earth was meant to be, but we do know that humanity has broken out of the mold. “We talk of wild animals,” says G.K. Chesterton, “but man is the only wild animal. It is man that has broken out. All other animals are tame animals; following the rugged respectability of the tribe or type.”<sup>8</sup>

Job’s friends have not brought him any comfort. Indeed, rather than understanding his plight and offering hope and encouragement, Eliphaz has only rather strongly implied that Job must have some secret sin that he is hiding from those around him. In Job 6:14-17 Job speaks of his friends as he says, “A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams, as the streams that overflow when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow, but that cease to flow in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels.”

Bildad only further heaps judgment upon the plight of Job as he asserts that not only asserts that Job must have sinned against God but that for God to allow or to cause Job’s children to suffer, they too must have offended God. Bildad only further espouses the retributive doctrine of God that Eliphaz began. In Job 8:4-6 he says, “When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.”

While his words offer the admonishment of a friend toward the hope of repentance, they remain replete with a retributive theology of God. Zophar advocates what is essentially the very same theology as that of his other two friends, though perhaps with an ever greater degree of eloquence. He does offer a similar degree of promise to Job that God will restore him and that this will pass. The theology of Job’s friends is fundamentally retributive, seeing God as a Heavenly accountant who ensures that the scales of good deeds and evil deeds are appropriately rewarded or punished.

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<sup>8</sup> Phillip Yancey et al., *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), 66.

Job's friends, while obviously deeply devoted to their friend, offer to him an empty misguided understanding of God's role in Job's calamity. "Job's well-meaning comforters demonstrate the force of this by straying even further from reality as they pursue their fixed ideas of suffering as punitive or, at the very least, purgative."<sup>9</sup> The crux of their misunderstanding is the presupposition that God always rewards the righteous with good things and that he always punishes the wicked with evil things. A simple observation of the world around us disproves the theology of Job's friends because it does not correspond with reality. In the real world it is very often the case that "no good deed goes unpunished!"

Consider the words of the prophet Jeremiah who was dismayed at the prosperous way of the wicked that he saw in his day. "You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jeremiah 12:1) In Job we see the righteous suffering and elsewhere in the Bible – *as well as in our own experience* – we see the wicked prospering in spite of their evil deeds.

Those who have a sense that the world is not all that it should be rightly perceive through their senses what God has revealed in the Bible. From the sinful state of humanity to the fallen condition of the world, God's creation cries out in agony. "Somehow, pain and suffering multiplied on earth as a consequence of the abuse of human freedom. When man and woman chose against God, their free world was forever spoiled. As Paul sees it, since the fall of humanity into sin, the planet and all its inhabitants have been emitting a constant stream of low-frequency distress signals. We now live on a "groaning" planet."<sup>10</sup>

### **RESTING IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, JOB'S THEOLOGY**

Job's theology unfolds throughout the book which bears his name. His theology is tested not only by his trials but also by the theological confrontation of his friends. It is only in the face of opposing ideas that one's view of God truly flourishes. Just as a stone is shaped by the jeweler's knife, Job's theology seems to have been refined through the conversation with his three friends. There are also the words of Elihu the onlooker and the words of God to consider in this discussion.

Elihu was a young man who looked on the development of Job's conversations with his friends. From a literary perspective his presence provides an almost narrative element in that he takes the cries of Job and the judgments of his friends and clarifies them from a purely God centered position. "But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he." (Job 32:2-4)

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<sup>9</sup> Derek Kidner et al., *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, & Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 67.

The theology of Elihu is absolutely reflective of what Job's perspective; though throughout the book Job is in many ways blinded by his pain as he tries to make sense of the seeming unfairness of God. Elihu goes on to elucidate a point well worth mentioned; a point that is at the center of Job's theology and a point which illuminates the questions raised by Job for us today. "I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. [Emphasis added] Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you. 'God is mighty, but does not despise men; he is mighty, and firm in his purpose. He does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights. He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever.'" (Job 36:3-7)

Elihu is saying that God is indeed just. He is making the distinction between the just nature of God and the unfair nature of life. Only a pantheistic god is bound the very nature of his creation as an intrinsic portion of his nature. God has created the world and all that is in it. He is intimately connected to His creation but His nature, His character, is separate from that of what He has made. This is made particularly relevant in light of the Fall of humanity and the domination of sin in the world. In his book, "Disappointment with God," Phillip Yancey says it this way, "After hearing all the alternatives, Job was driven to the conclusion I have suggested as the one-sentence summary of the entire book: life is unfair! It came to Job more as a reflex reaction than a philosophy of life, and that is how it strikes anyone who suffers. "Why me?" we ask. "What have I done?"<sup>11</sup> The point that Elihu makes and that Yancey echoes in his contemporary work is that life is unfair, but there is a distinction to be made between life and God.

God is just, the world is fallen in sin, and as a result, life is often not fair. This is the logical sequence of the cause of suffering in the world. God's heart aches for our suffering and our suffering is a result of human rebellion globally. There is not man or woman yet born who has escaped the effects of the fallen condition of the world. Our hearts are moved toward the question, as was Job's, is that the end of the story? Are we and was Job left with only a hallow sense of despair that the world around us will not respond "rightly" to our deeds? For a period in the discourse in question Job no doubt felt those very things. In Job 13:24-25 he cries out, "Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy? Will you torment a windblown leaf? Will you chase after dry chaff?"

When the storms of this life rage and we feel like a leaf blown about by the wind, it is not systematic theologies that our souls crave, it is a connection to our ultimate hope. If this life is unfair, then surely in the end God will restore justice and turn not His eye from my affliction! In the closing section of the book, Job comes into a new and more complete picture of his role in relation to the enormity of God. As the Lord begins to speak to Job, he is overwhelmed by the gravity of such a conversation and humbled by God's voice. "Indeed, I am completely unworthy – how could I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth to silence myself." (Job 40:4 NET) It is now that Job realizes the unfathomable nature of the God who created Him and the immense expanse which separates the

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<sup>11</sup> Phillip Yancey et al., *Disappointment With God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1988), 203.

knowledge and wisdom of God and that of man. "Job is awed by God's majesty and puts his hand over his mouth, vowing to content with God no more."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, who is worthy to question the Almighty? What jar of clay is able to debate with the master potter who created it? Job comes fully into the realization that ours is not to question God but to trust Him as He has commanded us, and to rest in the provision of His sovereign grace.

"Job is satisfied. His vision of God has been expanded beyond all previous bounds. He has a new appreciation of the scope and harmony of God's world, of which he is but a small part. But this discovery does not make him feel insignificant. Just by looking at ordinary things, he realizes that he cannot even begin to imagine what it must be like to be God. The world is beautiful and terrifying, and in it all God is everywhere, seen to be powerful and wise, and more mysterious when he is known than when he is but dimly discerned. The Lord has spoken to Job. That fact alone is marvelous beyond all wonder. Job has grown in wisdom."<sup>13</sup>

We learn from Job that our ultimate response to suffering is to learn to rest completely in the sovereignty of God. He who has created the universe has also made Himself available to us directly. He is our comforter and our provider, our hope and our resting place. God's character is that of justice and love, mercy and redemption. If anyone doubts the beauty of God's life in light of the suffering of this world, one need look no further than to Jesus Christ to learn of God's loving nature. In this conversation we must separate the pain of this life with the character of God; as did Elihu and ultimately Job as well.

Consider the following words of Jesus during His earthly ministry. "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:7) Jesus is saying that if we desire to understand the nature and character of God, we need look further than His ultimate expression; the word of God made flesh, Jesus Christ! Time again in the New Testament we see Jesus having compassion upon those who were in pain, those who were suffering, or those who had nowhere to turn for help. God's compassion is our ultimate source of hope in the trouble, pain and suffering of this life.

This is what Job discovered during his discourse with his friends. This is what we must discover if we are to find true and lasting hope as we endure the many trials which befall both the wicked and the righteous in this life. God does reward the righteous; he rewards them with His presence. He may not remove the pain but He will always be present with us in it. The message of the modern "faith healing" preacher who asserts that if you have "enough" faith God will heal will is false and it is completely at war with the

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<sup>12</sup> Matheny, William E, *Liberty Bible Commentary, Job*, ed. Jerry Hindson Falwell, Edward E. Kroll, Woodrow M (Lynchburg, Virginia: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1982), 980.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, 314.

more substantive message of the book of Job, because faith is not a commodity to be used for barter with God, it is a tool used to engage the presence of God in our lives.

The biblical message is that our ultimate hope is in the Lord for sustenance and solace in the trials of this life as well as for a place of eternal rest in the life to come. C.S. Lewis wrote, "Scripture and tradition habitually put the joys of heaven into the scale against the sufferings of earth, and no solution of the problem of pain which does not do so can be called a Christian one."<sup>14</sup>

All that we have experienced and will experience in this life are but shadows of the eternal life to come. As Job discovered, the ultimate aim of this life is to learn dependence upon our creator. While so many believers and unbelievers alike live with the impression that this life is primarily about them and that God is primarily concerned with their pleasure, the theology of Job compels us away from a view of God as a "cosmic genie" who grants our every wish, and toward the much higher and richer view of God as creator, sustainer, and Lord. The ultimate objective of this life is to begin to do what believers will do for eternity; rest in the sovereign provision of God's grace.

## CONCLUSION

This life is not primarily about this life. While God does perform miracles of healing and restoration and while our ultimate hope does lie in the restoration of this world to its intended perfection, there are many times when God does not remove the pain. Consider the Apostle Paul was afflicted with a "thorn in the flesh" which he asked God to remove three times and the Lord did not remove it. The biblical record does not tell us what this thorn was. Some have suggested that it may have been creeping blindness or possibly the nagging pain of an injury sustained during persecution for the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whatever this thorn was, the Apostle says that the Lord left it and even that God used it as a constant reminder of Paul's need to humbly remain in the grace of God.

"Even because of the extraordinary character of the revelations. Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me – so that I would not become arrogant. I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." (II Corinthians 12:7-10 NET)

One reason that God may allow suffering in our lives is to chasten us to the reality of His divine presence and our need for His provision. Suffering and pain have a way of drawing us to a place where pride and self-sufficiency usually do not allow us to go; on our knees is humble adoration and submission to the perfect, though often ill understood, will of God. Whatever the reason that suffering is in our lives, the lesson of Paul's thorn in the

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<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1940), 148.

flesh is that God's ultimate provision is to carry us through whatever we go through. Further, our ultimate aim is to bring glory to God in this life. Whether suffering is due to the sinful imperfection of another person, an honest mistake or accident, or some tragic set of events that were out of our control, God is always in control and drawing us nearer to Himself. The great lesson of Job is likewise that it is not our understanding of our circumstances which matters most. It is our understanding of God which is rightly our greatest concern.

In this life of ups and downs trials, pain, and suffering are unavoidable. Our frail human bodies give way to sickness and diseases of every kind. Our lives are cut short by tragedy or the simple reality of aging. If suffering and tragedy do not strike us directly, they will affect someone we love. The consequences of human rebellion, sin, are easily observable all around us. People hurt us, friends disappoint us, yet God remains the same! "Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know." (Job 42:1-3)

Dear Child of God, won't you choose this day to hold fast to the sovereign hand of our Almighty Father, Redeemer, and King! O, how sure is the hand of His provision, how loving His embrace, how merciful and complete His love! Amen.

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