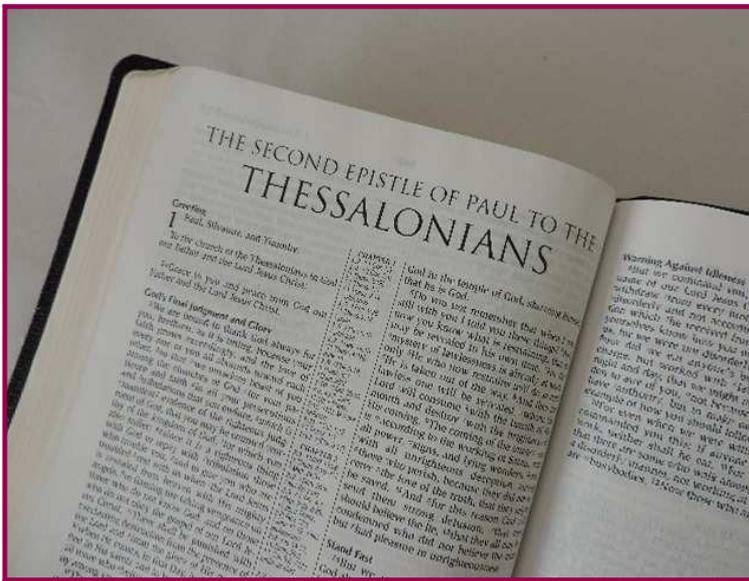


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



February 2018

Bible readings from 2 Thessalonians chapters 2 and 3
Job chapters 1 to 13

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They did not receive the love of the truth

There is all the difference in the world between loving sensational signs and wonders and loving the truth! Many are deceived by those who claim to work miracles, but they refuse to measure their teaching and practice by the truth of God's word. The *man of sin* will readily deceive such people by his *lying wonders ... because they did not receive the love of the truth* (9–10). If this seems a far-fetched statement, consider that thousands have already embraced the blasphemous teachings of certain extreme charismatic evangelists who claim that we can become 'gods'.

When men persist in rejecting truth, God *will send them strong delusion*. They will believe lies rather than truth and have *pleasure in unrighteousness* (11–12). William Hendriksen comments, 'God is love. He is not a cruel monster who deliberately and with inward delight prepares people for everlasting damnation. On the contrary, he earnestly warns, proclaims the gospel, and states what will happen if people believe, also what will happen if they do not believe. He even urges them to accept the love for the truth. But when people, of their own accord and after repeated threats and promises, reject him and spurn his messages, then — and not until then — he hardens them in order that those who were not willing to repent may not be able to repent but may believe the falsehood that "the man of lawlessness" is God, the only God, and that everyone should obey him.'

Hendriksen observes, 'When Pharaoh hardens his heart (Exodus 7:14; 8:15,32; 9:7), God hardens Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12) ... When men practice impurity, God gives them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity (Romans 1:24,26). And when they stubbornly refuse to acknowledge God, he finally gives them up to a base mind and to unclean behaviour (Romans 1:28).' (COMMENTARY ON 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS, pages 185–186).

Have you received '*the love of the truth*'? If you have not, please do not harden your heart. You may soon pass the point of no return.

God from the beginning chose you for salvation

Paul was *bound to give thanks to God always* (13; cp. 1:3) for the Thessalonians because through grace they had come to believe in the truth. Some of the essential elements in salvation are mentioned in verses 13 and 14:

- Election. – *God from the beginning chose you for salvation*. Every Christian was chosen in Christ before the world was created (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Timothy 1:9). We are not saved by our own good works or because we are better than others but because God has chosen us and given his Son to die at Calvary for us.
- *Sanctification by the Spirit*. – God has chosen us to set us apart for himself, to make us holy (Ephesians 1:4). Hendriksen describes sanctification as ‘a process of causing you to become increasingly detached from the world and attached to Christ until his image is completely formed in you’ (COMMENTARY, page 187).
- Calling. – *He (God) called you by our gospel*. Everyone whom God has chosen, he calls (Romans 8:30 – the theologians call this ‘Effectual Calling’). This call of God may come in a number of ways, eg. through the preaching of the gospel, the witness of a Christian, the reading of the Bible.
- Glorification. – God has called us *for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In him, we have a foretaste of glory here on earth but what indescribable glory awaits us in heaven (Romans 8:18,30; 1 John 3:2).

Why did God choose us, set us apart for himself and call us? – Because he loves us! Every Christian is *beloved of the Lord* (13). Let us now give thanks to God for his great love towards us!

Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught

The Thessalonians were not like those *who did not believe the truth* (10–12). They had come to believe the truth and they enjoyed the privileges and blessings of salvation (13–14; see yesterday's notes). Satan hates Christians and he is always seeking to unsettle us and to move us away from the truth. Persecution had not succeeded in shaking the Thessalonians from the truth of the gospel, but some were claiming that the Lord Jesus had already returned (1–2); this teaching was disturbing the infant church. God had from the beginning chosen them to salvation and for this reason ('therefore') Paul urges them, '*Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught*' (15). Let us beware of plausible, smooth-talking heretics who would have us turn from the word of God. We must:

- *Stand fast* (15). – We will not be *shaken in mind or troubled* (2) if we *stand fast* (or 'stand firm') in the Lord (cp. 1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:8). We will only be able to stand firm if we are well-grounded in the teaching of the Bible.
- *Hold the traditions which you were taught* (15). – We must be able to distinguish between false tradition based on man-made ideas (Matthew 15:2–3, 6; Colossians 2:8) and wholesome tradition rooted in Scripture. The traditions that Paul writes about here are the teachings of the Lord Jesus handed down to the apostles (cp. 3:6; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:1–3; Philippians 4:9). The scribes and Pharisees placed great emphasis on false traditions. Some professing Christian churches do the same, putting tradition above Scripture, even when their doctrines contradict the teaching of the Bible (eg. the Mass, Purgatory, praying for the dead, doing penance for sin).

If we seek to know thoroughly the teaching of the Bible, we will not be woolly-minded, weak or confused. **Let us be determined to stand fast in the Lord and to cling to good Bible-based traditions.**

Who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation

Notice how Paul addresses both God the Father and God the Son in his prayer (16–17). He knew that the Lord Jesus is not inferior to God the Father but is coequal with him. What has God done for us?

- He *has loved us* (cp. Jeremiah 31:3) so much that he gave up his Son to die in agony at Calvary so that we might be forgiven (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9–10).
- He has *given us everlasting consolation* (or ‘comfort’) *and good hope by grace*. How wonderful! We have every reason to rejoice in the Lord with grateful hearts.

*How helpless and hopeless we sinners had been
If he never had loved us till cleansed from our sin!*

*Unto him who hath loved us and washed us from sin,
Unto him be the glory for ever! Amen.*

(Arthur T. Pierson)

Paul prayed that God would *comfort* their hearts (17). ‘*Comfort*’ is the same word translated ‘*consolation*’ (it also means ‘encouragement’). We all need encouragement in the face of trouble and uncertainty and God is able to provide that encouragement for us! We also need to be ‘established’ (cp. 1 Thessalonians 3:2,13). The same Greek word is elsewhere translated ‘*strengthening*’ (‘*confirming*’, AV – Acts 14:22; 15:32, 41; 18:23). We need to be strengthened *in every good word and work*. We need divine strength in our task of making known God’s word and that we will also be kept faithful in every good work. The service of God is a good work which involves showing the love of Christ by practical deeds of kindness and by helping those who struggle, whatever the cost to ourselves.

Let us now ask our gracious God to comfort the hearts of our fellow-Christians, especially those who are being persecuted for the sake of Christ, and to strengthen them in his service.

Pray for us

Paul draws to the end of his letter with a request, *Finally, brethren, pray for us* (1). He was himself a great man of prayer, but he valued the prayers of other Christians (cp. Romans 15:30–32; Philemon 22; 1 Thessalonians 5:25). He was not so much concerned for his own physical needs, but for the furtherance of the gospel through his ministry (1; cp. Ephesians 6:18–20; Colossians 4:2–4). Many a servant of God, many a departing missionary has asked friends and supporters, ‘Please pray for me’. How should we pray for them? They will have their own special needs, but we must also pray:

- *That the word of the Lord may have free course.* The Greek is literally, ‘that the word of the Lord may run’ (cp. Psalm 147:15). The English Standard Version translates it ‘*that the word of the Lord may speed ahead*’. When the apostle was later in prison in chains he was encouraged that *the word of God is not chained* (2 Timothy 2:9).
- *That the word of the Lord ... be glorified* (cp. Acts 13:48). God’s word is glorified (honoured) when it is believed, when it is obeyed, and when it bears fruit in our lives. God’s word was having free course and being glorified among the Thessalonians (*‘just as it is with you’*). Could this be said of you?
- *That God’s servants may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men* (2). Paul was probably referring to unbelieving Jews at Corinth from where he wrote this letter (cp. Acts 18:4–6). The word ‘*unreasonable*’ means ‘out of place.’ The Jews had the Old Testament Scriptures which testify of Christ. Their opposition to the gospel was ‘out of place’ because they refused to believe those Scriptures. They were hostile to the gospel because they did not have true faith.

Missionaries and ministers of the gospel need your prayers. Bring those known to you to the throne of grace now.

But the Lord is faithful

What a great-hearted man was Paul! He asks the Thessalonians to pray for him but he cannot refrain from praying for them (1,5). He had written about his need to *be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men* and then thought about their suffering and persecution. What was his confidence (and ours) in such a situation? – *But the Lord is faithful, who will establish (strengthen) you and guard you from the evil one* (3). The apostle was confident in the Lord concerning them, that they would be obedient to his teaching and would obey the things that he commanded them (4).

Paul prayed that the Lord would direct (guide) their hearts into:

- *The love of God.* – He wanted them to enjoy the love of God and to be motivated by his love in all their work for him.
- *The patience of Christ.* – ‘Patience’ here means ‘endurance’. Christ persevered to the end (Hebrews 12:1–4) to save us from our sin and we must also persevere in following him in all kind of opposition and trial.

We all have trials, difficulties and battles in the Christian life and Satan will tempt us to give up in despair. What should we always remember? – *But the Lord is faithful* (3; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:24). He will guard us from the evil one. Are we weak? – *But the Lord is faithful* and he will strengthen us. Do we have spiritual needs, or perhaps financial needs? – *But the Lord is faithful* and his promises are true (Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 10:23; 11:11). We may be troubled by our lack of faith but *he remains faithful* (2 Timothy 2:13). When you come to God in prayer, remember that he is faithful. He will not fail you. **In every difficult situation those little words ‘But the Lord’ make all the difference.** – *But the Lord is faithful.*

There are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner

We will never find a perfect local church because every believer has the remains of sin. The Thessalonian church was flourishing, but it was not without problems. Paul writes, *‘We hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner’* (11). These people were not living according to apostolic teaching (*‘tradition’*) unsettling the church with extravagant claims concerning Christ’s return (2:2–3). They were lazy *not working at all* and they expected others to provide for them (11–12). They were also *‘busybodies’* making a nuisance of themselves and causing mischief by interfering in other people’s affairs (cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:11).

The Greek word translated *‘disorderly’* (or *‘unruly’* – 1 Thessalonians 5:14) was used in military circles to describe a soldier who was ‘out of rank.’ Such a fellow was out of step with everyone else as the soldiers marched. The problem with *‘disorderly’* people is that they generally insist that they are the only ones who are right, and that everyone else is wrong.

How are we to treat those in the church who are disorderly? – *‘Withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly’* (6). We must not keep company with them because they refuse to obey God’s word (14). We cannot have fellowship with them until they truly repent. It is a fact that troublemakers can be disciplined by one church only to be welcomed by another evangelical church. This is not right! It is a practice which blights many a church.

This leads us to another point. **Church discipline must be administered in love. Some have been turned out of churches for trifling reasons and this is wrong. Whatever the reason for discipline, it must be with a view to the restoration of the offender.** The sinning brother must not be counted as an enemy, but admonished as a brother (15). It is possible to be too severe and this is as bad as being too soft (cp. 2 Corinthians 2:5–8). Let us now pray for any disorderly Christians known to us that they will be restored to Christ.

Do not grow weary in doing good

Paul and his companions had left the Thessalonians a good example of personal discipline and hard work and he encouraged all of them to follow it (7–9). He was concerned that the busy workers in the church might become discouraged when some were busybodies and made no effort to help them. He encouraged them, ‘*Do not grow weary in doing good*’ (13). Good works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8–10) but they are an evidence of genuine faith (James 2:14–16). Good works also enhance our witness and glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

We must be busy workers rather than busybodies! Many churches owe their survival to the ‘faithful few’ who toil, giving much time and money to support the work of God. There is joy in serving God, but we will have disappointments and problems. The devil hates to see us working for the Lord and he will seek to discourage us and to hinder us. There are lazy passengers in many churches who do little and give little and this may also cause the workers to become discouraged and tired in doing good. Do not be a parasite in the church.

Do not measure your spirituality against the weakest Christian in the church, but aim to be like the most godly person that you know. **The Lord sees our toil (or lack of it) and he will richly reward those who work (Galatians 6:9–10).** – *Do not grow weary in doing good. We are to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

*Go, labour on; spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father’s will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?*

*Go, labour on; your hands are weak,
Your knees are faint, your soul cast down;
Yet falter not; the prize you seek
Is near — a kingdom and a crown.*

(Elsie D. Yale)

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace always

When Adam sinned, discord, hatred and restlessness came into the world. Man is now alienated from God and strife is found not only between nations, but even among family groups. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to reverse the effects of sin and to destroy the works of the devil (Romans 5:12–21; 1 John 3:8). He is *the Lord of peace* (16; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). The benediction here reminds us of three priceless privileges possessed by every Christian:

- The peace of God. – *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way* (16). We are reconciled to God through the blood of Christ shed on the cross (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:13–18; Colossians 1:20). Peace with God brings God’s precious peace into our lives which *surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7; cp. John 14:27). What is this peace? – ‘It is the reflection of God’s smile in the heart of the believer who, by sovereign grace, has received the blessed assurance of this state of reconciliation’ (Hendriksen). *Peace always in every way* – ‘The smile of the world cannot give it, nor the frown of the world take it away’ (Matthew Henry).
- The presence of God. – *The Lord be with you all*. Nothing whatever is able to separate us from the presence and the love of God. The Lord is with us wherever we go (Psalm 23:4; John 14:23; Romans 8:35–39; Hebrews 13:5–6). We will not know the enjoyment of God’s presence or peace however, if we disobey him.
- The grace of God. – *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all* (18). Grace is favour which we do not deserve! Salvation is by grace and our message is *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24; Ephesians 2:8). We also enjoy God’s continuing grace in the Christian life to help us in every situation (2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:15–16).

Are you enjoying the peace, the presence and the grace of God in your life? If not, could it be that your heart is not right with God?

JOB

Martin Luther considered the book of Job to be ‘magnificent and sublime as no other book of Scripture’. William H. Green writes, ‘The Book of Job is one of the most remarkable in the Old Testament. Apart from its inspiration, and considered simply as a literary production, it bears the stamp of uncommon genius. It is occupied with a profound and difficult theme, the mystery of divine providence in the sufferings of good men. This is not treated in the abstract, in simple prose or in a plain didactic method. But an actual case is set forth vividly before the reader, in which the difficulty appears in its most aggravated form.’ (CONFLICT AND TRIUMPH, page 3)

Job is the first of the poetic books of the Old Testament (the others are Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Lamentations). Job probably lived in the period of the patriarchs who had a greater life expectancy than later generations (Abraham died at one hundred and seventy-five and Job lived to a great age; 42:16; cp. Genesis 25:7). The Levitical sacrificial system had not been given at this time and righteous men acted as priests in sacrificing to God (1:5).

Ezekiel 14:14,20 refers to the righteousness of Job and James 5:11 to his perseverance. Job was blameless in the sight of God but the most terrible tragedy and suffering came upon him. His three friends were convinced that there was some secret sin in his life for which he was suffering divine chastisement but he strongly protested his innocence. We are reminded that there are no easy answers to the age-old problem of undeserved suffering.

The main purpose of the book is to do with a man’s relationship to God when all that he has is snatched from him. Satan was convinced that Job only served God because God had prospered him (1:9; 2:3–5). In tragedy, loss and perplexity Job was prepared to trust God even though God slay him (13:15). He knew that God was testing him to refine him (23:10). He was confident that he would see his Redeemer on the day of resurrection (19:25–26).

We are encouraged to persevere in our trust in God even when we are baffled at his providence in our lives and when we cannot trace his ways. We are brought to see that ‘God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform’ and that ‘behind a frowning providence God hides a smiling face’ in the lives of the righteous. The greatness of God’s power and majesty shine through the book. The title ‘*the Almighty*’ (Hebrew, ‘Shaddai’) is used of God forty-eight times in the Old Testament, thirty-one of them in the book of Job.

Outline of Job

1. Introduction – 1:1–5
2. God and Satan – 1:6–12
3. Satan’s attacks on Job – 1:13 to 2:10
4. Job and his three friends – 2:11 to 31:40
 - a. The lament of the three friends (2:11–13)
 - b. First round of speeches (3:1 to 14:22)
 - c. Second round of speeches (15:1 to 21:34)
 - d. Third round of speeches (22:1 to 31:40)
5. Elihu’s speech – 32:1 to 37:24
6. The Lord’s word to Job – 38:1 to 41:34
7. Job’s response to God – 42:1–6
8. Job vindicated and blessed – 42:7–17

I recommend the following commentaries for further reading:

Conflict and Triumph — The argument of the Book of Job unfolded by William Henry Green, published by Banner of Truth

The Storm Breaks — Job simply Explained by Derek Thomas, published by Evangelical Press.

Everyman’s Bible Commentary on Job, by Roy Zuck published by Moody Press).

I also commend John Blanchard’s booklet, WHERE IS GOD WHEN THINGS GO WRONG? published by Evangelical Press. This is not a commentary on Job but it deals with the question of suffering.

That man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God

The location of the land of Uz where Job lived is not certain, but it is generally accepted that it was east of the River Jordan (1; cp. verse 3). Job is described as being a man who *was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil* (1). The description of Job as *'blameless and upright'* does not mean that he was sinless but that he was a man of great integrity. He did confess that he was a sinner (7:21; 42:1–6).

Job lived at a time when a man's wealth was measured by the amount of livestock and servants that he possessed. He was very, very rich – *the greatest of all the people of the East* (3). True greatness is not measured by what we possess, however, but by our relationship with God. Riches have ensnared many a person but Job had his priorities right and he did not allow his wealth to spoil his relationship with God. He *feared God and shunned evil*.

Job was deeply concerned for the spiritual well-being of his sons and daughters. He prayed for them and offered sacrifices on their behalf. They may have complied with their father's godly leadership but Job was fearful that they may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts (5). He recognised that the human heart is a lurking place for sin before it breaks out into the open. **The very sin which Job was fearful of his sons committing was the sin that Satan sought to make him commit – to curse God.** The Hebrew word used for 'curse' is that which is also used 'to bless' but it is used in these verses to convey 'to bless' in an evil sense (5,11; 2:5,9).

There is a great challenge to every Christian parent here. You must instruct your children in the word of God while they are young (Proverbs 22:6; 2 Timothy 3:15). Do you earnestly pray for them and lead a godly example before them?

Have you considered my servant Job?

Our attention is now directed away from Job to the angels (*‘the sons of God’*) who come to present themselves before God. Satan came too; he is a very powerful angelic being who sinned against God. He is the master of deception and often comes to humans as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He is not omnipresent (everywhere present at the same time) and he told God that he had been roaming the earth. He was undoubtedly very satisfied to survey the evil and chaos of a fallen world. The Lord was able to point Satan to someone who shone as a bright light in the darkness around him: *‘Have you considered my servant Job?’* (8).

Satan is the greatest cynic in the universe and God’s warm commendation of Job brought an ugly response, *‘Does Job fear God for nothing?’* (9). He alleged that Job feared God only because the Lord had protected him (*‘made a hedge around him’*) and prospered him (10). If God were to take away these blessings, Job would lose his faith and would curse God to his face. God accepted the challenge, giving Satan permission to attack all that Job possessed but not to smite his person (11–12). Satan left the presence of God to do his deadly work and the scene is now set for the dramatic and tragic events that befell Job and which led to the many questions and discussions that are found in this book.

It is important that we understand that God is in control of all our circumstances (theologians call this *‘the providence of God’*). This truth is a great comfort to every Christian. **Satan is very active and very malicious, but he can only act with God’s permission (12).** H.L. Ellison comments that Satan *‘is not sovereign in a rival kingdom, but a rebel to whom God gives as much rope as will glorify his name.’* (FROM TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH, page 25 – Paternoster Press 1958). The Lord overrules the attacks of Satan for his glory and for our good (cp. Genesis 50:20). What a wonderful privilege it is to belong to God!

He fell to the ground and worshipped

Job was not aware of Satan's challenge to God nor of the fact that the devil was behind the tragic events that suddenly came upon him. Can you imagine how Job felt as one messenger and then another told him of disaster coming upon his flocks and herds? Worse was to come – his beloved children for whom he prayed much were all killed while feasting in the house of their eldest brother (13–19). Without any warning and in just a few minutes, Job had been reduced from a wealthy man to a pauper and his children were taken from him. In this desperate situation God kept out of sight.

Did Job only serve the Lord because of the blessings bestowed upon him? The angels in heaven had been witnesses to Satan's cynical challenge. I can imagine them waiting on edge to see how Job would react. Will he curse God as Satan had suggested? They see a shattered forlorn figure tearing his robe and shaving his head as a sign of his grief. *He fell to the ground and worshipped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD'* (20–21). The man is worshipping God and blessing him! How heaven would have resounded with the joyful praises of God that day!

Why do you love God? Do you love him for his matchless worth, because in all his perfection, he is worthy to be loved and admired? We may lose everything in the world but we can never lose our salvation and we can never be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:35–39). The greatest faith in the Lord is not seen on the mountain-top of ease or spiritual blessing, but when we rejoice in God as we are plunged into baffling circumstances (Habakkuk 3:17–18)! *In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong* (22). **If we are not worshippers in the good times, we will hardly worship God when times are difficult. If we murmur against God at small troubles which befall us, how will we bless him in the darkest periods of our lives?**

In all this Job did not sin with his lips

Satan had failed in his attempts to make Job curse God, but he works on the principle, ‘If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, and try again.’ The Lord was again able to point out Job as a model of integrity and godliness (2–3) but Satan again challenged God, ‘*Stretch out your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse you to your face!*’ (4–5). He was suggesting that Job would curse God if he was made to suffer in his body. God gave him permission to smite Job, but not to take his life. The devil is only able to touch us with God’s permission and he cannot possess a child of God (cp. Paul’s thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan – 2 Corinthians 12:7).

There were no half-measures with the devil who then *struck Job with painful boils* from head to toe (7). He was such an appalling sight that his poor wife could take no more. She unknowingly became Satan’s instrument to tempt her husband to curse God. She thought that he would be better off out of his misery and urged him, ‘*Curse God and die!*’ (9) Job rebuked her, pointing out that we must be prepared not only to accept good from God, but also adversity (10).

Job’s three friends had come to mourn with him and to comfort him but such was his suffering, they did not recognise him. They were so shocked that they did not speak a word for seven days but they wept and mourned with him (11–13). It is better to remain silent than to speak when we cannot find the right words (13:5). When the friends did speak, they were *miserable comforters* (16:2).

In all this Job did not sin with his lips (10). **He did not speak unwisely because he was ready to accept the dark providence of God as well as his blessings. This is far easier said than done!** We have so much to learn but God is patient with us. How we need to ponder our words before we speak, lest we sin with our lips. Let us make Psalm 141:3 one of our prayers for today — *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.*

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest

Job was in great agony of soul and he now cries out in anguish. He did not curse God but he did curse the day he was born (1); it was a day he would like to see blotted from the calendar (2–6). Leviathan was a great sea monster, possibly a dinosaur, so large that it could hide the sun from those in its shadow (8–9). Some commentators suggest that Leviathan is a term for a crocodile, but the description of this monster in chapter 41 does not support such a view.

Job asked why it was that he had not died at birth. If he had been stillborn, he would have been at rest in the state where the wicked can no longer practise evil, where the voice of the oppressor is silent, where the slave is free from his master (11–19). Job longed for death but he had no right to take his own life (20–22). It is possible to regard death as the ideal solution to end suffering or sorrow but death brings no escape for the unbeliever, though the child of God will be with his Lord and Saviour (Philippians 1:21–23). Satan had recognised that God had put a hedge around Job to protect him (1:10) but the suffering servant of God now felt that God had hedged him in to prevent his escape from suffering (23).

The thing that Job had greatly feared and dreaded had come upon him and he complained, *‘I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes’* (25–26). He could not understand why all this was happening to him and he was very agitated. A godly life is no protection against trouble but will often attract it from Satan and from evil people (cp. 2 Timothy 3:12). The Christian knows, however, that God sees his tears and hears his cries. **Our suffering is not for ever!**

*Be still, my soul, the hour is hastening on
When we shall be for ever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul, when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.*

(Katharina von Schlegel, translated by Jane L. Borthwick)

Now a word was secretly brought to me

Job had broken the silence and Eliphaz was the first of the three friends to respond. We shall see that these friends were unable to reconcile their own beliefs with the tragic events that had come upon Job. They had come to the conclusion that he was being chastised by God for some great sin he had committed but they were wrong (42:7).

Eliphaz began by suggesting that Job might not listen to his counsel but even so, he must speak (2). He acknowledged that Job had instructed and encouraged many sufferers but for all his spiritual strength (3–4), he was unable to cope with his own suffering (5–6). Job had longed for death but he should remember that sudden, unnatural death is not visited upon the righteous but on the wicked (7–11). Such a view of God's activity is far from true and this was why Eliphaz was so wrong in his counsel. He was like a doctor who makes an incorrect diagnosis and then proceeds to treat his patient accordingly. Such treatment is useless! Eliphaz was probably the oldest of the three friends and he claimed to speak from his experience of life (*'even as I have seen ...'* – 8; cp. 5:3). He had learned that we only reap what we sow and he suggested that Job must be reaping the punishment for some gross, secret sin (8).

It is very difficult to reason with people who claim to have a word from the Lord. Eliphaz told Job, *'Now a word was secretly brought to me.'* He claimed to have seen a spirit in a vision and was filled with fear when he heard a voice saying, *'Can a mortal be more righteous than God?'* (12–21). Job had never said that a man can be more righteous than his Maker, but he was baffled at the strangeness of God's ways with him. Be very careful when someone seeks to convince you that they are right because they have had 'a word from the Lord'. They may have a good imagination but their theology is often poor and their counsel even poorer. Eliphaz appeared to be saying the right things but he lacked discernment. **If our Christian beliefs make us hard, callous and lacking in warmth, let us beware. We are not being like our Saviour!**

But as for me, I would seek God

Some people give the impression that they are always right and they refuse to listen to anyone else's point of view. Eliphaz was such a person. He told Job that it was pointless to call upon one of the angels ('*holy ones*') to help him (1). He was here most insensitive, telling Job that he has seen the sinful (foolish) man taking root and prospering but sudden devastation strikes and his sons are crushed in the gate (3–4). What a heartless thing to say to a man whose sons had recently been crushed to death! It is true that *man is born to trouble* (7) but that does not make suffering any easier to bear.

Job is now given advice on what he ought to do: '*But as for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause, who does great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number*' (8–9). Eliphaz was implying that Job had not sought God in his distress and that this was the reason that he was continuing to suffer. He was saying, 'If I were in your place, Job, I would seek the Lord and I would commit my cause to God.' Eliphaz had not been there when Job had worshipped and blessed the Lord when loss and tragedy came upon him. He was so glib and such an attitude was no comfort to a suffering soul. It is all too easy to say what we would do in trial when we are not the sufferer. Eliphaz magnified God for his power, kindness and justice (10–16). Verse 13 is quoted in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 3:19). He sounded so spiritual but his theology was callous and without heart.

Eliphaz had wept when he first saw Job in his suffering and he shared in his grief. He went wrong when he began to offer explanations to Job for his suffering; it was when he opened his mouth that he proved to be a miserable comforter. **The Bible is sufficient to guide and to direct us but we must recognise that we do not have all the answers.** We cannot understand God's ways and thoughts; they are beyond our grasp. May God make us sensitive to those who are suffering and grief-stricken!

Happy is the man whom God corrects

Eliphaz had reminded Job of the power, justice and kindness of God (9–16) and he goes on to encourage Job to accept God’s chastening which was for his own good: ‘*Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty*’ (17). These words of Eliphaz are very true and are precious to every child of God. Chastisement is vital for the development of Christian character and growth. We must not despise it because it yields *the peaceable fruit of righteousness* in our lives (cp. Hebrews 12:5–11).

The words of Eliphaz were of little comfort to Job however, who was not aware of the reason for his suffering (or ‘chastisement’ if Eliphaz was correct). He wrongly assumed that God was dealing with Job for some hidden sin. He urged him to acknowledge his guilt and then all would go well with him. Job was sitting in ashes, torn with pain and his friend talks about healing and restoration to his former prosperity and peace in a detached manner (18). Job was not hidden from the scourge of his friend’s tongue and destruction had not brought laughter to him (21–22). Everything was amiss in his habitation (24) and to speak of a promise of many descendants to a man who had just lost his ten children was most insensitive (25).

Eliphaz was right in saying that he had found the things he stated to be true (27) but he was so pompous and smug. **With regard to suffering we can only ‘see in a mirror dimly’ (cp. 1 Corinthians 13:12) and we must not jump to hasty conclusions however obvious they appear to be.** This is what Eliphaz did and though his theology of chastisement may have been correct, he wrongly applied it to Job’s situation. Let us prayerfully seek to have wise and understanding hearts!

To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friend

Job answered by telling Eliphaz that he was only considering one side of the balance. His grief and calamity if weighed, would be heavier than all the sand of the sea. His friends may have thought his words to be rash but he had been very careful not to sin against God with his lips (1–3; cp. 1:22; 2:10). Job acknowledged the hand of the Almighty in his suffering but he was not aware that it was Satan who had attacked him (4). He was not complaining because of some light affliction. The wild donkey does not bray when it has grass and the ox does not low when it has fodder to eat (5). Life had become tasteless and loathsome to Job (6–7) and such was his despair that he wanted God to crush him and take his life. He felt that he had no hope of recovery and his strength had departed from him (8–13).

‘To him who is afflicted, kindness should be shown by his friend’ (14). The English Standard Version translates verse 14, *‘He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.’* Job had been confident that his friends would have words of comfort for him but they had been a disappointment. They were like a desert brook which has an abundant supply of water during the winter snow and spring thaw, but which dries up in the summer and has nothing to offer the thirsty traveller. They had seen Job’s suffering and were so afraid that they had nothing helpful to say to him (14–23).

Eliphaz had not proved anything for all his logic and *‘right words’* (24–25). He had undermined his friend when he should have upheld him. Job challenged him to look at him and he would then see that Job would not lie to his face. Could these three friends not discern that Job was still righteous (28–30)?

Are you a real friend to some despairing soul? Are you always ready to show kindness even when a friend’s faith appears to be in a perilous state? They need you more than ever at such a time! We often praise people after they die but they need to be on the receiving end of our kindness and encouragement while they are alive.

Have I sinned? What have I done to you?

Job now pictures life as a relentless struggle. It is like hard toil imposed on a hired servant who longs for evening's cool shadows and eagerly looks for his wages. He has sleepless nights because of the severe discomfort caused by his maggot-infested sores (1–5). His days are passing more quickly than the moving shuttle of a weaver but they hold no hope for him. His life is like a vanishing cloud which will soon take him to the grave from which there is no return (6–10). Job complains that God has hedged him in so completely that he is being restrained like the sea or like a dangerous sea monster. When he is able to sleep, there is no escape, for it seems that God is tormenting him with nightmares (11–16). Verses 17 and 18 are similar to the words of Psalm 8:4 but the conclusion is different. In the psalm, the question is, 'How can the almighty, majestic God stoop down to visit and bless insignificant man?' Here the question is, 'If God is so great, why does he not leave man alone? Why does he continually pursue him to test him and leave him miserable?' (17–20).

Job had asked his friends to show him how he had sinned (6:24). He now asks God, '*Have I sinned? What have I done to you?*' (20). He feels that God has made him his target, firing arrows of judgment at him. He did not know that the arrows were from Satan. The Christian poet, William Cowper, knew many periods of dark despair and depression. He likened himself to a deer wounded by many arrows but he points us to the Lord Jesus who is *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief* (Isaiah 53:3). **We are never alone in affliction! Our great Saviour understands us and he will never abandon us!**

*I was a stricken deer that left the herd ...
 Long since. With many an arrow deep infixed
 My panting side was charged when I withdrew
 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
 There I was found by One, who had himself
 Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,
 And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars ...*

(William Cowper – THE TASK, BOOK THREE – THE GARDEN)

Behold, God will not cast away the blameless

We are now introduced to Job's second friend, Bildad, who considered himself to be a defender of God's justice. He was very uncouth and unkind in the way that he spoke and he went straight on to the offensive with a rebuke. He remarks that Job's words are like a strong wind and that he must have sinned against God who cannot be unjust (1–3). Then came the most cruel words of all. – God has destroyed Job's sons because of their sin (4; 'If' = 'since' or 'when'). Of course they were sinners, but no more than others. We must refrain from making sweeping judgments (cp. Luke 13:1–5). Bildad said that if Job were to earnestly seek God and beg for forgiveness all would be well (5–7). He believed that if Job did certain things God would respond in such-and-such a way. We cannot manipulate God and we must remember that he often moves in ways which are mysterious to us.

Bildad goes on to appeal to the wisdom of the past (8–10):

- He suggests that Job had forgotten God and that he was like the papyrus or the reeds which need marshy ground to flourish. Without water they will perish and so is everyone who forgets God (11–13). This was not true of Job who had worshipped God in his distress.
- He accuses Job of hypocrisy, reminding him that the hypocrite will come to sudden grief (13–18).
- He infers that Job had sinned: '*Behold, God will not cast away the blameless*' (20). God's estimation of Job was that he was blameless (1:8; 2:3) but Bildad was not aware of this.

Some Christians can be very hard and unfeeling in the things that they say and do to others. Such behaviour is not Christlike! Do not be like Bildad or his modern imitators. *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one* (Colossians 4:6). Amy Carmichael wrote, 'If I can write an unkind letter, speak an unkind word, think an unkind thought without grief and shame, then I know nothing of Calvary love' (IF – published by S.P.C.K. and more recently by CLC).

But how can a man be righteous before God?

Job begins his reply to Bildad by agreeing with him that God is absolutely just in all his ways – ‘*Truly I know it is so, but how can a man be righteous before God?*’ (2). Man is sinful, hence Job’s question here. How can a man prove his innocence before the God of unsearchable wisdom who may ask him a thousand questions, none of which he would be able to answer (3)? God is not only infinite in wisdom but also in power and it is futile to plead one’s case before him and expect to win (4–10). Job found this to be true when God later appeared to him (cp. 40:1–5; 42:2–3). Job reflected that God is wonderful in all his ways and that he is absolutely sovereign (10,12). The Lord later reminded Job of these truths (38:4 to 39:30).

Some commentators believe that verse 13 contains a reference to the fallen angels. ‘*The proud*’ is translated in the English Standard Version, ‘*the helpers of Rahab.*’ This Rahab was a mythical sea monster which was said to have attempted an assault on heaven. Satan and the rebellious angels did attempt to overthrow God but they were cast down to *lie prostrate beneath him*.

‘*How can a man be righteous before God?*’ (2). This is one of the most important questions a person can ask and it is essential that we know the right answer! To be wrong here is to be led in the path of error. On what basis can a man be accepted by God? Some religions seek an answer in good works, undertaking pilgrimages to holy places or by religious ritual. None of these things can bring forgiveness of sins. **The Bible says that everyone is guilty before God (Romans 3:19) but Job’s question is answered in the gospel of Jesus Christ.** We are justified through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). He bore the punishment for our sins, that *we might become the righteousness of God in him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is no other way to righteousness! Are you right with God? Are you a true Christian?

If it is not he, who else could it be?

The person who seriously thinks about the question in verse 2 will be driven to despair if he does not know the answer. Job recognised that even if he was righteous, he would not be able to answer God and his own mouth would condemn him. He could only beg for mercy from his Judge (14–15, 20). In his dark despair, Job could not bring himself to believe that God would listen to him or to answer him (16). When we are depressed and baffled, we may be tempted to think hard thoughts about God. We may feel like Job, that it is of no advantage to be righteous because God *destroys the blameless and the wicked* (21–22). Job appears to have lost his assurance here and he was wrong in his conclusion. Though it is true that both the wicked and righteous die, the end of the godly person is different, as Job was later to acknowledge (19:25–27).

The suffering soul may feel that God laughs at the plight of the innocent, that he has handed over the world to the wicked and blindfolded its judges so that evil people are not brought to justice (23–24). There is a ray of light, however, in Job's question, '*If it is not he, who else could it be?*' We know that Satan was responsible for the calamity that befell Job though God had allowed it in his wise providence. If you are passing through a difficult and perplexing period in your life, the devil may seek to drive you to despair by whispering all kinds of dark thoughts into your mind. When Satan suggests to you that God is uncaring or unjust, do not listen to him. **God has wise and loving reasons for all our trials though we may not presently understand them. Satan cannot do just as he pleases with us and he cannot separate us from God's love and care!**

*God shall alone the refuge be
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.*

(Samuel Medley).

Nor is there any mediator between us

Job again speaks of the fleeting nature of human life (25–26; cp. 7:6–9,16). He felt that it was pointless to put a brave face on his plight because God would still find him guilty. He saw life as an unequal struggle because it appeared that God would plunge him into a filthy pit even though he craved for purity (27–31). Job recognised that he was not dealing with a man but with God: *‘Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both’* (33). He was crying out for a mediator who would be able to listen to his case and God’s case and arbitrate between them (*‘who may lay his hand on us both’*). No one has more authority than God and Job felt his helplessness. He could only hope that God would remove the rod of affliction from him and the dread of the Lord that terrified him (34).

These verses point us to another very important truth. – We all need a mediator to plead our cause before God because we are sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ is our great Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). He is perfectly qualified to mediate on our behalf because he is God. He took human flesh to live a perfect life on this earth. He suffered as a man for sinners and his righteousness is put to the account of all those who repent of their sin and trust in him. They are reconciled to God through the work of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19,21). He knows us, understands us and pleads for us in the presence of the Father (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25). **Christian, are you feeling troubled or perplexed? Has the devil been attacking you? Remember that you do have a Mediator and take heart (Hebrews 12:24)!**

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea;
A great High Priest, whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.*

*When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see him there
Who made an end of all my sin.*

(Charitie L. Bancroft)

You have granted me life and favour

Job's affliction was made all the worse because his friends were suggesting that God was punishing him, but if this were true, he could not see the reason for it. Since he had no mediator to help him (9:33), he would be obliged to make a direct appeal to God. He again expressed a loathing for life but he would say to God, '*Do not condemn me*' (1–2; cp. 9:21). God does not see imperfectly as man does. He is not short-sighted, nor is he short-lived; therefore he must know that Job is not wicked (4–7).

Job acknowledged that God had made him and fashioned him as a potter makes a vessel from clay. Would God now destroy him and turn him again to dust (8–9)? He said to God, '*You have granted me life and favour, and your care has preserved my spirit*' (12). He had been the object of God's loving attention and that is why he was so baffled when he could see no reason for his suffering. He is now plunged into the depths of despair. It seems that God is ready to pounce on him for the most trivial sin so that there is no hope for him whether he be wicked or righteous. God seemed like a fierce lion, relentlessly hunting him (13–17). Job asked God why he had allowed him to survive at birth? He would have been better carried from the womb to the tomb (18–19). He pleaded for some respite from his suffering in the few days left to him. He asked God to leave him alone that he might know a little comfort before death cast its shadow over him and he went to the grave, *to the land of darkness* (20–22).

There are times when a child of God may be full of despair, when God seems to be hidden, when there is no comfort. Even the great prophet, Elijah, once asked God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). **Christian, if you are feeling low, remember that God has granted you life and favour (12), and what favour it is!** He has saved you from your sin and brought you into his own family. He has given you eternal life and there will be no *land of darkness* for you. You will go to be with Christ which is far better (Philippians 1:22–23). Do not trust in your feelings but look to God who has a bright tomorrow for you!

Can you search out the deep things of God?

The third friend, Zophar, was very rude and far more insensitive than Eliphaz or Bildad. He accused Job for being talkative, for mocking and for being a self-righteous hypocrite (2–4). Job had asserted that he was ‘*blameless*’ and God had said the same of him in answer to the accusation of the devil (9:21; cp. 1:8). He had not, however, claimed to be sinless in the eyes of God as Zophar had suggested (4) If God would but speak, he would not speak for Job but against him. Job should know that God was giving him less punishment than he deserved (5–6). One can only wonder what kind of friend could be so callous and vitriolic in his speech, lacking in compassion for one who was suffering so much.

Though Zophar was very wrong in his treatment of Job, he was right in his view of the ‘otherness’ of God. He asked, ‘*Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?*’ (7). God is infinite in his wisdom and power. He is absolutely sovereign and no man can deceive him (8–11). Zophar quoted a proverb to imply that Job was empty-headed and as stupid as a wild donkey (12). He urged Job to seek God in prayer and to renounce his sin (13–14). If he were to do this, his misery would vanish and light, hope and rest would be his portion (15–19). If Job did not repent, the only hope left for him would be to die (20).

It is possible to be very correct in our doctrine but to be like Zophar who lacked humility and love. He rightly asked, ‘*Can you search out the deep things of God?*’ but his know-it-all attitude blinded him to the needs of people. If our theology has made us hard-hearted and insensitive, something must be wrong! **The more we know of the surpassing greatness of God and of his marvellous grace, the more humble and compassionate we will be.**

With him are wisdom and strength

If Zophar thought that his assertiveness and rudeness would intimidate Job, he was much mistaken. Job was not to be silenced and in chapters 12 to 14 he castigated his friends (12:1–13:19) and he then addressed God (13:20–14:22). In biting sarcasm, he said to his friends, *‘No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!’* (2). He insisted that he was in no way inferior to them and that their observations were common knowledge (3). He was very frustrated by their inflexible approach to God’s justice. Their view that God always blesses the upright did not fit in with the facts.

He then cited his own case. He had called on God who had answered him. He was blameless, but the Lord had allowed him to be scorned by his friends who were at ease (4–5). He then pointed out that robbers and those who provoke God prosper and are secure (6). God does not always bring immediate judgment upon them as the three friends of Job had implied. *‘You’* (7–8) is in the singular and Job was probably directing his words to Zophar who had rudely implied that Job was more stupid than a wild donkey (11:12). Let Zophar learn from the animals who will explain that all life is in God’s hands (7–12).

Job went on to describe the wisdom and power of God who controls nature, men and nations: *‘With him are wisdom and strength’* (13). Notice the verbs used to describe his sovereign power over his world – *‘breaks ... imprisons ... withholds ... sends ... leads ... makes ... loosens ... binds ... overthrows ... deprives ... takes away ... pours contempt ... disarms ... uncovers ... enlarges ... guides’* (13–25). **In his pain, Job had however, lost sight of the fact that God is not only all-powerful and all-wise, but that he is also all-loving. God is working all things together for good, even our pain and suffering (Romans 8:28).** This is the hope and confidence of the afflicted and distressed believer. The Lord will never fail those who trust in him!

Though he slay me, yet will I trust him

Job again told his friends that he was not inferior to them (2; cp. 12:3). To speak to God and to reason with him would be preferable to disputing with them. They had falsely accused him and he described them as *‘forgers of lies’*. He also described them as *‘worthless physicians’*. A true physician is able to diagnose the condition of his patient and to prescribe treatment for him. The friends had failed to understand his case. Their counsel was useless and they would show more wisdom if they were to remain silent (3–5).

Job then fired several questions at his friends (7–11). — *‘Will you speak wickedly (‘falsely’) for God and talk deceitfully for him? Will you show partiality for him? Will you contend (‘plead the case’) for God?’* Job saw that such misguided men were not able to speak on behalf of God. He asks them, *‘Will it be well when he searches you out? Or can you mock (‘deceive’) him as one mocks (‘deceives’) a man?’* We can imagine Job pointing to the ashes around him as he told them that their platitudes were as useless as ashes and their defences as weak as clay (12).

Job again asked his friends to listen carefully to what he had to say (6,13,17). He would risk his life by taking his flesh in his teeth to speak to God (14). His words in verse 15 are a wonderful expression of faith in God: *‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.’* Some commentators believe that the Hebrew should be translated, ‘Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope.’ I prefer the way it is rendered here and in most of our translations. If Job was here feeling without any hope, he would not have said that he would defend his ways before God (15b). The word *‘trust’* in verse 15 means ‘to wait in hope.’ Job was saying, that come what may, he would still trust in God and not give up hope. **Can you honestly say the same thing?**

Why do you hide your face?

Job wanted his friends to be quiet but they continued to talk (5,13). He wanted God to speak and to explain his suffering but Heaven was silent. He had prepared his case and was confident that he would be vindicated (18). Job prayed for two things:– That God would remove his hand from him, and that he would not let his dread fill him with fear (20–21; if God afflicted or intimidated him, he could not have a just hearing). He was so desperate for God to communicate with him that he did not mind who spoke first (22).

There was no response from God, so Job began to speak. He asked God to reveal what his sins were (23) but there was still no reply. This silence led Job to ask God, ‘*Why do you hide your face, and regard me as an enemy?*’ (24). Why was God tormenting him for he was as helpless as a leaf or chaff blown about by the wind (25). Was he being punished for long-forgotten sins of his youth (26)? He felt that God had put his feet in stocks, was watching his every move and had marked his feet so that he could be easily tracked (27). Job began to despair, feeling that he was rotten and like a moth-eaten garment (28).

Do you feel concerned when God seems to hide his face from you? You should be! It may be the Lord is chastising you because of some sin to which you are clinging. It may be, that as in the case of Job, God is allowing Satan to test you for a season. **Remember, God may seem to be hidden from you, but you are never hidden from him.** He watches over his children with great love and concern. The dark valley experiences do not last for ever!

*When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every rough and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

(Edward Mote)