The Sufferings of Job

by

Daniel J. Lewis

©Copyright 2019 by Diakonos, Inc.

Troy, Michigan

United States of America

Contents

Preface 4

Introduction 5
- Historical-critical Issues 5
- The Text of Job 6
- Cultural Context and Genre 7
- Was Job an Historical Person? 9
- Structure 10
- Meaning 11

The Prologue 14
- The Introduction (1:1-5) 14
- The Adversary (1:6-12) 14
- The First Stroke (1:13-22) 16
- The Second Stroke (2:1-10) 17
- The Arrival of Three Friends (2:11-13) 19

Job's Opening Lament (3) 19

The First Cycle of Dialogues (4-14) 22
- Eliphaz Speaks (4-5) 22
- Job Responds (6-7) 24
- Bildad Speaks (8) 28
- Job Responds (9-10) 29
- Zophar Speaks (11) 33
- Job Responds (12-14) 35

The Second Cycle of Dialogues (15-21) 38
- Eliphaz Speaks (15) 38
- Job Responds (16-17) 40
- Bildad Speaks (18) 42
- Job Responds (19) 43
- Zophar Speaks (20) 45
- Job Responds (21) 46

The Third Cycle of Dialogues (22-27)	49
Eliphaz Speaks (22)	49
Job Responds (23-24)	52
Bildad Speaks (25)	54
Job Responds (26-27)	55
The Search for Wisdom (28)	59
The Monologues (29-41)	61
Job's Final Appeal (29-31)	61
The Speeches of Elihu (32-37)	68
The First Monologue (32-33)	69
The Second Monologue (34)	72
The Third Monologue (35)	74
The Fourth Monologue (36-37)	75
The Voice of God and the Responses of Job	79
God's First Speech (38-39)	80
The Mysteries of the Created World (38:1-38)	81
The Mysteries of the Animal World (38:39—39:30)	83
The Divine Challenge and Job's Response (40:1-5)	84
God's Second Speech (40:6—41:34)	85
Behemoth (40:15-24)	88
Leviathan (41)	88
Job's Final Response (42:1-6)	91
God's Rebuke of Job's Friends (42:7-9)	92
The Restoration (42:10-17)	93
The Answers of Jesus to Job	94

Preface

When the New Testament writer James says, “You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about,” he could assume that his audience was familiar with the story. Indeed, most Christians are familiar with at least the opening of the story and perhaps the ending. Far less know much about the dialogues, arguments and defenses that make up the larger part of the book. Still, some pithy phrases from the book, such as “skin and bones” and “skin of the teeth” (19:20), along with “the root of the matter” (19:28) and “weighed in the balance” (31:6), are idioms from the Book of Job that have passed into the common English vocabulary.

In the larger sense, the Book of Job falls into the broad category of theodicy, which is to say, it addresses the problem of evil vis-a-vis the sovereignty of God. Classically stated, the problem of evil as delineated by the skeptic can be presented in two mutually exclusive statements:

If God is all-good, then he must not be all-powerful, else he would eliminate evil.
If God is all-powerful, then he must not be all-good, else he would eliminate evil.

Christians have always affirmed that God is both all-good and all-powerful, and while the Book of Job cannot be expected to interact with every nuance of the modern existential discussion, it has a substantial contribution to make nonetheless. The relevance of the book lies in the bluntness with which it addresses an enduring human problem, the unrelenting human reality of destitution, sickness, humiliation, depression and loss. This so-called “problem of evil” is most acute for the one who believes in God. Why does a sovereign God put up with moral evil? How is one to account for the horror of natural disasters? Why is there animal pain? Why is there human suffering in general and inequitable human suffering in particular? For the atheist, the idea of evil is an abstraction naming what humans fear or don’t like, but it is not a problem in the same sense that it is for theists, who affirm both the goodness and omnipotence of God. At the very least, the story of Job, because it exists near the center of the existential problem, has stimulated a rich variety of reflections in English literature, ranging from William Blake to Archibald MacLeish.

Introduction

In the Hebrew collection of biblical books, Job generally falls between Psalms and Proverbs in the *Kethubim*, the last of the three major sections of the Hebrew Bible. In the Syriac, it falls between Deuteronomy and Joshua, probably owing to the opinion that it occurred in the patriarchal period and/or was written by Moses. In the Latin Vulgate, it follows Esther, and the English Versions follow suit, placing it between Esther and Psalms. Job was recognized as canonical by both Judaism and Christianity.

Historical-Critical Issues

Many questions remain ongoing concerning this book. In the first place, it is anonymous (written in the 3rd person), and speculation about its authorship has ranged from Moses[1] to some unknown Jew in the post-exilic period.[2] It certainly could not have come from Job himself, since the setting includes the insider's view of the spirit world, including the *satan*, something which Job never discovered. The story was certainly known by the time of Ezekiel (cf. 14:14, 20), but whether known by text or oral tradition is unclear. Of course, the date of written composition and the era of Job himself need not be identical. Dates for composition for the book suggested by historical-critical scholars cover almost every century from the time of Solomon until the 3rd century BC,[3] though the preponderance of opinion is that it was written in the post-exilic period.

Equally debated is whether the book is a unity or a composite, and the exploration of this question has expended a considerable amount of scholarly ink and paper.[4] The debate surrounds whether or not the opening and closing match (Satan appears in the opening but not in the conclusion), whether or not the poem on wisdom in chapter 28 was a free-standing composition later included in the book (the poem is ostensibly spoken by Job but seems inconsistent with Job's previous

---

[1] *Baba Bathra* 14b in the Talmud

[2] Many modern scholars

[3] E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 323.

[4] See, for example, the various OT introductions, such as, O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 456-462 and R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 1031-1042.

speeches), whether or not the speeches of Elihu were inserted after the main composition was complete (Elihu appears abruptly without introduction in chapter 32 and then disappears after chapter 37), and why there are doublets for the divine speeches at the end (38:1 and 40:6). It is not uncommon for historical-critical scholars to suggest several stages by which the book emerged in its final form:[5]

- STAGE 1: *The oldest form, the ancient story preserved orally and likely consisting of the material in the prologue and the epilogue.*
- STAGE 2: *The addition of the poetic dialogues between Job and his friends.*
- STAGE 3: *The addition of the Elihu speeches.*
- STAGE 4: *Copyists, shocked at some of Job's imperious language, put some of Bildad's and Zophar's speeches into Job's mouth to soften the effect.*

On the other hand, despite some lingering problems, the book "hangs together" as a whole. The common literary structures, themes and style fit the work of a single author. A scholar like B. S. Childs, while accepting that the book is a composite, argues that its canonical recognition by both Judaism and Christianity was as an entire whole, and hence, it should be treated as a whole.[6] In the present short treatment, we shall be content to leave many of these questions unexplored, while addressing the book as a whole in the form in which it has come to us.

The Text of Job

It is generally agreed that the Hebrew text of Job is difficult. For one thing, there are more than 175 *hapax legomena* in the book, which is to say, it has many words that appear only here and no place else.[7] The Septuagint has numerous occasions where words in the Masoretic Text are simply absent (or omitted). Indeed, the LXX is some 300-400 lines shorter than the MT.[8] Among the Dead Sea Scrolls is an Aramaic translation of the book (11QtgJob) that in general is closer to the Hebrew text than the LXX, but several specific passages seem more closely connected to the LXX. It has some omissions as well as some additions. Many

---

[5] C. Newsom, "The Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), IV.320-325.

[6] B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 533-543.

[7] A list of them can be accessed at: http://community.logos.com/forums/t/66705.aspx

[8] Origen, in his *Hexapla* in the period of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, supplied missing lines in the LXX from the later version of Theodotian, but copyists often then copied these additions as though they were original, cf. H. Rowley, *The Book of Job* [NCBC], 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 26.

scholars offer emendations of the text by changing the vowel pointing (vowel-pointing is not original to the consonantal text, of course) or exchanging a letter for a similar letter to make sense of the text, but such changes naturally result in a wide range of meanings.

Further, the Book of Job, while largely poetry, still contains a wide diversity of genres, including lament, wisdom, proverbs, hymns, and so forth. The grammar, syntax and spelling often depart from the norms of classical Hebrew. Aramaic elements are also scattered throughout the book, especially in the Elihu discourses, enough so that some scholars have suggested the work may originally have been composed in Aramaic and later translated into Hebrew.

All this is to say that the English versions reflect this textual diversity to greater or lesser degrees. Many of the more recent versions offer footnoting with alternative readings based on the Septuagint, the Syriac, and the Vulgate, as well as various other ancient sources, along with regular notations that the meaning of certain Hebrew words is uncertain.

Cultural Context and Genre

Wisdom in the ancient Near East is essentially practical—the art of being skillful and successful in life and conduct. Wise persons, both men and women (2 Sa. 14:2; 20:16), are listed alongside priests and prophets as prominent resources for practical and spiritual guidance (Jer. 18:18b). They are not wise in the sense of their quantity of knowledge, but rather, in the ethical and moral character of how to evaluate human experience and act upon it. Wisdom was thought of as the product of experience, and the wise person was at his/her best in old age. Often, this took the form of a wisdom tradition, taking account of the nature of the world, the accepted "rules" and dynamics behind its operations, the character of the human creature, and what can be expected of women and men. In light of this tradition, wise persons offered advice about proper responses to life situations. Solomon is perhaps the most prominent in this sense, able to adjudicate a criminal case even without eyewitnesses (cf. 1 Kg. 3:16-28).

Wisdom literature in the ancient Near East, those writings derived from wise persons, is widely attested, both east and south of ancient Israel. In Mesopotamia, for instance, the poetic monologue, "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom",[9] depicts a sort of Babylonian Job, a man who is described as struggling with the fact that the

[9] *ANET*, pp. 434-437.

god Marduk has allowed him to suffer, even though he is righteous. Though he hoped that ritual piety would make a difference, he nonetheless exclaimed, "Oh that I only knew that these things are well pleasing to a god!" In the end, like the biblical Job, he was restored and offered a thanksgiving hymn and offerings. In Egypt, the "Dispute Over Suicide" depicts a man contemplating taking his own life because the times are so bad that justice and love have disappeared. In his dilemma, he pled for the advocacy of the gods as though he were presenting his case before them.[10] Still another text, "A Dialogue About Human Misery," describes a man accused by his friend of imbecility and evil, who suggested that if he would only put away such thoughts and seek the favor of the gods, things would improve. All these texts have thematic elements in common with the Book of Job, even though, unlike Job, who was strictly monotheistic, they are presented against the background of pagan polytheism.

A geographical feature of the Book of Job is its link to Edom. Job is described as a "man of the sons of the east" (1:3), a description depicting those areas east and south of the Jordan (Is. 11:14). Edom, to the south and east of the land of Israel, had a reputation for being a wisdom center (1 Kg. 4:30). Uz, Job's land, is associated with several southern ethnicities, one of which is Edom (Je. 25:20-21; La. 4:21).[11] Of Job's friends, Eliphaz came from Teman, an Edomite city which was also a center for wisdom (Je. 49:7; Ob. 8). If so, then it is likely that the accompanying friends who appear early in the book are Edomite as well.[12] Some scholars have suggested that some of the unusual forms of Hebrew in the Book of Job may derive from a dialect of Edomite origin.[13] That Job was a non-Israelite seems probable, not only because he is categorized as a "man of the east," but also because he is enumerated along with other pious non-Israelites (Eze. 14:14, 20).[14] As to why a non-Israelite might be a worshiper of the one true God, it should be remembered that there is at least some biblical precedent for ancient individuals doing so, such as, the Sethites (Ge. 4:26), Melchizedek (Ge. 14:18), and of course, Abraham.

---

[10] *ANET*, p. 405.

[11] However, complicating the picture is the fact that the LXX omits the reference to Uz in both these passages. On the other hand, the LXX has an additional lengthy paragraph at the end of the book which locates him on the border of Edom and Arabia.

[12] E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. H. Knight (London: Nelson, 1967), pp. xxvi-xxvii.

[13] E. Smick, "Job", *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 4.843.

[14] Noah, of course, preceded the Israelite era, and Dan'el (spelled differently in Hebrew from the biblical Daniel) was a Canaanite king famous for wisdom (cf. Eze. 28:3), whose story is told in the Ugaritic epic of Aqhat excavated at Ugarit, cf. *ANET*, pp. 149-155.

Locating the genre of Job in the context of wisdom literature naturally follows, but the effort to pin it down to a specific type has proved elusive. It has been regarded by various interpreters as an epic, a drama (or tragedy), a parable, or a didactic poem. Certainly, the book has elements in common with all these genres. It has dialogue, plot, development, and denouement. Much of the action is internal and mental. Job's situation certainly is tragic. Individual sections of the book contain hymns, proverbs, laments, riddles, and curses. Still, in spite of rough parallels with other ancient Near Eastern literature, the known literature of the ancient Near East shows more differences than similarities, and Job stands alone. Hence, the Book of Job is essentially a genre unique in itself. As Francis Andersen has put it, "The literature of the ancient Near East has not yielded another 'Job'."[15]

At the same time, it is worth pointing out that relatively late in the book the term מָשָׁל (= parable, proverb), often translated as "discourse" (so NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NET, NIV, NIB, NJB), is used to describe two of Job's speeches (27:1; 29:1). Besides placing his discourse firmly within the wisdom tradition, this word suggests that the verbal interactions within the book should be regarded as dialogues intended to assist the reader in mastering the vagaries of life. Finding an English equivalent for this word is difficult, since it can refer to a wide variety of literary types in diverse contexts (e.g., Dt. 28:37; 1 Sa. 10:12; Is. 14:4-11; Eze. 17:2). As a genre, the *mashal* is an instructional text, a form widely used in the ancient Near East and Egypt. Non-biblical examples, such as, the Instruction of Ani, the Instruction of Amenemope, the Instruction of Onchscheshonqy, the Sumerian Instruction of Shuruppak, and the Aramaic Words of Ahikar all demonstrate that ancient people were quite capable of deep and penetrating thought. Typically, the *mashal* is framed as an antithetic couplet connected by the contrasting conjunction "but," familiar to most readers from the Book of Proverbs. As a book, Job is built from contrasting dialogues between Job and his friends. The friends speak and Job responds, but from a different point of view. These discourses invite and provoke reflection on the part of the readers, helping them to navigate through the complexities of life, and in this case, the situation of unexpected tragedy.

Was Job an Historical Person?

This question concerning Job is directly related to the genre of the book. Of course, depending upon the genre, a piece of literature need not be historical to be truthful. Still, in the Talmud, some Jewish interpreters argued against the idea that

---

[15] F. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction & Commentary [TOTC]* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1974), p. 31.

Job was merely typological, though others argued the reverse.[16] The mention of Job in the Bible alongside other historical persons suggests that ancient biblical writers thought of him as historical (Eze. 14:14, 20; Ja. 5:11). It seems hardly likely that an Israelite who wanted to write a parabolic story about wisdom would choose a descendant of Esau as the protagonist. Christians up until the time of the Reformation generally treated Job as historical, though there were exceptions (e.g., Theodore of Mopsuestia, d. AD 428). Luther, while he did not deny an historical core, suggested that it was poetically idealized. Catholics, responding to Luther, argued that if Job was not strictly historical, the book perpetrated a fraud, and more than one writer urged that the conversations in the book were literal transcriptions (and in poetry, no less!). Alternatively, some argued that the story was purely a poetical creation or myth (i.e., C. S. Lewis), and with the advent of historical-critical scholarship, today the widely held opinion is that while it may rest on an historical core, the biblical author has used this core and embellished it in order to underscore his moral lesson.

Objections to literalism stem from internal factors within the book. The heavenly scenes, by definition, cannot belong to ordinary history. The use of numbers, such as three and seven, describe Job's children both before and after his trial, and the exact doubling of the numbers of his flocks and herds at the end suggest a symbolic framework. The stereotypical escape of a single servant in each of Job's successive tragedies sounds more like a dramatized account than sober history. Finally, the extensive musings of Job and his friends, their philosophical discussions, and the frequent use of poetic imagery suggest literary genius as opposed to plain reporting.

Perhaps the best answer still is Luther's, that is, that the underlying basic story concerns a real person and a real tragedy occurring some time in antiquity, but this basic story has been stylized and poetically enhanced to accentuate the moral and philosophical issues that it addresses. There is no reason why such a view should undercut the Christian view that this work is divinely inspired and truthful.

Structure

Inasmuch as most of the Book of Job is poetry and given that the distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry is literary parallelism, it should come as no surprise that the overall structure of the composition displays symmetry as well. The book has, as

---

[16] A. Davidson, 'A. B. Davidson on the Book of Job,' *The Voice Out of the Whirlwind: The Book of Job*, ed. R. Hones (San Francisco: Chandler, 1960), p. 63.

it were, “book ends”, the prose prologue and epilogue. These “book ends” framing the central poetic part of the book serve to emphasize the speeches that are described between them. One is tempted to posit that the book’s structure is chiastic, the poem on wisdom appearing as the center and, hence, the most important section. If chiastic, however, there are some disparate elements for which one must account, such as, the absence of Zophar in the 3rd cycle of dialogues, the double interrogations of Yahweh, and Job’s two confessions of contrition at the end. Strictly speaking, these elements at the end have no clear matching features at the beginning, which in turn make the chiastic structure doubtful. Still, there remains obvious symmetry in the book’s pattern. Here is how the material in the book is ordered:

Prose Prologue (1-2)

Job’s Opening Lament (3)

The Three Cycles of Dialogues:

- *Eliphaz and Job (4-7)*
- *Bildad and Job (8-10)*
- *Zophar and Job (11-14)*

- *Eliphaz and Job (15-17)*
- *Bildad and Job (18-19)*
- *Zophar and Job (20-21)*

- *Eliphaz and Job (22-24)*
- *Bildad and Job (25-27)*

Poetic Interlude on Wisdom (28)

The Series of Monologues

- *Job (29-31)*
- *Elihu (32-37)*
- *Yahweh (38:1—40:2; 40:6—41:34)*

Job’s Closing Contrition (40:3-5; 42:1-6)

Prose Epilogue (42:7-17)

Meaning

While there are many lessons to be learned from the Book of Job, perhaps the single most important one is that conventional wisdom often falls conspicuously short. While Job’s downfall and suffering is the setting that precedes the various

speeches, the speeches themselves, which are the heart of the book, concern the basic assumption on the part of Job's friends that suffering is cause and effect and that justice is to be achieved in the present life. Particularly is this true in an ancient society that viewed all experiences and outcomes to be directly attributable to God. Righteous conduct was rewarded by material blessing, and the guilty received their just deserts, both reward and punishment coming in this life and at the hand of God. At best there was only a vague concept, if any, of immortality and justice beyond the present life.

This, then, underscores the importance of the prologue, where Job is described as a man of impeccable character (1:1). He was rich (1:2-3), but he also was utterly devout (1:4-5). He responded to tragedy with worship and integrity (1:20-22; 2:9-10). This setting is essential, because the book is not about the suffering that Job deserved but the suffering of a man who was righteous (2:3). The bulk of the book, of course, details the series of conversations between Job and his friends, each of whom attempted to offer wisdom on why Job's tragedy had occurred. In general, his friends argued that suffering was punitive (4:7-9; 5:17; 8:20; 11:2-6) or redemptive (36:10-11), and any defense suggesting otherwise was an attack upon God's justice (8:1-7).

Job, for his part, struggled with universal questions. Can anyone truly understand the depth of another's suffering (6:1-3)? When a lowly human confronts a sovereign God, how can he hope to be counted righteous (9:1-3, 14-20)? Is there anyone in the universe who can legitimately arbitrate between human creatures and Almighty God (9:32-33)? How does God himself perceive human suffering (10:3-4)? Can God, because he longs for relationship with his creatures, cover over human sin (14:14-17)? Why is there such inequity in human suffering (21:23-26)? And most important, why does God seem silent in the face of such suffering; why does he postpone justice (23:3-9; 24:1)?

Throughout his crucible, Job continued to defend his innocence while berating his friends for their callous presumptions (12:1-3; 13:2-19; 16:1-4; 21:34; 26:1-4; 27:1-6; 31:5-34). In the end, Job consigned his case to God (31:35, 40b). Indeed, God finally answered Job, but the resolution to his universal questions remain shrouded in mystery. At no point did God explain Job's suffering. Rather, he left Job with two conclusions—but both are at the heart of the message of the book. First, the problem of evil and human suffering was bigger than Job's capacity to understand (38:1-2; 40:1-5; 42:1-6). Second, the notion that suffering was simply

cause and effect—the solution offered by Job's friends—was wrong (42:7-8). In the end, while the Book of Job does not fully explain the problem of evil, it does warn the reader against superficial solutions, especially the notion that all suffering is punitive. Indeed, the very same point would be made many centuries later by Christ himself (Jn. 9:1-3; Lk. 13:1-5).

In the bigger picture, the questions of Job would eventually be answered in the coming of God's Son. Does God understand human suffering? Can humans be righteous before a holy God? Is there a mediator who can fully relate to both God and human life? Will God cover human sin so that he might have relationship with his creatures? Will there be justice in the end? To all these questions there is a resounding "yes" in the incarnation, suffering and resurrection of the Son of God.

The Prologue (1-2)

The Introduction (1:1-5)

The primary emphasis in the prose prologue is upon Job's integrity, which is stated in the opening sentence in unequivocal language (1:1). He was a "man of the sons of the east" from Uz (see discussion in the Introduction), a family man and, like Abraham, wealthy in the ancient Near Eastern commodities of huge herds of cattle, sheep, donkeys and camels,[17] not to mention abundant servants/slaves. Unlike Abraham, however, Job was not a nomad, and later passages indicate that he lived in towns (cf. 29:7ff.). The high number of oxen that he owned, which are used for plowing, also suggests that Job was a wealthy farmer, not a wanderer. Most important, however, was not his wealth but his moral rectitude. He even offered sacrifices for his sons and daughters just in case they had sinned,[18] and such sacrifices belong to an historical context either earlier than the Levitical system or at the very least outside it, since the patriarch served as priest for his own family (1:2-5).

The Adversary (1:6-12)

The introduction of the *satan* among the sons of God offers the reader a glimpse behind the scenes into the invisible world. The idea of a heavenly council of spirit-beings, all under the creatorship and sovereignty of Yahweh, is widely attested in the Hebrew Bible. In several books, there appears the description of this council that attends Almighty God and is accountable to him. These heavenly beings, the "myriads of holy ones" (Dt. 33:2) or "council of holy ones" (Ps. 89:5-7), is presided over by God himself, who calls them to account (Ps. 82:1), and when

---

[17] If Job belongs to the patriarchal period, then the challenge must be addressed concerning his camels, since not a few scholars have objected that camel domestication did not occur until much later. However, more recent evidence has countered this objection, cf. M. Chavalas, "Did Abraham Ride a Camel?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (November/December 2018), pp. 52, 64-65.

[18] The Hebrew expression וּבֵרֲכוּ אֱלֹהִים בִּלְבָבָם in 1:5, "...and they blessed God in their hearts..." is likely a euphemism for cursing, and all English Versions take it in this way. It is an example of the Hebrew reluctance to place the word "curse" in juxtaposition to the word "God" (see 1 Kg. 21:10, 13; Ps. 10:3 for the same euphemism).

necessary, passes judgment on them (Ps. 82:6). In one of the most bizarre passages in the Old Testament, the prophet Micaiah described a vision of the heavenly council in which God inquired if one of the heavenly beings might lure Ahab to his death on the battlefield. One of the spirits agreed to become "a lying spirit in the mouths of all his [Ahab's] prophets," and in response to their false prophecies, Ahab would go to war and be killed (1 Kg. 22:19-23). Glimpses of this council engaged in heavenly liturgy are to be found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation. In the Book of Job, the *satan* himself is called to account along with all the other heavenly creatures (Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2).

The presence of the *satan* in this council comes as something of a surprise, and perhaps the fact that he alone is questioned by God about his business might suggest that he is an interloper (1:7; 2:2). The Hebrew word שָׂטָן (*satan*) can function as both a title and a name (differentiated in biblical Hebrew by whether or not the definite article is used). In the Book of Job, the word is invariably used with the definite article, which means that technically it is a title, not a name, despite the fact that most English Versions capitalize it, the NAB being a notable exception (1:6-9, 12; 2:1-4, 6-7). Elsewhere, this title is used to describe a human enemy or adversary (1 Sa. 29:4; 1 Kg. 5:4; 11:14, 23, 25). In at least one instance it seems to be used of a prosecutor (Ps. 109:6), and in another it seems to depict a spirit-being whose primary function is to accuse persons before God (Zec. 3:1; 1 Chr. 21:1), leading to the New Testament designation that he is the "accuser of the brothers" (Rv. 12:10). Insofar as this accuser indicts those whom God favors, he is implicitly the adversary of God, ostensibly making accusation in order to uphold God's honor, but in reality, opposing him.

It is to the point that the subject of Job is raised, not by the *satan*, but by Yahweh, an example *par excellence* of an upright human (one who, implicitly, stands in contrast to this *satan*, who seeks to undermine the divine purpose). The *satan's* business in "going and walking"[19] in the earth sets the precedent for Peter's later description of the devil as "prowling around" (1 Pe. 5:8). Job, by contrast, is one of those rare specimens of complete integrity, and when Yahweh sees such a righteous man, he is delighted (cf. Is. 42:1). The *satan*, for his part, is cynical, which is his essential character, what Francis Andersen called "studied disbelief".[20] In seeking to shift the focus from Job's piety to the more ambiguous issue of motives, the *satan* at once impugns both the character of God and the character of Job. His rhetorical question, "Does Job fear God for naught?" assumes the general posture

---

[19] The sequence of the two Hebrew infinitive constructs, מִשּׁוּט and מֵהִתְהַלֵּךְ, carries the nuance often rendered in the English Versions as "to and fro" (e.g., NRSV, ESV, KJV, JPS).

[20] Andersen, p. 84.

that religious people only serve God for what they can get out of him—and Yahweh is himself complicit in this hypocrisy and self-deception. Take away the benefits of protection for Job, his house and his possessions, and his apparent faith and faithfulness will shrivel!

Then comes the test challenge. "Remove the 'hedge' (an agricultural metaphor for protection)," says the *satan*, "and Job will 'bless' you to your face!"[21] In other words, the indictment is that Job's piety is based on love of self, not love for God. The *satan*, of course, has no power to remove such a hedge on his own. While there is evil in the world, the Book of Job does not countenance any sort of eternal dualism, such as one finds in Zoroastrianism or some forms of eastern thought. The *satan* is a creature, at best, and while hostile and powerful he is not the equal and opposite of God. As C. S. Lewis astutely observed in his introduction to *The Screwtape Letters*, Satan's true counterpart is Michael, not God. So, this is the challenge. Earlier, Job had sacrificed burnt offerings for his children just in case they had "cursed God in their hearts." Now, the *satan* asserts that Job himself will curse God if his privileges are struck down, not merely in the silence of his heart but in God's very face. To this challenge Yahweh consents with only the restriction that the *satan* cannot strike Job himself, only what he has.

Here, then, are the fundamental questions in the book. Is God sufficiently good that he can be loved for himself alone, not merely for what he gives? Can a mere human maintain his trust in God when there are no reciprocal benefits? God says, "Yes!" while the *satan* sneers, "No!"

The First Stroke (1:13-22)

The *satan* now takes advantage of his permitted freedom to attack Job, and in rapid succession a series of horrific blows remove from Job his wealth and his children. While the text does not attribute these disasters to the *satan* directly, in context the reader is surely to assume that this is the case. (Later, of course, when Job's health is affected, the text will directly attribute the second stroke to the *satan*, cf. 2:7).

Raiding parties were the common experience of ancient Near Eastern life, and two of the disasters were from such attacks. The others were natural disasters, a tremendous lightning strike[22] and a desert sirocco. Together, these four strokes describe two kinds of evil, moral evil from self-conscious and intentionally malignant invaders and natural evil where self-consciousness is not a factor. The

[21] Again, the euphemism using "bless" to mean "curse" (see comments on 1:5 in Footnote #18).
[22] The "fire of God" (אֵשׁ) is a biblical idiom for lightning (cf. 1 Kg. 18:38; 2 Kg. 1:10-14).

identical formula is used to describe all four consecutive disasters, and in each instance, there was only a single survivor left to report. The number four possibly carries the non-mathematical value of totality, indicating that the disaster was complete. The completeness of Job's piety is now matched by the completeness of his destruction. The four strokes come in such rapid succession that Job is unable to respond until they all have been reported.

It is Job's response to these disasters that now takes center stage. In the typical gestures of mourning within the ancient Near East, he tore his robe in consternation (cf. Ge. 37:34; Jos. 7:6; 2 Sa. 1:11, etc.) and shaved his head (cf. Ezr. 9:3; Is. 22:12; Je. 7:29, etc.). Prostrating himself, he worshiped in the midst of disaster.[23] This is the initial answer to the *satan's* cynical challenge. Contrary to the *satan's* sneering predictions, Job humbly submits himself to God. Of course, Job was not privy to the behind-the-scenes machinations of the *satan*, so he attributed all the disasters to God himself in what Soren Kierkegaard regarded as a supreme example of true piety. He does not first say, "The Lord took..." which is the human default response, but rather, "The Lord gave..." which is the recognition that all the good things he had received in life in the first place had been the gifts of the good and gracious Giver. Job's loss only accentuated his gratitude for what he had previously enjoyed. He does not regard those things as "rights," as though they were things deserved and inappropriately removed by an arbitrary deity, but he accepts them as undeserved blessings for which to be grateful, and in this recognition, he could say with total conviction, "Yahweh's name be blessed!"[24] The narrator's conclusion, "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong," proved the *satan's* cynicism to be empty. Job did *not* serve God merely for the benefits he received; he served God for God himself. He had the same thankfulness, the same love, the same reverence for God as he had had when all was well.

The Second Stroke (2:1-10)

The language describing the setting for the second stroke parallels exactly the language of the first, with the *satan* giving account of himself to Yahweh. This time, however, Yahweh not only calls attention to Job, but he also points out that Job has maintained integrity in spite of his great loss. This is what C. S. Lewis would call a "complex good." He distinguishes between the "simple good" that comes from God (i.e., Job's initial blessings) and "simple evil" produced by rebellious creatures (i.e.,

---

[23] The *Hishtaphel* verb חָוָה (= to bow down, do obeisance) is distinctly a gesture of worship and is found some 170 times in the Hebrew Bible.

[24] S. Kierkegaard, "The Example of Job," *The Voice out of the Whirlwind: The Book of Job*, ed. R. Hone (San Francisco: Chandler, 1960), pp. 138-151.

the attacks upon Job's prosperity). Out of this can come the exploitation of evil by God for his own redemptive purposes, and this, in turn, produces a "complex good" to which acceptance and endurance in suffering contributes. In other words, God allows evil and actually uses it for his own sovereign good purposes, and in the case of Job, he uses the evil attacks of the *satan* as the context in which to demonstrate Job's integrity. The point, of course, as Lewis makes clear, is not simply suffering *per se*, but the way in which one approaches suffering. Pain and travail are not desirable, but nonetheless, a greater good can be achieved through the experience of pain.[25]

Still, the *satan* would not abandon his cynicism, for cynicism is the essence of the satanic. His proverb "skin for skin" is cryptic, and while the broader intent is explained by the succeeding line (all that a man has he will give for his life), the precise meaning of the proverb is unknown, though it may have been well-known in Job's time. Does the *satan* sardonically imply that Job could accept the loss of his children's skin so long as his own was untouched? Was this a market-place bartering adage, such as, "pelt for pelt?" Does it mean, "So long as you leave my skin alone, I will leave yours alone?" One ancient Jewish explanation is that it is a figure of speech meaning one will surrender one member of his body in order to save another, such as, giving up an arm to save one's head.[26] Was the "hedge" that originally protected Job a sort of "outer skin," one that Job was willing to surrender so long as his own person was preserved?[27] In the end, no consensus has been reached regarding the saying, even though the general tone of sarcasm seems evident.

So, the game was still "on." The *satan* asserted that if Job's own person was afflicted, then he certainly would curse God to his face. To this challenge Yahweh assented with the single restriction that the *satan* could not kill Job. As before, Yahweh still was sovereign, and the *satan*, while the agent of destruction, could not proceed beyond the limits set by Almighty God. Hence, there is the anomaly that the misfortunes of Job derive from God's "stretched out hand" (1:11; 2:5), but the actual agent of misery is the *satan*. One sees this same anomaly in other biblical passages as well (cf. 2 Sa. 24:1; 1 Chr. 21:1).

The *satan* now attacked Job's health, striking him with terrible sores from head to foot. Diagnosing an illness from an ancient text is risky, at best, but at least we know that the word שְׁחִין generally concerns the skin (Ex. 9:10; Lv. 13:18). Suggestions ranging from boils to leprosy to elephantiasis are not uncommon. Residual effects described later include unbearable itching (2:8), disfigurement

---

[25] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 110-111.
[26] M. Pope, *Job [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965, 1973), p. 20.
[27] Rowley, p. 35.

(2:12), maggots in the ulcerous outbreaks (7:5), nightmares (7:14), failing eyesight (16:16; 17:7), bad breath (19:17), rotting teeth (19:20), emaciation (16:8; 17:7; 19:20), joint deterioration (30:17), and discolored and peeling skin (30:28, 30). He sewed for himself loose sackcloth clothing for relief (16:15). The misery went on month after month (7:3). Like an outcast piece of pottery himself, Job continued to sit in grief and consternation in the rubbish dump at the edge the city.[28]

Now, his wife becomes a sounding board for the *satan*, urging Job to "bless" God and die.[29] Her words show that all his family relationships were now fractured, and he was truly alone in his suffering. In an era when the afterlife was hardly contemplated, death was preferable. Job, however, mildly rebuked his wife (he does not accuse her of blasphemy, but foolishness). He reasserts his earlier faithfulness to God: it is God's right because he is God to both give and take away, and as before, he speaks of God's gifts before speaking of deprivations. The narrator adds the majestic conclusion as before, "Job did not sin with his lips" (cf. 1:22). Some have suggested that the phrase "with his lips" might imply that he sinned in his heart, even if not verbally, but this would contradict God's own assessment at the end that Job had spoken faithfully (cf. 42:7-8). Rather, it was the sin "with the lips" (he will curse God to his face) that the *satan* had predicted, and now, that cynical prediction was proved false. After this scene, the *satan* will disappear from the rest of the book.

The Arrival of Three Friends (2:11-13)

In time, three friends appeared in order to comfort Job after hearing of his disaster. Their appearance and the conversations that follow become the setting for the larger portion of the remainder of the book. His friends seem to have come some distance, Eliphaz from Teman (Teman is a local name for an area of Edom, cf. Je. 49:7, 20; Eze. 25:13; Am. 1:12; Ob. 8-9), Bildad from Shua (possibly to be connected to Shuah, the son of Abraham by Keturah, whom Abraham sent to the east, cf. Ge. 25:1-2, 6), and Zophar (in the LXX, Zophar was the king of the Mineans in southern Arabia, cf. Ge. 36:11, 15). To westerners, the arrival of friends who sit silently for a week might seem to be anything but comforting, but in the ancient Near

---

[28] Syntactically, the Hebrew participial phrase וְה֖וּא יֹשֵׁ֥ב בְּתוֹךְ־הָאֵֽפֶר (= as he was sitting in the midst of the ashes) suggests he already had been there, probably out of grief for the loss of his children (cf. Je. 6:26; Eze. 27:30).

[29] The LXX has a longer passage here, which seems to ameliorate his wife's words somewhat. Here is Pope's translation (p. 22): *After a long time had passed his wife said to him, "How long will you endure and say, 'See, I will wait a bit longer, looking for the hope of my salvation.' Look, your memory is already blotted out from the earth [along with] the sons and daughters, the travail and pangs of my womb, whom I reared in toil for nothing. And you, you sit in wormy decay, passing the nights in the open, while I roam and drudge from place to place, and from house to house, waiting for the sun to go down, so that I may rest from my toils and the griefs which now grip me. Now, say some word against the Lord, and die."*

East, this was the customary time for mourning the dead (cf. Ge. 50:10; 1 Sa. 31:13). His friends joined in the traditional rites of mourning, their lack of words an eloquent testimony to their shock, respect and perhaps even awe at Job's crucible.

Job's Opening Lament (3)

Job finally broke the verbal silence, and his lament prefaces a series of lengthy poetic dialogues and soliloquies between him and his friends. Each speech (and there are no less than seventeen of them, possibly more, depending upon how one counts) is a complete piece in itself, though each interacts to greater or lesser degrees with the others. While no audience is described, the speeches often sound like arguments to an implied audience. Job's speeches differ from those of his friends in one important aspect, however. His friends attempt to explain Job's dilemma and defend God, but they can only do so from an outsider's point of view. Job, for his part, speaks from the midst of his own crucible, where he tries to understand what has happened to him. Whereas his friends talk *about* God and against Job, Job often talks directly *to* God and sometimes even to himself as he grapples with his inability to hear from God while struggling with the inexplicable disaster that has overtaken him. His friends are aloof and cold; Job is passionate and bluntly honest. Still, in his search for God and meaning, he never lapses into materialistic regret because of the things he has lost. He is, if anything, entirely consistent. Job's concern is his seeming lost relationship with God, not his former wealth or health.

Job's opening lament falls into three sections: a) if only I had never been conceived, b) if only I had been still-born, and c) what meaning does my present existence now have? Like Jeremiah (cf. Je. 20:14-18), Job pronounced a curse[30] on the day of his conception and birth (3:1-10). Significantly, he does not curse God, however, and he continues to demonstrate the falsity of the *satan's* cynicism![31] Still, the series of jussive verbs (3:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) reflects his despair and passionate anguish that he now lives in such abject misery. The poetic structure alternates between condemnations of the day and the night of his conception and birth, equally consigning both to be expunged from the calendar.[32] Job wishes that the day of his

---

[30] Unlike the earlier euphemisms that avoided juxtaposing the verb "to curse" with Yahweh as the object (cf. 1:11; 2:5, 9), here the verb קָלַל (= to curse) is allowed to stand.

[31] Both the prologue and epilogue of the book use the tetragrammaton יְהוָה (= Yahweh), but other than 12:9, the middle chapters of the book exclusively uses אֱלוֹהַּ (= God).

[32] Since the dialogues between Job and his friends are poetic, they are replete with figures of speech and parallel lines, the latter of which is the quintessential character of Hebrew poetry. In the opening lament, the reader sees personification of the night (3:6, 7), the image of the "eyelids of the dawn" (בְּעַפְעַפֵּי־שָׁחַר), and the "double doors of the womb" (דַּלְתֵי בִטְנִי), which are typical poetic figures of speech (3:9-10), and the latter two will come up

birth had been swallowed up by the chaotic forces of Leviathan![33] Job is not suicidal, but his misery is so profound that he contemplates how much better it would have been had he never been born.

Job now transitions from curse to questioning. He contemplates how much better it would have been had he been stillborn and not consigned to the wet-nurse (3:11-19).[34] Death at birth would have meant passing immediately to the abode of the dead, where all the preeminent builders of society eventually go also. While the Book of Job does not entertain ideas of heaven and hell or rewards and punishments in the afterlife (such ideas will not arise until later in the biblical revelation), it still suggests a continued existence, not extinction. Further, the inequities of the present life are resolved in death, princes with houses of wealth being no different from stillborn infants, and prisoners suffering under forced labor now at ease, slaves and masters and the small and the great all on equal footing.

The conclusion of his lament raises an even deeper question: "Is there meaning to life in the midst of unbearable suffering?" This is the point of Job's question, "Why is light given to him who is in misery—to the one who wishes to die but cannot?" Why, indeed? Job certainly does not entertain the modern questions of active euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. He is not a quitter. He clearly understands that issues of life and death are the domain of the Almighty. Still, he can see no way forward, no way to do anything meaningful. He can no longer even eat because of his intense suffering. What he feared the most—the loss of God's favor—has now happened, leaving him bereft and in unrelenting agitation. The final sentiments are like a hammer on an anvil:

No peace!

No quietness!

No rest!

But agitation comes!

What is essential and important in this lament is that Job is now able to voice his deepest questions before God. Suffering must find a voice, and in the presence of his friends, Job is given the opportunity to speak. In speaking, he is finally able to begin to address his experience. To be sure, his opening lament finds no

---

later as well (cf. 38:8; 41:18). It is beyond the scope of this short commentary to address all the poetic structures and imagery (see the published commentaries on the Hebrew text), and here I will concentrate on the content more than the form of the poetry.

[33] Leviathan (לִוְיָתָן), the ancient Near Eastern primordial sea monster with seven heads, is familiar both from Ugaritic literature as well as the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ps. 74:14; Is. 27:1).

[34] The reference to being "received on the knees" (3:12) probably refers to either the mid-wife, grandmother or, perhaps, a wet nurse (cf. Ru. 4:16).

constructive way forward, but still, it is the place to begin, and to begin in transparent honesty. There is such a thing as naive faith—faith that has not yet experienced the crucible—and equally there is such a thing as considered faith—faith that has passed through the crucible and remains constant. This latter is the faith that Job will ultimately demonstrate, but he must begin at the beginning.

The First Cycle of Dialogues (4-14)

Job's lament, though not directly addressed to his three friends, prompts responses. The responses will become sharper as each friend takes up his explanation as to why this tragedy must have happened. In many ways, the explanations are conventional. While they will say many true things, indeed sufficiently so that St. Paul will quote them,[35] they will err at the heart of the issue, which is to say, they will argue that disaster is simply cause-and-effect. Job's protestations of innocence only push his friends further, and they seem unwilling altogether to accept the notion that Job's suffering is undeserved.

Eliphaz Speaks (4-5)

Eliphaz' first speech begins temperately enough if not wholly sympathetically (4:1-2). Like many, however, he seems to think that certain things "go without saying," but then he goes ahead and says them anyway, since he cannot bear to have his thoughts undeclared. We might categorize him as a moralist, the person for whom there is always a moral explanation and few, if any, gray areas. He begins with the reminder that in the past Job had been a comforter to many in their times of distress and perplexity (4:3-5).[36] Now, however, he charges Job with impatience and dismay, a man who has forgotten the advice he once gave to others. While he concedes, at least in theory, that Job may have been innocent (4:6),[37] he quickly jettisons this notion and asserts with confidence that tragedy is punitive (4:7). Indeed, any acknowledgement of Job as an innocent sufferer seems, in the mouth of Eliphaz, to be tinged with irony if not outright sarcasm (cf. 22:2ff.). He continues his conventional wisdom, pointing out that trouble-makers get their just deserts under the lion-like justice of Almighty God (4:8-11). The problem with conventional wisdom, however, is that while it may be generally true, it may completely miss

[35] 1 Co. 3:19//Job 5:13
[36] For Job's own account of his role as an advisor to others, see 29:7-25.
[37] The Hebrew text reads, "Is not your fear your confidence?" and the ESV and other versions appropriately expand the phrase to "fear [of God]", since Job's piety is clearly in view.

what is true in any particular circumstance. In this case, it was *not* true, and God himself will say so in the end.

Eliphaz' wisdom is what might be called cliché wisdom. Perhaps Eliphaz realized that his conventional wisdom needed some propping up, so what it lacked in substance he now tries to make up for by appealing to mystical experience. His revelatory dream, despite all the introductory titillating eeriness of ghosts[38] and whispers in the dark (4:12-16), ends up being banal. The message he heard is true enough—mortals cannot hope to be more righteous than God—but it is hardly helpful, unless he intends to imply that Job has considered himself more righteous than God (4:17).[39] Such a question with its implied accusation is surely unfair! What mortal man would ever have thought that he could be purer than God? The only one to disagree would be the person whose hubris knows no bounds! Job has certainly has said nothing to merit this aspersion!

There may a hint, here, of the fall of the angels, though this conclusion is not a necessary one (4:18). What is clear is that even God does not trust angels to be perfect, and by the logic of *a fortiori*, he would trust even less mere mortal humans in their "houses of clay" (4:19a). Before God, humans are about as significant as moths, and they die without meaning (4:19b-21). Here, Eliphaz comes close to the fatalistic sentiments of the existentialist Jean Paul-Sartre, "Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance."

Even should Job should appeal to the angels ("holy ones"), it would be an exercise in futility, and in any case, Eliphaz seems to think Job has disqualified himself (5:1), for as he later implies, Job has "despised the discipline of God" (5:17). For Eliphaz, disaster is a product of cause-and-effect, plain and simple. This is especially exemplified in the life of the fool, who by his indignation and passion puts his whole family at risk and whom Eliphaz stoops to curse (5:2-4). Human troubles, accordingly to Eliphaz, are engendered by humans themselves, and such deserved reprisals are as inevitable as sparks that fly upward from a campfire (5:5-7).[40]

---

[38] It is unclear in 4:15 whether the word רוּחַ (= wind, spirit or breath) is to be taken as a spirit or a cold breath of air. Most English Versions take it as a reference to a spirit, though not all (e.g., NET).

[39] The Hebrew phase is a comparative (הַאֱנוֹשׁ מֵאֱלוֹהַ יִצְדָּק = Is a man more righteous than God?), and many English Versions read it this way, though other versions, based on the context, opt for the softer, "Can mortal man be in the right before God" (so ESV, cf. JPS, NASB, NET, NJB, NLT, RSV, NRSV).

[40] There are significant problems in determining the meaning of 5:5-7, and scholars have offered a multitude of suggestions, none of them holding the field. 5:5 is particularly obscure but probably means the fields of the fool are pilfered by others. 5:6 implies that disaster doesn't mysteriously appear out of the dust of the ground (or "out of thin air", as we would put it in a contemporary idiom); hence, there must be a cause (and, by implication, Job must have done something)! If one changes the vowel-pointing in 5:7 from the Masoretic Text's passive *Pual* perfect יוּלָּד (= is born) to an active *Qal* participle יוֹלֵד (= begetting), the meaning would be, "For a human begets trouble...", which shows human agency and therefore human guilt. This understanding is followed in the rendering, "Humans beget mischief..." (so NAB, NJB and several Hebrew commentators, including Dhorme).

Is there a solution? Eliphaz argues, correctly, that only God can reverse misfortune. Certainly, this is true as it stands. However, Eliphaz goes further in urging that in seeking the Almighty, who accomplishes his divine purposes through nature and in spite of human machinations (5:8-16), Job needs to realize that his trial is one of divine chastening and disciplinary action (5:17). If Job will only admit his sins, all will be well! He will be healed (5:18), delivered (5:19), redeemed (5:20), protected (5:21), preserved (5:22), secured (5:23), fulfilled (5:24), blessed with additional children (5:25), and healthy (5:26)! The reference to more children is particularly crushing. To talk of more children to a man who is still grieving over the horrific loss of his own children in a single agonizing disaster is heartless to the core. This is not comfort; it is cruelty. To add insult to the cruelty that marks this patronizing wisdom, Eliphaz closes with an exaltation of his own ingenuity (5:27). Using the royal "we" (by which he includes himself among the sages of the ages), he urges that Job only needs to apply such wisdom to himself. How delightfully comforting! Rest easy, Job, you miserable cur, you sinner! You deserve this! Just confess your moral shortfall, and you can be happy again! Carol Newsom's reflection on Eliphaz' speech is particularly apt:

> *What makes chaps. 4-5 so deeply offensive is not that they [the friends] attempt to integrate suffering into a context of meaning but that they are the attempt of someone who is not suffering to silence the "unacceptable" words of one who is.*[41]

Job Responds (6-7)

Eliphaz has done his best with conventional wisdom. Job, however, knows in his bones that this is not the right answer. Eliphaz' words are like a cold slap in the face, the insinuation that if Job will just admit his sins, everything will come right. For Job, this is precisely what he cannot do and remain an honest man. To knuckle under to such speculation would be hypocritical, even dishonest, and Job, whatever else he might be, is not about to start being dishonest. He doesn't want to argue about his plight. All he wants, at this point, is for someone to understand his experience. Hence, he often talks to himself as much as to his friends, struggling with the issue in his own mind.

Condemnation by insinuation is devious and disingenuous, since it implies guilt while making no direct accusation. This was the character of Eliphaz' discourse, and in response, Job simply moans that his suffering is unbearable. If it could be weighed, it would be beyond calculation (6:1-3a). While Job's response is

---

[41] Newsom, p. 383.

not at first a direct refutation of Eliphaz' insinuations, he does pull from Eliphaz' speech a key word, "vexation," that shows he is engaged.[42] If Job's opening complaint seemed rash, he had good reason (6:3b-5)! Both Eliphaz and Job agree that Job's misfortune has come from God, but they disagree emphatically over the human capacity to explain it: for Eliphaz, all is explainable, but for Job, all is mystery and uncertainty. Eliphaz's explanation, at least as far as Job was concerned, was as empty as tasteless food (6:6-7)!

Hence, Job wishes he could simply die. Again, Job is not entertaining the lesser option of escape by suicide. He fully understands that life is given by God and should only be taken by God, but still, if God would only grant his hope, he would prefer to die (6:8-10a). Job's assertion that he has "not denied the words of the Holy [One]" (ESV) is difficult to place in the larger context, particularly since the translation is problematic (6:10b).[43] Perhaps he means that even if his affliction has come as the direct command of God, he has refused to charge God with wrong-doing (cf. 1:22; 2:10). In any case, Job feels he is now at the end of his ability to cope (6:11-13).

At last, Job says something directly to his friends. Of course, only one friend so far has spoken, but Eliphaz has deigned to speak for them all, so Job responds in kind to his "brothers." Even if they thought he had abandoned God, they still should have shown pity, not recrimination (6:14).[44] His friends were like a desert wadi whose streams fail in the dry season (6:15). They were like melting snow or caravans that lose their way in the desert (6:16-18). They were as ephemeral as travelers that never show up, a shameful disappointment (6:19-20), cowardly in their smug advice (1:21)![45]

Going on the offensive, Job now poses a series of searching questions. Eliphaz had insinuated that Job had somehow sinned, even if he was unwilling to admit. But

---

[42] In 5:2, Eliphaz' used the word כַּעַשׂ (= vexation), and now Job picks up on that same word in 6:2.

[43] The meaning of the *Piel* verb סָלַד , which is a *hapax legomenon*, is unclear, with most English Versions taking it to mean "rejoice" or "exult" (largely on contextual grounds), but others taking it to mean "recoil" (Tanakh) or "harden oneself" (KJV). The final line, כִּי־לֹא כִחַדְתִּי אִמְרֵי קָדוֹשׁ (= "...for I have not hidden the words of the holy"), is obscure. Some commentators actually delete the line as coming from a later hand, and others take it to mean that Job half-expresses a hope aimed at an afterlife—that even after death he would still continue to maintain his innocence—and in doing so, his sentiment nearly matches the one in Psa. 119:50.

[44] 6:14 is another problematic passage to translate. The noun חֶסֶד (= faithful love, loyalty) is clear enough, but the verb מָס is not, since it is another *hapax legomenon* and has resulted in mutually exclusive options, ranging from "to withhold" (so ESV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NJB, NIB) to "to be kind to" (so KJV, NLT, NET, NASB, NAB, JPS). If the larger context is taken to mean that in refusing loyalty to Job his friends have themselves abandoned their fear of God (so ESV, NIB, NJB, RSV, NRSV), then Job's retort is particularly stinging. If, on the other hand, the passage means that a suffering man deserves the compassion of his friends, even if he himself abandons his reverence for God (so RV, NIV, JPS, NAB, NET), then Job chides his friends for their lack of empathy.

[45] There is a delicate play on words here between תִּרְאוּ (*tir'u* = "you see") and תִּירָאוּ (*tira'u* = "you are afraid").

if so, in what way? Job demands that Eliphaz be specific if he has any accusation to make. So, Job asks, “Have I ever asked for a bribe” (6:22)? “Have I ever pled for a ransom from kidnappers” (6:23)? In other words, have I ever made any demands of you at all? Such rhetorical questions may seem overly stated except, of course, that they are posed in sarcasm. So, if his friends thought there was some fault on Job’s part, out with it! Straight talk is helpful, and if his friends had something specific and constructive to offer, even if it concerned inadvertent failures,[46] Job would quietly listen. Callous insinuations, on the other hand, were empty (6:24-25)! To treat Job’s lament as only an occasion for rebuke, as simply empty speech to be blown away on the wind, was heartless indeed (6:26)! If they could cast aspersions, so could Job, and now he does so with his stinging, “You would gamble over orphans and barter over your friend” (6:27)!

Job now takes oath that he is telling the truth when he protests his innocence.[47] In a series of imperatives, he challenges his friends to face him, to stop assuming his guilt and to reconsider (6:28-30)![48] His very integrity was at stake, and their unjust aspersions were misdirected. Job was quite capable of discerning falsehood, even in himself (here using the metaphor of taste to describe such ability). He was quite able to “taste” his own circumstance and determine whether the cause of his calamity was his own fault.

Now, in almost an aside, Job reflects on the hardness of life. His days are like serving as a mercenary or a hired worker or a slave, laborers who long for evening when they can finally take their wages and quit for the day (7:1-2). But night was hardly a reprieve. Month after month he struggled through the nights, tossing and turning in the midst of erupting pustules and maggots in his skin, making sleep nearly impossible (7:3-5). With understandably conflicting perceptions, he feels that the nights drag on while, at the same time, he moans over life’s brevity, which is like a weaver’s shuttle when the thread runs out (7:6, cf. NEB).

In 7:6, Job now begins to address God directly. His imperative, “Remember that my life is a breath...” is probably not an address to his friends, but rather, to the one who had given him the breath of life (cf. Ge. 2:7). Soon, he would be gone altogether and no longer visible, even to God. One must keep in mind, of course, that Job’s thought is much earlier than the theology of hope embodied in the Christian expectation of resurrection. It is not so much that he rejects resurrection

---

[46] The verb שָׁגָה (= to err, to go astray) is used in the Torah for sins of inadvertence (Lv. 4:13; Nu. 15:22).

[47] The use of אִם in 6:28 (if I am a liar) and 6:30 (if my mouth cannot discern) is an oath formula and carries a negative force (i.e., “I swear that I’m not lying!”), cf. T. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribners, 1971), p.172.

[48] The double use of the verb שׁוּב (= turn, return) in 6:29 carries the nuance of his friends turning from their accusations.

(*contra* Rashi), but that he does not even know about it. His hope for a meeting with God after death will eventually be expressed (cf. 19:24-27), but at this point he only speaks in the general terms of his times, where death and the entry to *sheol*, the place of the dead, are the only known realities (7:8-10).[49]

One of the downsides of reading a text without hearing the audible voice of the author is that the reader is compelled to assume the tone. Such an assumption is risky, of course, so one must offer the caveat that his/her assumption could be incorrect. Given that Job has reached such an extremity, he is bold to speak of his misery, even to God (7:11). The bluntness of his words might lead one to assume a tone of belligerence, and some interpreters take it in this way, but I am more inclined to the opinion that his words should be read with a tone of bewilderment. He cannot understand how the God he has come to love has allowed this tragedy to happen. As such, his questions are not expressions of insolence, but rather, sobs of confusion. He asks, "Am I Yam or even Tannin that you should put on me a guard" (7:12)?[50] He laments, "I am miserable all night long, because even in my restless sleep I am terrified with nightmares, so much so, that I would rather die" (7:13-16).[51]

The similarity of language between 6:17-19 and Psalm 8:4-8 is striking, and if there is a literary relationship between the two passages, it begs the question as to which is earlier. Each asks the same question, "What is man?" but the answers are far from the same! For Job, the question revolves around why God would spend so much time testing a puny human creature without even giving him time to swallow his own spit.[52] For David, it revolves around the wonder and dignity of the human creature for whom God continually cares and under whose dominion he has put the

---

[49] In the Old Testament, the realm of death is depicted as a shadowy existence in שְׁאוֹל (= the underworld, abode of the dead). Those who die descend to some region of confinement, where they join their ancestors (cf. Ge. 15:15; 35:29). It is the destiny of all living persons (Job 30:23), sometimes metaphorically described as a walled city with "gates" (Job 38:17; Is. 38:10; cf. Mt. 16:18). It is a place characterized by silence (Ps. 94:17; 115:17) and gloom (Job 10:21-22; Ps. 143:3; La. 3:6). In contrast to the turbulence of the living world, it also can be a place of rest (Job 3:16-19). Those who exist in this realm sometimes are called רְפָאִים, that is, ghosts or shades (Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Pro. 9:18; 21:16; Is. 14:9; 26:14). Here, they no longer are able to praise God as do the living (Ps. 6:5; 88:12; 115:17-18).
[50] The names יָם and תַּנִּין are well-known names of ancient mythological creatures from the Canaanite culture, and the fact that they appear as proper names (i.e., without a definite article) suggests that Job has in mind these personalized monsters of chaos (*contra* the KJV, which renders them simply as "the sea" and "a whale"). The NRSV's "the Sea" or "the Dragon" is a more faithful rendering. That Job might allude to a false deity by way of illustration in no way suggests that he believes in them any more than St. Paul believes in the Greek pantheon when he quotes from a poem about Zeus in the New Testament (cf. Act. 17:28). Allusions are just that—allusions—not confessions of faith.
[51] The plural of the word עַצְמָה (= bones) seems odd here ("death more than bones"), but perhaps the term is a synecdoche for the body, hence "these my bones" (JPS) or "my existence" (NAB) or "this body of mine" (NIB). Some scholars prefer a broader metaphor and render it as an allusion to suffering (NJB, NLT, NAS).
[52] The reference to swallowing his own spit is probably an idiom, asking more or less why God would not leave him alone even "for a moment," cf. Rowley, p. 69.

whole world. Job, in his misery, could not see beyond the agony of the present, which indeed, is the common experience of most people who suffer greatly.

Job had no illusions of personal moral perfection, however. Though Eliphaz insinuated that Job had sinned and his sin had resulted in divine punitive action, and though Job had denied that this was the case, still Job does not see himself as sinless. Indeed, his words are a frank confession, "I have sinned" (7:20a).[53] Still, even though he was a sinner like all humans, this should not have been an afront to God. The series of pointed questions, all beginning with מָה (= Why?), point to his continuing bewilderment:

What do I do to you, O Watcher of men?[54]
Why do you set me to be your target?
[Why] am I a burden to you?[55]
Why do you not pardon my transgression and cause my iniquity to pass?

These penetrating questions imply that Job knows he is a sinner, and he equally knows that God forgives: but why has this not happened? These are not the words of a doubter, but in fact, it is Job's very faith that lies behind his bewilderment. Such questions arise in the dark night of the soul when God seems silent.

Bildad Speaks (8)

The second of Job's friends begins with less deference than the first. Eliphaz showed some initial reserve, at least at the beginning, but without ceremony Bildad bluntly accuses Job of being an empty windbag (8:1-2). His point of departure is Job's bewilderment and searching questions, which he takes to be impugning God's justice. Fastening, then, on this perceived indictment of the Almighty, Bildad zeros in on why he thinks Job's protestation of innocence is false (8:3).[56] Unlike Eliphaz, who buttressed his case with an appeal to mystical dreams and visions, Bildad appeals to the wisdom of the ancients.

---

[53] The insertion of the word "if" in many translations (ESV, JPS, NAB, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV) is based on the LXX and the supposed context, but the word "if" is not in the Hebrew text. Further, in 7:21, the words "transgression" and "iniquity" are clear admissions as well. Hence, I decline to insert this word and prefer to leave the sentence just as it stands, a clear confession, "I have sinned".

[54] The expression נֹצֵר הָאָדָם (= watcher of men) is somewhat softened in the LXX, which reads, ὁ ἐπιστάμενος τόν νοῦν τῶν ἀνθρώπων (= the [one] watching the minds of men). This rendering makes God look less like a disinterested observer and more like One who examines human hearts and motives.

[55] The Hebrew text reads "a burden to myself" (so KJV, RV, JPS, NAS), but this expression is probably a scribal adjustment due to the discomfort of having Job state that he is a burden to God. The LXX reads "a burden to you" (σοί), and most English Versions follow suite.

[56] Bildad's use of two names for God, *El* and *Shaddai*, seems intended to suggest that Job hardly knows who he is indicting. Doesn't he realize he is accusing God Almighty of perversion? So implies Bildad.

He starts by suggesting that if Job's children were killed, it must certainly have been a deserved judgment (8:4). Hence, Job himself should take warning! If he will repent, he will not suffer the same sad consequence but will be restored (8:5-7). In this context, then, he draws from the wisdom of his forebears (8:8). Since Job, at best, can only offer the wisdom of a single lifetime, what right had he to question the accumulated and proven wisdom of the ancients (8:9-10)?

At this point, Bildad cites some of this ancient wisdom. The aphorism, "Can papyrus rise up without a swamp? Can reeds grow where there is no water?" features rhetorical questions that stand in contrast to the rapidity with which such plants wither if cut off from their water source (8:11-12). Bildad understands this proverb to demonstrate the brevity of blessing for the profane who neglect God (8:13). Their prosperity is as fragile as a spider's web (8:14-15),[57] as unenduring as a garden plant that shrivels in the hot sun despite the fact that its roots spread over the whole garden (8:16-17). It is only fit for uprooting and short-lived joy (8:18-19).[58]

Bildad's insinuation, then, is that Job must be such a profane man who has forgotten God. His conclusion is blunt: God will not reject a blameless man, and therefore, Job must be blamed (8:20). Still, Job can find restoration and good times, presumably if he will only admit his guilt (8:21-22).

The Bildads of the religious community have hardly gone away, people who have simplistic answers to complex questions. Job had questions, of course, deep and agonizing questions. The fact that he would not accept simplistic answers angered Bildad, who took the line that if Job disagreed with him, he disagreed with the ancients (not to mention God). He continued to treat Job like an intellectual midget, drilling him with condescending truisms and the logic that if a host of other people agree with him, especially people in the past, then he (and they) must be right. Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. It was all so very simple!

Job Responds (9-10)

Once again, it is important to consider Job's tone and, as before, with the caveat that any conclusion carries the risk of misunderstanding. It is not uncommon

---

[57] Lit., "house of a spider"

[58] All scholars concede that these passages are difficult, both because of differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, but also because a number of the Hebrew words have multiple meanings. Hence, one will find considerable variation in the English renderings. Compare, for instance, the translation of 8:19a, "Now he rots on the roadside... (NAB, NJB) with "Behold, this is the joy of his way..." (RSV, NASB, ESV) with "Surely its life withers away..." (NEB, NIV, NIB). Still, the gist of the passage seems clear enough—the short life-span of the garden plant parallels the short-lived prosperity of those who neglect God.

for commentators to read his response as sarcastic, belligerent, bitter or even faithless—and some would go so far as to say that he finally succumbs to the *satan's* confident assertion that he would curse God. Given some of Job's sharp language, of course, this is one way to read the text. However, it is not the only way to read it, and I would suggest that some of these approaches fail to do justice to the context of Job's suffering. Job is not engaged in a detached philosophical discussion about the abstractions of divine ethics. He is a man who is beset with unending physical pain, horrific memories of the loss of his children, and the destruction of everything he held dear. Small wonder that his language, even about God, is affected by his extreme circumstances. In any case, I take a more moderate view of Job's mood and am less inclined to censure him despite his edgy words. People in extreme pain are apt to frame their words in language that reflects their agony, but this need not be taken as an expression of faithlessness.

Next, it is important to recognize a controlling metaphor in Job's response, the metaphor of two disputants appearing in court. Small claims in the ancient Near East were usually adjudicated in the city gate by the city elders, sometimes by a magistrate appointed by the king, and sometimes by the king himself. In such disputes, the two parties in conflict would each present their cases, and here Job contemplates what it would be like if he should be able to stand alongside God and state his case. The irony, of course, is that the other contender in this court case would, in fact, be God. The language of lawsuit is unmistakable throughout, and the impossibility of resolution in such a lawsuit between a human and God is obvious. As James Weldon Johnson quaintly puts it, "Your arm's too short to box with God."

Job begins by acknowledging the general truth of Eliphaz' and Bildad's argument, that is, that no human could be purer than God (cf. 4:17) and that God is always just (cf. 8:3). Nonetheless, such truisms do not answer the question that if one were to appear in court with God, how could a mere human possibly have any chance of arguing his case (9:1-3)?[59] God is, well, God! He has unlimited wisdom and strength, he causes volcanos and earthquakes, he regulates the whole celestial world, including the well-known constellations,[60] and his astounding actions are

---

[59] The forensic context in 9:3 is clear, since the infinitive construct לָרִיב (= to contend) is the standard expression for a lawsuit. What is unclear in 9:3 is who is the plaintiff and who is the defendant? Is Job questioning God (so most English Versions) or is God questioning Job (so RV)? This ambiguity arises in the Hebrew sentence itself, which literally reads, "If he wishes to contend with him, he cannot answer him once from a thousand." Interpreters who see Job as the questioner have him cross-examining God and getting no answer, and indeed, this is the way Elihu will take Job's statement much later in the book (cf. 33:13). Others see God cross-examining Job, who is unable to reply. In either case, the impossibility of going to court with God is the primary point.

[60] The same three constellations will be mentioned later (cf. 38:31-32), along with a fourth. However, there is some discussion among scholars as to their precise identity, and while there is reasonable certainty for the identify of Orion and Pleiades, there is less for the Bear, which might also refer to Arcturus, Ursa Major or Hyades.

beyond number (9:4-10). Though Job echoes the words of Eliphaz (cf. 5:9//9:10), his understanding of God is not the same as Eliphaz. Eliphaz cites God's great acts in support of his thesis that Job should not despise divine discipline, but Job describes God's great acts as evidence of his transcendence and unfathomableness. Indeed, it is this transcendence that is at the heart of Job's dilemma. God is always beyond him (9:11). No one can thwart God's work, not even the chaos monster of the deep (9:12-13), much less a puny human (9:14)![61]

Even if Job felt he was in the right, he was in no position to argue his case with God, since, as he already has stated, such an effort would be futile (cf. 9:3, 11-14). He could only appeal for mercy before the judge (9:15).[62] God is not like someone who must answer a subpoena; even if God showed up, Job would have a hard time believing that God would take him seriously (9:16). In the crucible of his suffering, it only seemed that God was crushing him unmercifully (9:17-19). Hence, even if Job thought he was in the right, he can see no way forward toward vindication.[63] God sees the most intimate thoughts of every man's life and penetrates to the deepest recesses of every man's motives. Anything Job might say would no

---

[61] As before (cf. 7:12), Job makes reference to the monster of the sea from ancient Near Eastern mythology. Rahab is one of several names for this primeval dragon whom Yahweh is poetically described as defeating in creation (cf. Job 26:12; Ps. 89:10; Is. 51:9). A number of Old Testament and Apocalyptic passages employ the mythological imagery of this dragon-like creature opposing God. The monster is variously called *Leviathan* (Job 3:8; 41:1; Ps. 74:14; Is. 27:1; cf. 2 Esdras 6:49, 52), *Behemoth* (Job 40:15-24; cf. 1 Enoch 60:7-9; 4 Ezra 6:49-52), *Rahab* (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps. 89:10; Is. 30:7; 51:9), *Tannin* (= dragon, Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 27:1; 51:9), *Yam* (= Sea, Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 51:10; Hab. 3:8), *Nahar* (= River, Ps. 93:3; Hab. 3:8) and *Nahash* (= Snake, Job 26:13; Is. 27:1), cf. M. Horsnell, *ISBE* (1986) 3.459; H. Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Creation Story," *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 35-40.

[62] Two noteworthy points should be made about 9:15. First, Job's claim is hypothetical and is prefaced by אִם (= if), in spite of the fact that some English Versions seem to make him claim innocence outright (so RSV, NRSV, NET, ESV). Job may not be willing to succumb to the vague accusations of his friends, but he does not claim perfect innocence (see comments on 7:20). Second, there is variance among translators over how to take the word שֹׁפֵט (= judge). Several English Versions translate this word as "adversary" or "accuser", based largely on context, and doing so makes this the figure Job's opponent to whom he pleads for mercy. It seems better to retain the normal meaning of שֹׁפֵט and translate it as "judge" (so KJV, NAS, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, ESVmg). One of the interpretive problems of this extended forensic metaphor, of course, is that God appears both as the one standing beside Job in court, but he is also the universal judge.

[63] As with 9:15, the Hebrew text of 9:20 begins with the important word אִם (see previous Footnote), making the statement hypothetical, a form that again is ignored by some English Versions (so RSV, NRSV, NET, ESV and others). Preferable are those versions that retain it (so KJV, NIB, NIV, NJB). Though the tense is different, the basic construction is the same:

אִם־צָדַקְתִּי = If I were righteous... (9:15) – perfect tense

אִם־אֶצְדָּק = If I am righteous... (9:20) – imperfect tense

These conditional statements color the rest of the passage, including the statement in 9:21, תָּם־אָנִי (= I am perfect), which should be understood as, "[If] I am perfect..." or "[If] I am blameless..." Again, Job is not claiming perfection, but rather, he is saying that even if he were perfect, he knows that as a mere human he cannot carry out a successful self-defense before the awesome perfection of Almighty God.

doubt end up being faulty before such a perfect and lofty Being. Hence, Job resigns himself to self-loathing (9:20-21). Eliphaz and Bildad have asserted that good people receive blessing while sinners receive punishment—and both in the present life (4:7-9; 8:4-7)! Job says just the opposite—that both the blameless and the wicked experience disaster (9:22-23). When an epidemic or a natural disaster happens, doesn't it strike both good and bad, and isn't God the one who has the power to control such things—and if not him, who else could it possibly be? Many centuries later, Jesus will say essentially the same thing, although from the more positive side, "For he [i.e., the Father] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). The assertions of Eliphaz and Bildad, that a man's fortunes inevitably reflect his moral character and behavior, flies in the face of all experience. Due to pervasive wickedness in the world, even the judges seem blindfolded when it comes to fixing blame (9:24).

Job now lapses into a reflection on the brevity of life, using metaphors of runners, papyrus boats and diving eagles to describe his fast-vanishing days (9:25-26). He is afraid to be optimistic, since another bout of suffering might follow (9:27-28a). Being treated like a man condemned, unable to cleanse himself by any ablution, he feels his plight to be hopeless (9:28b-31). Hence, he longs for some mediator, some friend of the court who, as it were, could put his arms around both God and Job, bringing them together (9:32-33). What he truly longs for, of course, will not be fully answered until the incarnation of the Son of God, the one who knows the very heart of the Father and yet who was made like humans in every way (cf. He. 2:17). But such an answer was so distant from Job that he could hardly imagine it. In the meantime, he only pleads that the "rod" of the Almighty be taken away so that he might speak to God directly and without fear, and this, then, is at the very heart of the book (9:34-35).[64] It is this transcendent difference between God and humans, this unbridgeable gulf that separates them—what Soren Kierkegaard called the infinite qualitative difference—with which Job struggles.

Job continues to struggle with the question, "Why" (10:1-2)? He ended his initial response with a series of "whys" (7:20-21). Once again, he voices to God this fundamental question, "Let me know why you bring suit against me?"[65] It is, in fact, the age-old question lying behind every tragedy, the question, "Why?" "Why me?" or perhaps equally, "Why not me?" Job toys with the possibilities, some of them dark, to say the least. Did God somehow derive perverse pleasure from watching human suffering or bestowing benefits to the wicked (10:3)? (To such a question, St. Paul would probably interject, **μὴ γένοιτο** = "May it never be!") Is God

[64] The last clause in 9:35 is difficult. Literally, it reads, "...for I [am] not thus with me." Translators have offered several possible options, none of them wholly satisfactory.

[65] Again, as in 9:3, Job uses the term רִיב, the technical term for the lawsuit.

operating on merely a human level (10:4-7)? (If so, Job could understand it better, but he cannot accept the idea that God actually operates this way.) The origin of humans in creation seems to demonstrate God's goodness, and Job uses a series of metaphors to describe this divine action, the analogy of the potter, the analogy of the cheese-maker, and the analogy of the weaver, all of them probably reflections on Ge. 2:7 (10:8-11). If God was the celestial craftsman, his designs were thoughtfully produced and wonderfully made, for he granted life to the human creature he formed and extended to him loyal love and the privilege of overseeing the world (10:12-13).[66] If this is God's basic character, and it is good, how then could such tragedy have happened to Job, one of his faithful creatures? Job is struggling with his faith, but there is no compelling reason to think he has given it up. Indeed, struggle and even doubt are constituent parts of any examined faith![67]

So, Job continues to question. Does it make any difference whether he is righteous or not? If he sins, God will certainly know it, and if he is righteous, he still finds no vindication. If he is elevated, he will surely be hunted down by the divine Lion. In all cases, he seems condemned and under the displeasure of God, always under threat from God's "troops" (10:14-17).[68] Hence, back to the basic question, "Why?" the question that echoes his opening lament (cf. 3:11-12, 16, 20, 23). "Why was I born?" "Would it not have been better to have been still-born?" "Can God not simply leave me alone before I descend to the underworld of darkness and death?" (10:18-22).

Zophar Speaks (11)

Zophar, the final speaker of the three, is at least brief. He offers no new insights, and indeed, he is even more severe than his compatriots. Whereas Eliphaz insinuated that Job must have sinned, and Bildad carried that insinuation even farther, Zophar actually suggests that Job is so guilt-ridden he has gotten off easy.

---

[66] The word חֶסֶד is variously translated as lovingkindness, loyal love, covenant love and faithfulness, all of which are legitimate, since this word has no easy English equivalent. A thorough exploration of its shades of meaning can be found in N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), pp. 118-166. The word פְּקֻדָּה also has various shades of meaning, but the one that seems most appropriate here is the idea of appointment, service or guardianship, the divine directive given in Ge. 1:28 in which humans were created to be stewards over the earth.

[67] Some scholars regard Job's descriptions as suggesting that God merely "sets up" humans so that their suffering would be all the more acute, and if one begins reading Job's questions and musings while assuming such a tone of sarcasm, indictment or belligerence, then such a conclusion naturally follows (so Rowley, for instance, who says, "...all his suffering was designed from the start and all kindness was but intended to make his present suffering the more acute," p. 83). However, if Job's musings are read in the tone of a man desperately searching for answers from a God who is eluding him, such negativism is unnecessary.

[68] Again, translation is problematic here, especially in the final line of 10:17. Literally, the Hebrew text reads, "Changes and an army [is] with me," the intent of which is unclear, at best.

Zophar is the sort of comforter that sufferers could do without. He is the sort of pretentious advisor who says, "You want to know about God? Just ask me! (God and I go back!)"

He begins by addressing Job's "multitude of words," dismissing them as empty talk[69] and arrogant mockery, deserving censure (11:1-3). He flatly contradicts Job's claim of innocence and asserts that if only God would speak, he would reveal that Job has received even less than he deserved (11:4-6). If Job has pled with God to answer his agonizing question, "Why?" Zophar is confident that he already knows why! Zophar asserts that if God would speak he would say the same thing as Zophar is saying.

He challenges Job's search for God as an exercise in futility, since God's wisdom is higher, deeper and wider than any human can comprehend, encompassing the heavens, the underworld and the ends of earth and sea (11:7-9). God's judgments, here expressed in a courtroom metaphor, are irrevocable (11:10). He knows that humans are worthless and stupid, and he implies that Job should see himself in this same light (11:11-12). Of course, Zophar is partially correct in his truisms about God's vast wisdom, but as with the other friends, though he can make true statements, Zophar comes to wrong conclusions. Further, to insinuate that Job is a stupid ass is particularly heartless.

Zophar's conclusion is that repentance is the only way forward. Job needs to turn from his evil ways and seek God's pardon (11:13-14). Only then can he expect to be restored, and once he has done so, his former misery will vanish like water disappearing into a desert wadi (11:15-16). Life will be bright, he will be protected, and fear will be gone (11:17-19). The alternative, on the other hand, is disastrous and will end in miserable death (11:20).

So, Job's friends have concluded their first round. Job continues as he was, an upright man experiencing dire calamity, but he knows not why. His friends claim to speak for God, and if Job will only take their advice and repent of his sins, God will be pleased (which really means that *they* will be pleased). It is almost axiomatic that when some religious experts urge that another must do such and such to please God, it often means he must do such and such to please them! Job, for his part, is certain that he is innocent. His friends are certain that he has hidden guilt. Job believes he can know the truth about himself. His friends contend that only God can know such hidden mysteries. Job struggles with his conception of God, whom he regards as good but now, in light of God's goodness, finds his own reduced state inexplicable. His friends confidently assert that "everything happens for a reason." Not everything his friends have said is wrong, of course, but in the midst of their well-intentioned

---

[69] Lit. "a man of lips"

truisms, they fail to do justice to Job, and more to the point, they fail to do justice to God, as will be made clear later (cf. 42:7).

Job Responds (12-14)

Job now begins his final speech of the first cycle, and it will be his longest thus far. In it he will address both his friends and God.

The address to his friends, particularly Zophar, is couched in finely-crafted sarcasm (12:1-2). Zophar has urged that God's wisdom is so high and wide and deep that it is entirely beyond Job's ability to perceive it (cf. 11:7-9), and Job is nothing more than a stupid donkey-brain (cf. 11:12). Job counters Zophar's harshness by pointing out that he has as much a right to access God's wisdom as they do (12:3). No doubt he feels his sarcasm is appropriate in light of their cheap mockery, even though he is a man who has previously been known to seek and hear from God (12:4). In particular, Job's friends have failed entirely to explain why he, a just and blameless man, has experienced misfortune, while bandits, blasphemers and idolaters see peace and security (12:5-6).[70]

Job begins to address one friend in particular, probably Zophar.[71] He points out that all God's activities, including even his activities in the animal world, are essentially the same, which is to say, the tragedies of animal life in both land and sea seem indiscriminate and without any moral attachments (12:7-9).[72] Every living thing is in the hand of the sovereign God (12:10), and Job is as qualified as any of his friends to test and "taste" the validity of arguments, even the so-called wisdom of the ancients (12:11-12). In God's activities in the world, which display his wisdom and sovereignty, there is no clear moral pattern to justify the notion that all outcomes of good and bad are simply cause and effect, rewards and judgments. God's will cannot be resisted, of course, and all humans, not to mention nature itself, testifies to the reality of God's sovereignty (12:13-25). Nonetheless, this historical parade of builders, droughts, floods, counselors, judges, kings, priests, elders,

---

[70] The Hebrew in 12:5-6 is quite difficult, though the gist seems reasonably clear. Readers will see some variation in the English Versions. Rowley's summary is helpful when he says, "Job is observing that the theology of his friends is the theology of the prosperous, who can afford to look down on the unfortunate and excuse themselves from giving sympathy by the assumption that they have brought it upon themselves," p. 92. The line הֵבִיא אֱלוֹהַּ בְּיָדוֹ (= "they bring their god in their hand") probably refers to idolatry.

[71] This change from plural to singular is not obvious in an English translation, since the pronoun "you" in English does double duty for both singular and plural. In Hebrew, however, the "you" in 12:2, 3 is plural, while the "you" in 12:7ff. is singular.

[72] Job 12:9 is the only poetic passage in the book using the name Yahweh, which since the prose prologue has given way to a form of *Elohim*. Some scholars suggest that this must be a gloss and not the original text. On the other hand, if this is original, then it forms an emphatic declaration of Yahweh's sovereignty over all created life and forms a link with his divine right to both give and take away (cf. 1:21).

princes, nations, and chiefs all point to one overpowering conclusion: disasters happen to them all under the sovereignty of God, but there was no clear sense of how or why such things happen. Zophar had sarcastically asked of Job, “Can you find out the deep things of God?” (cf. 11:7), and Job’s much more serious answer was, “No!” For Job, the actions of God were profound, mysterious and inexplicable, but at least he recognized what his friends did not—that God cannot be easily explained by shallow reasoning as though he were a conundrum to be solved! Job’s God, who was ever beyond his reach, was so much bigger than the God of his friends, a God who could be analyzed and explained.

Job now longs to voice his appeal directly to God.[73] He knows only too well the threadbare truisms of his friends (13:1-2), but what he really wants is to have a conversation with God in order to sort out his poverty of understanding (13:3). God, only, can provide an adequate answer! As for his friends and their superficial counsel and worthless explanations, it would be wisdom on their part if they would just shut-up (13:4-5). He urges them to hear him, for their presumptuous attempts to defend God have put them in grave danger, since their arguments are unjust and treacherous (13:6-8).[74] If God, for instance, deigned to examine the three friends, it would hardly turn out well for them (13:9-10).[75] They would be terrified to discover that their advice had been nothing but ashes and clay (13:11-12)!

So, Job boldly intends to claim his innocence before God, come what may (13:13), and indeed, he is confident that he does so as a godly man, taking his life in his hands to face Almighty God. He is absolutely undaunted in his firm belief that he will be vindicated (13:14-16). There is a difference between arrogance and confidence, and Job’s boldness stems from confidence. Death itself could not undercut his confident expectation![76] His friends must continue to listen as he

---

[73] The strong adversative אוּלָם (= but) is grammatically important at the beginning of 13:3, for it points to Job’s desire to hear from God, not merely from his friends.

[74] Most English Versions offer some sort of dynamic equivalency for the opening phrase of 13:8, which literally reads, הֲפָנָיו תִּשָּׂאוּן (= “Will you lift up his face?”), an idiom for bribing judges, cf. Dt. 10:17; Pro. 18:5. The Almighty is not about to start condoning partiality, even if in defense of himself!

[75] Here is the same idiom as in 13:8 (see previous footnote).

[76] The wording in 13:15a can be taken in two ways. The *Qere* reading is הֵן יִקְטְלֵנִי לוֹ אֲיַחֵל (= “Even if he slays me, I will wait for him.”). The *Kethiv* reading is הֵן יִקְטְלֵנִי לֹא אֲיַחֵל (= “Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope.”). A *Qere* reading in the margin of the Masoretic Text (MT) is an oral substitute for the actual written word in the text itself. In other words, scribes would never change a text, but they would offer an alternative reading, a euphemism, if the text as it stood was considered unsuitable for public hearing. The *Kethiv* reading is what is written in the MT itself; the *Qere* is what would be read aloud in the synagogue service. Here, whether one should follow the *Qere* reading or the *Kethiv* reading depends upon how one understands Job’s mood and tone. If he is expressing unbounded and optimistic trust in God (and I think that he is), then the *Qere* reading is the most appropriate (so KJV, RV, JPS, NAB, NASB, NET, NIB, NIV, ESV). On the other hand, if he is defiantly resigned to pessimism (a viewpoint that some scholars adopt), then the *Kethiv* reading is to be preferred (so NJB, NLT, RSV,

prepares to present his case to God, and Job knows he is in the right—he will be vindicated. He is confident that God will exonerate him, but even if this does not happen, he would willingly accept the verdict of death (13:17-19). He prays for two things only, that God would give him relief and that God would directly specify his transgression and sin (13:20-23).[77] If God would only break the silence, Job would heartily respond, or if God would let him speak, he would accept whatever reply God might give. It is noteworthy that Job uses three distinct words for sin, עָוֹן (iniquity/error), חַטָּאת (sin/missing the mark), and פֶּשַׁע (transgression/rebellion). Job does not claim perfection or sinlessness, and he frankly concedes waywardness during his younger years (13:26b), but if he has done something now to earn God's displeasure, he wants to know what it is. What frustrates him beyond measure is the fact that he simply does not know and that God has not spoken (13:24-25). He feels as vulnerable as a leaf in the breeze or a piece of dry straw—totally helpless before his tragic circumstances. It is as though God has delivered a sentence against him, but he doesn't know the charge. God has sentenced him to the stocks and kept him under surveillance, restricting his freedom, but Job still doesn't know why (13:26-27). Hence, as before (cf. 3:11, 20; 7:20; 10:18), the word לָמָּה ("Why?") looms large (13:24a)! As it is, his life is rotting away with no answer (13:28).

Hence, Job returns to his lament about the condition of his waning life, and indeed, all human life, a lament that has graced many a funeral service for its elegant depiction of life's brevity (14:1-2). Given life's fragility and insignificance, Job is amazed that God even pays attention to him or cares to bring judgment on him, since no one can reverse impurity anyway (14:3-4). Since the lifespan of a human is so short, why does God not just leave him alone, so he can enjoy his brief respite at the end of the day like a hired man who has completed his work (14:5-6)? A felled tree might be regenerated out of the old root system if it gets sufficient water, but is that even possible for a human (14:7-10)? Humans are more like a dried-up lake or river with no hope of recovery (14:11-12).

So, Job muses on the possibility of resurrection. After death, he expects to descend to *Sheol,* the place of departed spirits (see Footnote #49), and he wishes that he could simply linger there until God's anger against him had waned and he could be recalled (14:13). *Sheol*, of course, raises the question of whether death is the end

---

NRSV). The reader should keep in mind that the verb יָחַל, here used in the *Piel* form, means to wait, and idiomatically, to wait in hope.

[77] The Hebrew in 13:20a literally reads, אַךְ־שְׁתַּיִם אַל־תַּעַשׂ עִמָּדִי (= "Only two things do not do to me."). In the context, this makes for a difficult reading, since Job actually asks for something to be done, not something to be omitted. Hence, while some versions retain the negative force of the sentence (so KJV, RV, JPS, NAB, NET), other versions follow the LXX, which reads, δυεῖν δέ μοι χρήσῃ (= "but two [things] grant to me"), rendering the sentence in a positive way (so RSV, NRSV, ESV, NIB, NIV, NJB, NLT).

of everything, and Job contemplates that there may actually be life beyond *Sheol*. If so, he would patiently await this brighter future (14:14)! He envisions God desiring his fellowship and recalling him from death, expunging the record of his sins by sealing them away forever (14:15-17). Here lies the most vibrant of hopes, and while the Hebrew Bible does not have many references to resurrection or life after death,[78] Job surely looks to the future with this blessed hope in mind!

Finally, Job's mood swings again to despair, which should not be too surprising, given his miserable condition. People in dire circumstances find that their emotions vacillate, and Job is no exception. The imagery of crumbling mountains and eroded landscapes seems to parallel crumbling hopes (14:18-19). In the end, death comes to all. Even though a man might be mourned by his family, in death he is unaware of such honor (14:20-22). Hope and fear shadow each other during tragedy, and they do so here. In view of the silence of God, Job gropes toward the future, mingling his hopes and fears. The reader should not expect of Job some sort of sterile consistency, but neither should Job's expressions of despair be allowed to obliterate his profound expressions of hope.

The Second Cycle of Dialogues (15-21)

Now begins a second set of dialogues between Job and his three friends. As before, each will speak in turn, and also as before, Job will offer responses. Since the friends have been altogether unsuccessful in diverting Job from his protestation of innocence, the friends change tactics somewhat. Previously, they sought to defend God. Now, they attempt to defend religion, accusing Job of doing away with reverence for God (cf. 15:4). Further, their rebukes toward Job become more pointed as they defend their theology of divine retribution. Previously, much of their accusation was in the form of insinuation, but now the gloves are off, and they attack Job directly and without reservation.

Eliphaz Speaks (15)

The same order of speakers is preserved, so Eliphaz speaks first. He bluntly accuses Job of windy emptiness (15:1-3) and brands him as a threat to religious reverence (15:4).[79] He charges that Job's claims of innocence are nothing but a huge

[78] The idea of resurrection and life after death is to be found in the Old Testament, though not often (e.g., Ps. 16:8-11; Is. 26:19; Da. 12:2-3).

[79] In saying that Job is undermining fear, several versions insert the words "of God," because they seem implied (so RSV, NRSV, ESV, NLT).

cover-up, and by fingering specifically Job's words (mouth/tongue/mouth/lips), he flatly contradicts what the narrator said earlier—that Job did not sin with his lips (15:5-6; cf. 2:10b). In a flurry of blistering and highly sarcastic rhetorical questions, Eliphaz derides Job's capacity for wisdom:

Are you the original human, older than the hills? (15:7)

Were you privileged to listen in on the divine council, smarter than everyone? (15:8)
How is it that you think you know more than we do, since there is a gray-headed man here older than your own father? (15:9-10)[80]
Are our gentle and consoling words, inspired by God, not sufficient? (15:11)
Why do you allow yourself to get carried away with passionate speeches that end up turning you against God? (15:12-13)
Who among humans is pure? The Almighty could not even trust the angels in heaven,[81] *much less an abominable and filthy man like you, who gulps injustice like water! (15:14-16)*

Eliphaz now embarks on a lengthy and pompous exposition of divine retribution, which he says is derived from the accumulated wisdom of the ancients, a wisdom unadulterated from passing strangers (15:17-19). Still, he offers essentially the same cause-and-effect theology he expounded earlier (cf. 4:7-8). It is as though by saying it again, more loudly this time, its veracity will be confirmed. The wicked man pays for his wickedness year after year, Eliphaz says. He suffers starvation and is haunted by the fear of a judgment he instinctively knows is coming (15:20-24). All this misery is due to his defiance toward God, against whom he has raged like a man in full armor (15:25-26)! But a self-indulgent human with bulging fat who has

---

[80] While most English Versions imply that Eliphaz is referring to the body of aged wise men, some even adding the word "men," (which is not in the Hebrew text, so KJV, RV, NIV, NIB, NLT, NET, NAB, JPS), in fact, the words for the gray-haired and aged are in the singular, so that Eliphaz may well be simply referring to himself (so NJB). Otherwise, these singular forms are simply taken as collectives.

[81] Here, Eliphaz returns to the idea he expressed in 4:18 that God does not trust even the angels. As before, there is perhaps a hint of the fall of angels. The biblical information about angels who fell is admittedly fragmented and incomplete. The two passages most frequently cited are Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, but in each of these texts, the primary figures are human rulers, and if there is information about the fall of angels, it is indirect, not direct. We know that Jesus referred to "the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41), and Paul declared that in the church Christ intends to display the manifold wisdom of God to the hostile "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ep. 3:10), but the circumstances of their fall are shrouded in mystery. Once Christ also remarked that he saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven (Lk. 10:18), but this might simply be an idiomatic way of speaking about the success of the 70 in their Galilean mission. If the symbolism of "stars" in the Revelation of John are taken to refer to angels, then perhaps this defilement of heaven came at the fall of Satan (Re. 12:4), though that passage is an interpretive crux as well. On the other hand, we know that the Jewish pseudepigrapha interpreted the strange passage in Genesis 6:1-2, 4 as referring to angels who invaded the earth in order to take human wives and spawn children (1 Enoch 6-8). Later, this tradition is echoed in the New Testament (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). In the end, however, the reader of the Bible must be content with hints about this rebellion rather than direct descriptions.

merely scavenged upon the remnants of others is in no shape to fight God (15:27-28). Such a man will soon be stripped of his wealth, ending his life in emptiness (15:29-31). Payment in full would surely come, and his life would end like palms, grapes or olive trees that lose their buds and produce no fruit (15:32-33). This is the destiny of the wicked, who live on bribes and plot for evil (15:34-35).[82] The result is cause-and-effect, and by implication, if Job has experienced disaster, he should know that his misery is a divine and fiery judgment!

As Carol Newsom has insightfully pointed out, the speeches of Eliphaz, along with those of the other friends, raise cogent questions about not merely facts but the deeper levels of belief and how one defends them.[83] These are the more profound questions of religion, philosophy, and ethics, often abstract but frequently triggered by concrete situations like that of Job. Such defenses can be grouped into several broad categories, arguments from direct revelation (cf. 4:12-17), arguments from nature (cf. 4:10-11; 8:11-12), arguments from consensus or the authority of tradition (cf. 8:8-10; 15:10, 18-19), and arguments from individual experience and observation (cf. 4:8; 5:3; 15:17). Job's friends have appealed to all these arguments as the bases for their beliefs, but the problem, as is evident to Job, is that in the end they prove nothing absolutely. They may be true some of the time, perhaps most of the time, but they have no final compelling force (13:12), and in the viewpoint of Job, they can be treacherous (6:15; 13:4), even self-deceptive (cf. 13:7-8). Hence, Job desperately wants to hear from God directly, not so he can extrapolate from such an encounter a list of generalizations for the rest of the human race, but so he can understand what is happening to him personally (10:1-2; 13:3, 15, 22). This is "the hard work of moral dialogue" and the problem with which Job grapples, indeed, with which all humans grapple!

Job Responds (16-17)

Nothing new has been added by Eliphaz' insinuations. Job's ironic rejoinder—that Eliphaz is at least as windy as Job has been and Job has heard it all before—seems appropriate (16:1-3). Stringing together clichés is easy, but if the positions were reversed, Job could easily do what they are now doing (16:4-5). Indeed, Job even wishes they could experience the misery he feels![84]

By this time, Job is truly at his wit's end. It hasn't helped to vent his feelings,

---

[82] Several English Versions have missed a subtle inclusio from the beginning and end of Eliphaz' speech. The key word is בֶּטֶן (= belly). At the beginning, Eliphaz accuses Job of filling his "belly" with wind (15:2), and at the end, he speaks of the wicked who prepare deceit in their "belly" (15:35). Translations that render this word as "belly" at the beginning and "womb" at the end (so ESV, NIB, NIV, NLT, NJB) miss the play on words. Hence, it is better to retain the translation as "belly" in both passages (so KJV, RV, JPS, NET).

[83] Newsom, pp. 453-455.

[84] The phrase לוּ־יֵשׁ נַפְשְׁכֶם תַּחַת נַפְשִׁי may be an added sarcasm, but literally it reads, "Would that your soul was instead of my soul", which is tantamount to saying, "I wish you were in my position!"

but silence doesn't help either (16:6). God has exhausted both Job and those surrounding him. He is emaciated and gaunt, torn and persecuted, the object of God's anger (16:7-9). His friends have mustered a devastating attack upon him, punching him with vicious words (16:10-11). Andersen's literal translation of 16:12-14, where Job describes the attack of God, is vivid but accurate:

> *I was at ease and he shattered me;*
> *He grabbed my gullet, and smashed me.*
> *He set me up as his target,*
> *His archers encircled me.*
> *He chopped my kidneys unsparingly,*
> *And split my guts on the ground.*
> *He wounds me with wound upon wound;*[85]
> *He rushed against me like a champion.*

Still, in spite of a torrent of tears and no relief, even from loose clothing, Job has refused to retaliate against God (16:15-17). His description of God's attack is just that—a description—but he never resorts to incriminating God, and he considers his prayer to be pure. Bildad had insinuated Job was not pure (cf. 8:6), but Job continues to claim that he is! Even though he feels death is imminent ("blood" is a synecdoche for death), he remains confident that God will vindicate him (16:18-19). If the blood of Abel once cried from the ground for vengeance (cf. Ge. 4:10), the blood of Job will cry from the ground for vindication!

So, Job is now reduced to disputing with both God and his friends. God has not spoken, and his friends, who have spoken, have only mocked and betrayed him. Job lifts his tear-stained face upward, pleading for someone, but especially God, to come to his defense (16:20-21). He feels there is not much time left (16:22)![86] Indeed, he feels that the grave awaits him (17:1). In this extremity and in view of his friends' accusations, Job now enters into a solemn oath in which he calls upon God to defend him against his accusing friends (17:2-3).[87] Doubtless he realizes the risk of such a bold initiative, but he feels justified, since he is convinced that God already has negated their wisdom, which is evident by their closed minds (17:4a). They must not be allowed to succeed in their malicious prosecution (17:4b)! They have been to Job like a betrayer in the hopes of getting whatever is left of his property—and such

---

[85] The triple use of פרץ (= to break through), first as a verb and then as nouns, is the language of siege warfare and the breach of a city wall. I would translate this line as, "He breaches [my wall] with breach upon breach."

[86] The reference to "a few years" may not mean that he expects to live a few years more, but rather, that the span of a man's life is only a few years (cf. 14:1), not nearly enough to resolve such problems, cf. Andersen, p. 183.

[87] The אִם־לֹא introductory clause of 17:2 is an oath formula, and this formula, coupled with the imperatives שִׂימָה־נָּא (= Set now!) and עָרְבֵנִי (= Pledge!) along with the idiom לְיָדִי יִתָּקֵעַ (= strike my hand), which is the idiom for standing surety (cf. Pro. 6:1; 17:18; 22:26), all point to the idea that Job is putting God on oath to defend him. He is consigning his friends to God's judgment seat.

malicious disloyalty would surely end in a curse on their whole family (17:5).[88]

Once more taking up God's attack upon him,[89] Job moans that he has become an object of public contempt, one in whose face people spit (17:6). His eyesight is failing and his body is only a shadow of its former health (17:7). Decent people[90] are appalled at his condition, and they recoil at the cruel mockery of his friends (17:8). Still, in spite of these crushing circumstances, Job's spirit rises to the occasion, if only briefly (17:9). He still expects his friends to continue their slander, even though their attacks are without wisdom or substance (17:10).

Continuing the description of his debilitation, Job anticipates death. All his former aspirations have been dashed, and darkness is closing in (17:11-12).[91] Still, if he resigns himself to death, embracing *sheol*, the pit and the maggot, what prospect is there (17:13-15)? His hope for justification will sink into the prison of the dead along with him, never to be resolved (17:16)!

Bildad Speaks (18)

Bildad, the consummate traditionalist, holds true to form in his response to Job. He obviously has taken umbrage at Job's speech, for he asks, "How long will you set a snare for words?" (18:1-2a).[92] His quip, "Be intelligent, and then we will speak!" merely adds insult to injury (18:2b). He queries why Job regards their counsel as nothing more than the dull thoughts of stupid animals (18:3). Earlier, Job had used the imagery of crumbling mountains and eroded landscapes to describe his crumbling hopes, and now Bildad throws this image back into Job's face, asserting that it is Job himself who is tearing apart the earth in his rage (18:4).

Bildad then embarks on a rambling discourse about the misfortunes that beset the wicked, and by implication, he continues to indict Job as someone suffering his just deserts. Again, this is the cause-and-effect theology propounded by all the friends, except that this version is blunter and less nuanced. The extinction of lamp light and domestic fire is a metaphor for the darkening world of the wicked (18:5-

---

[88] I have followed the general sense of most of the English Versions here, but as all readers of the Hebrew text can ascertain, these verses are particularly difficult and are open to several possible interpretations (see the commentaries on the Hebrew text).

[89] Technically, the word "God" is not in 17:6, only the implied pronoun "he", and while it is conceivable that Job is talking about Eliphaz, the more natural understanding is that he is talking about God, which is why some English Versions add the word "God" (so NIV, NIB, NLT).

[90] It is possible that by "the upright" Job is making a sarcastic jibe against his friends, but without a larger context, it is better to take the word as referring to ordinary decent people.

[91] The meaning of 17:20 is far from clear, and the variety of renderings in the English Versions reflect this ambiguity. Literally, the Hebrew text reads, "They set night to the day; light is nearer than the face of darkness."

[92] In the English Versions, the verbal combination תְּשִׂימוּן קִנְצֵי (= "you [all] set a snare") has mostly been handled as an idiom calling for some sort of dynamic equivalency, with only the RV and JPS retaining the literal meaning. Why Bildad addresses Job in the plural is unclear, though perhaps he is simply consigning Job to the company of windbags who should be discounted.

6). The flurry of additional metaphors—shortened stride, enmeshed in a net, trapped in a snare, caught by a cord—all point toward the hidden dangers that inevitably overtake the evil person (18:7-10). He is beset with fear that is hard on his heels; his strength wanes and his steps falter, all harbingers (lit. "firstborn") of death as disease eats away at his body (18:11-13).

The flurry of mixed metaphors continues: the wicked person is torn from his tent, arrested, and brought before the "king of terrors" (a metaphor for death), while his residence is purged with brimstone (18:14-15).[93] He is like a dying tree, no longer remembered (18:16-17). He is driven into darkness, childless and an object of horror from all directions (18:18-20). The final allusion to the loss of Job's children is particularly cruel, and Bildad's parting shot that such things are bound to happen to the man who does not know God is presumptuous, arrogant, and tendentious (18:21).

Job Responds (19)

If the preceding speech by Bildad is especially dark, the climax of Job's response is brimming with faith and even confidence. First, however, Job must say something about the stinging barbs of his friends. They have been unrelenting in their castigation, crushing him with accusations they cannot prove, drawing their conclusions from inferences based on Job's tragedy, not from any actual knowledge of his life (19:1-3). This is why Job urges that even if he has some hidden fault, it is his business, not theirs (19:4)! Not that he is conceding any such a thing—he will continue to contend for his innocence—but it is God's place to judge, not theirs (19:5-6)!

This, then, is the complete sense of abandonment Job feels. What has happened has happened, but Job still has not heard from God himself. His friends attempt to speak for God, but Job knows instinctively that their words are presumptuous and empty. Job wants to hear from God himself, but there has been only divine silence (19:7). Job does not accuse God of injustice, but thus far he has heard no divine word to exonerate him. God, in his sovereignty, has allowed Job's downfall without explanation, here described by the metaphors of being walled in, stripped of glory, demolished, uprooted, and put to siege (19:8-12). To be sure, these metaphors are mixed, which is a bit frustrating for English readers who have been reared on the maxim not to mix metaphors, but it is their cumulative effect that is most important.

Job is utterly lonely! He is estranged from his friends, rejected by his kinfolk, forgotten by his friends, and disrespected by his servants (19:13-16). Even his closest relationships—those of his wife and siblings—have completely deteriorated (19:17).

---

[93] Again, the Hebrew here is difficult, so the reader will see considerable variation in the English Versions. The reference to sulfur might be an oblique allusion to the destruction of Sodom (cf. Ge. 19:23-28).

Little children jeer and whisper about him (19:18), and his most intimate friends repudiate him (19:19). He is surviving, but just barely (19:20).[94] He pleads with his friends for mercy rather than recrimination, but they seem like ravenous predators, pretending to speak for God, but eager for his flesh (19:21-22).

In desperation, Job turns from his faithless friends to his faith in God. He is certain that God will vindicate him, and when it happens, he will know it himself. Indeed, he even wishes that his protestation of innocence could be inscribed on a scroll, embossed on a lead sheet or engraved in stone—an enduring witness to his innocent suffering (19:23-24).[95] Then follows an exclamation of incredible confidence that shines all the more brightly against the larger background of bleak negativism (19:25-27).

וַאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי גֹּאֲלִי חָי וְאַחֲרוֹן עַל־עָפָר יָקוּם׃

And I know my Redeemer lives, and afterward he will stand upon the earth!

וְאַחַר עוֹרִי נִקְּפוּ־זֹאת וּמִבְּשָׂרִי אֶחֱזֶה אֱלוֹהַּ׃

And after my skin has been stripped off, so from my flesh I will see God!

אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי אֶחֱזֶה־לִּי וְעֵינַי רָאוּ וְלֹא־זָר

Whom I will see for myself, and my eyes will behold, and not a stranger!

כָּלוּ כִלְיֹתַי בְּחֵקִי׃

How my "heart" is spent in my bosom!

There are, of course, some translational and hermeneutical factors that must be taken into account in Job's exclamation. The term "Redeemer" doubles for any near kinsman, whether an avenger of blood or a brother-in-law in levirate marriage or the purchaser of a piece of family property. Contextually, Job sees God as his Vindicator, though the careful interpreter must not anachronistically import into this word the fuller meaning that will be explicated in the New Testament. Primarily, Job has in mind the One who will redeem him from the dust of death. The word I have rendered as "earth" is literally dust, and it is used elsewhere in the book to describe deterioration and death (7:5; 10:9; 17:16; 20:11; 21:26; 34:15). If this is its meaning here, then Job depicts his Redeemer as standing upon the dust of death, a metaphor for Job's own grave. Nonetheless, it is after the event of death that Job is certain he will see God! In this post-death vision of God, he will not see him in some ghostly

[94] The meaning of the idiom made famous in the rendering of the KJV, "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth", is not immediately clear. No doubt it was understood in Job's day, but it is irrecoverable for us.

[95] Much discussion has attended Job's references to ancient writing. In the first place, the "book" is surely a scroll, not a codex, which will not make an appearance until the early Christian era. Writing on lead sheets is known from antiquity, and engraving on stone monuments is widely known. Some scholars, however, suggest that the latter two examples might be combined, so that what Job is describing is engraving on stone with molten lead poured into the incised letters.

shade of existence, but as a full man ("from my flesh"), a full view of God that he will see for himself! Does Job anticipate resurrection? Many interpreters are doubtful, but it seems to me that this is precisely what Job has in view—a form of life after death! To be sure, Job is a long way on the other side of the Christian gospel of Jesus' resurrection, but nevertheless, even if imperfectly formed, his confident hope is that after death he will encounter God, and he will do so as a full and complete man! His yearning for this vindication after death is captured in the final line. The word "heart" is actually "kidney," but this is an ancient way of speaking about one's innermost being, so most English Versions render it by the more contemporary idiom "heart."

The Hebrew of the final verses in Job's speech is exceedingly difficult as it stands, and one will see a great variety of renderings in the English Versions (19:28-29). What seems clear enough is that they are intended as a warning to his friends. They cannot continue their recriminations as though Job alone is at fault, but they must remember that the sword of judgment cuts both ways.

Zophar Speaks (20)

Zophar especially took umbrage at Job's closing words about the sword of judgment cutting both ways, which he took to be a personal insult. He claims to have had an inner dialogue with himself, which he evidently perceives to be a mark of wisdom and insight (20:1-3).

He seems surprised that Job is either unaware or unwilling to accept the wisdom of the ages, a wisdom concluding that the joy of the wicked is short-lived (20:4-5). He even resorts to the crude analogy that prideful wickedness ends in total decomposition—just like feces (20:6-7). The wicked man is as ephemeral as a dream, quickly forgotten (20:8-9). His children become beggars, asking for help from the very people whom their father had refused (20:10-11).[96] Even if such a man seems healthy, he is destined for an early death (20:12). The seeming sweetness of his ill-gotten gain is like poison food which, when he holds it in his mouth, it makes him sick, and he regurgitates it all (20:13-15). Sucking in such dishonest profit is like sucking snake venom, and it will kill him in the end, preventing him from any enjoyment of life (20:16-18). All this is because he is avaricious, crushing those beneath him while foreclosing on their property (20:19-20). Because the wicked man's greed is insatiable, God will dispense judgment upon him like weapons of war, even to the destruction of his own body (20:21-25). Divine wrath will destroy him as surely as a raging fire consumes everything in its path (20:26-28). This, then, was the dark heritage of the wicked man—and by implication, Job must hear and

[96] The meaning of the phrase "his hands will give back his wealth" (ESV) is not as clear as one might wish. Some sort of dynamic equivalency is probably in order, and several options are available, such as, "His sons will have to reimburse the poor and his children pay back his riches" (NJB) or "...they must give back their stolen riches" (NLT).

learn (20:29)!

There is very little new ground in Zophar's rebuttal. He remains consistent in contending that everything is explainable by cause and effect. Zophar's God has no place for repentance or mercy, and his cruel reference to the bronze arrow of divine retribution that pierces the body of the wicked and comes out his back is a not too subtle suggestion that this is exactly what has happened to Job. His generalisms, while perhaps true, have little to do with Job's specific circumstance. It is not that they are not true in the broad sense, for systemic evil, since it is not a part of God's good creation, is always liable to collapse. Still, evil in the world continues to perpetuate itself in a wide variety of forms, and insofar as Zophar seems to think that the evil man is ephemeral, he does not seem to grasp the larger dimensions of evil. In any case, the conclusions he has offered may be true generally, but they are not true regarding Job.

Job Responds (21)

In this closing speech of the second cycle, Job continues to counter the theodicy of his friends. Here, he does not lapse into a prayer or a lament about his misery, but instead, stays focused on their preceding arguments. All along, his friends have urged that the fate of the wicked demonstrates that Job's calamity must be deserved. Job, so far, has not offered much to counter this claim, but here he intends to do so directly. As such, he draws various elements from their previous speeches, which he examines. He will refute their arguments freely, not always quoting verbatim, but near enough so it is clear he had heard and understood their main points. It is not always easy to locate precisely where Job is referencing them, since usually he does so by allusion rather than by word-for-word citations. In some cases, English Versions have added words like "you say" or "it is said", words that are not in the Hebrew text but are probably implied (see, for instance, in 21:19a, RV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NASB, ESV, NET, NIB, NLT). In other cases, of course, the words "you say" do appear in the Hebrew text, and when they do the reference is clear enough (cf. 21:28). Following are some of Job's allusions to his friend's previous speeches:

21:2 // 15:11
21:7 // 20:11
21:8 // 18:19
21:9 // 15:24
21:17 // 18:5
21:19 // 20:10
21:28 // 8:22; 15:34; 20:26
21:29 // 15:19; 20:4

Job commences his rebuttal by calling for his friends to actually listen to him (21:2). This, he says, would in itself be an act of true comfort. Earlier, Eliphaz had professed to offer the consolations of God (cf. 15:11), but he was far better at talking than listening. At the very least, could Zophar not simply restrain his mockery until Job had a chance to speak (21:3)?[97] Job's following rhetorical question puts the debate squarely in its true perspective. The issue with which he struggles is not merely a petty argument against another human. If it were just a matter of human dispute, he might expect some sympathy, but since his intensive musing[98] concerns something much more fundamental, he knows that what he intends to say will almost certainly stun them (21:4-5). Indeed, they will be struck dumb[99] when they hear his words! Job himself regards his thoughts as audacious and frightening (21:6), for he intends to question the accepted moral structure of the world in which he and his friends have lived all their lives.

His friends have argued from the beginning that sin leads to calamity. For them, the moral framework of the universe is cause and effect, pure and simple. They also have turned the equation around and argued that if calamity happens, then sin is the root cause. Job now will attack both this thesis and its corollary by pointing out from observable human experience that very often the wicked live long, healthy lives (21:7)! Zophar had confidently asserted that the wicked die prematurely (cf. 20:11), but Job says this is not necessarily so. Further, Bildad had urged that the wicked die childless (cf. 18:19), but Job says not necessarily so—he has seen plenty of wicked people with happy families (21:8). Eliphaz had urged that if Job would just confess his sin, his "tent" would be at peace (cf. 5:24), but Job says not necessarily so—lots of wicked people have comfortable and safe houses, and God doesn't seem to do anything about it (21:9)! Job, by contrast, has suffered terribly under the "rod of God" (cf. 9:34). The livestock breeding programs of the wicked are hugely successful (21:10), and their families produce a veritable flock of happy children, all dancing about (21:11) and singing (21:12). More to the point, they live out their days in prosperity and finally go to the grave in peace at a ripe old age (21:13)!

---

[97] Though not apparent in English, the language shifts here in the Hebrew text from a noun with a 2nd person plural pronominal suffix (תַּנְחוּמֹתֵיכֶם = "your consolations") to a 2nd person singular imperfect verb (תַלְעִיג = "you may mock"), implying that Job has Zophar in view. This is not apparent in English, since the word "you" does double duty for both singular and plural. All his friends have mocked him, one way or another, but Zophar has been the most cruel.

[98] The Hebrew in 21:4 is somewhat oblique. In 4a, the word usually translated "complaint" (שִׂיחַ) carries more the nuance of an inner struggle, which is why the NEB renders it as "thoughts," and I have used the word "musings." In 4b, the phrase לֹא־תִקְצַר רוּחִי, usually translated as "impatient", quite literally reads, "Is my spirit not short?", which in turn suggests inner agitation.

[99] The phrase is literally, "Put hand over mouth!"

Job's observations, then, are exactly the opposite of what his friends have said: they have asserted that the fate of the wicked includes the loss of children (18:19), the destruction of their homes (18:14-15; 20:28), the evaporation of their wealth (15:29; 20:15), inescapable terror (15:21), and violent, premature death (15:30; 18:13-14; 20:23-25). Job says that his observations of life show that these things simply don't happen consistently! Indeed, those who reject God often seem quite prosperous (21:14-16).[100]

Hence, Job poses his own set of rhetorical questions. Alluding to Bildad's words, he asks, "How often do the wicked really experience calamity, divine reprisal and premature death" (21:17-18)? Not that often, it seems! Job's friends have argued[101] that God stores up punishment, even to the next generation, paying it out to the children so that even if the parents don't experience it fully, their children will do so (cf. 5:4; 18:19; 20:10).[102] They are apt to say, "Our kids will have to pay, but what do we care" (21:19-21)?

So, who gets to tell God how to run the world (21:22)? The answer to this rhetorical question, of course, is no one. The sovereign God is beyond moral advice from his creatures, and indeed, since he is supreme, he even passes judgment on the higher beings.[103] Still, the moral framework of God's judgment is not immediately apparent, since the fates of any two individuals, one healthy, relaxed and prosperous and the other bereft and poor, are the same (21:23-26). Death is the great equalizer, and it admits no favoritism, since every human dies! No moral differences explain their fates. It is, of course, precisely this reality that is the problem for Job. If he believes in a sovereign God (and he surely does), how are these moral inequities to be explained? The world seems more characterized by randomness than anything

---

[100] While the overall thrust of 21:14-16 is not in doubt, the translation of 21:16 is problematic. Some take 16a to be a rhetorical question, "...is not their prosperity in their own hand?" (RSV, NRSV, ESV), which implies that the wicked are responsible for their own prosperity. Others take the statement to be a positive assertion, which amounts to the same thing, "They think their prosperity is of their own doing" (NJB, NLT). A number of versions take it to be a negative assertion, "But their prosperity is not in their own hands" (KJV, NASB, NAB, NIB, NET, NIV, JPS). If the latter, perhaps Job is mimicking his friends by saying this sort of thing is just what they would be expected to say (and in this vein, the RV adds the marginal note "Ye say...").

[101] Here, the words "You say..." or something comparable are not in the Hebrew text, but most Versions supply them as strongly implied.

[102] Of course, the idea of reprisals to a future generation, at least on the face of it, seems embedded in the words "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Ex. 20:5; Dt. 5:9, etc.), but this may be a failure to understand the idiomatic language of comparison. The numbers "third" and "fourth" are not here some mathematical formula by which to calculate judgments, but a comparison and contrast to the succeeding words "showing steadfast love to thousands [of generations] of those who love me" (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10). Hence, this saying is not, as some would have it, some sort of generational curse. Rather, the point is that God's capacity for mercy is immense compared to his capacity for punishment. Indeed, the Torah itself forbids punishing a son for the crime of his father (Dt. 24:16), and later voices will directly refute this notion of generational punishment (Je. 31:29-30; Eze. 18:1-24, 30).

[103] Here, as in 4:18 and 15:15, there may be a hint toward the fall and casting out of the angels (see Footnote #81).

else.[104]

Of course, Job can easily anticipate the counter-argument of his friends. No doubt they will continue to spout their threadbare truisms, citing this or that occasion when some noble has lost everything (21:27-28). He equally knows that in such examples they are not just talking about an ambiguous "someone," but him. But Job counters with Zophar's own example, when he claimed some sort of universal knowledge (cf. 20:4). Any chance traveler on the road with a modicum of experience knows better—that very often the evil person faces no consequences at all for his evil (21:29-30).[105] It is only too apparent that the wicked person frequently escapes confrontation and gets away without paying for his crimes (21:31). Earlier, Bildad had contended that the very memory of an evil man would perish from the earth (cf. 18:17), and Zophar had urged that the remembrance of such a man would disappear like a wispy dream (cf. 20:7-8). In realty, very often when such a man dies, great crowds go to his funeral and bury him with ceremony,[106] while others maintain his gravesite with care (21:32-33). In the end, then, the consolations of his friends were so much vapor (21:34). They had no substance, and they were wrong!

The Third Cycle of Dialogues (22-27)

If the first set of dialogues was largely occupied with implied accusations of guilt and the second with the fate of the wicked, the third degenerates even further with sharp accusations of personal transgression. That Job's friends cannot consider the legitimacy of his point of view almost goes without saying, and indeed, they don't even try. The notion that an innocent man could suffer as Job was suffering was well beyond their range of possibilities. To be sure, their accusations are not based on any real knowledge of Job's behaviors; they have only deduced that he *must* be a heinous sinner; otherwise, he wouldn't be suffering at all.

In this round, Bildad's speech is quite short, and Zophar will not speak at all. (Apparently, he has said all he intends to say.) While some scholars have theorized that perhaps a disruption in the text lies behind Bildad's brevity and Zophar's silence, there are no textual grounds on which to base such reconstructions. The Septuagint and the Dead Seas Scrolls agree with the form and order of the Masoretic Text. More probably, the shortness of Bildad's speech and the silence of Zophar is a literary device for showing that the discussions are grinding to a halt.

Eliphaz Speaks (22)

---

[104] The same observation is made by Qoheleth (Eccl. 9:1-3).

[105] Early, Eliphaz had spoken of wisdom untainted by the thoughts of passing strangers (15:18-19), but here Job simply observes that even passing strangers seem to know better than Eliphaz!

[106] The "clods of the valley" probably refer to the burial mound.

Eliphaz's opening salvo is to pose the rhetorical question, "Does God need humans?" which, of course, must be answered in the negative (22:2a). Rather, humans need to behave themselves in ways that are to their own advantage, which is to say, they need to be moral, since God will reward their morality (22:2b). As Job had predicted, Eliphaz was shocked by Job's observations that God seemed aloof from human proclivities. But would God gain anything, even if Job were vindicated (22:3)? Surely not, Eliphaz asserts! God does not dispense either judgments or rewards in order to better himself; rather, he actively judges because he is strictly impartial. Was the suffering of Job some sort of unreasonable backlash because Job was such a blameless and upright man?[107] To Eliphaz, the whole notion was ridiculous. Of course, Eliphaz had no knowledge, as does the reader, of the opening dialogues between God and the *satan*, so he doesn't realize that Job's suffering came about precisely because he was a blameless and upright man!

Hence, Eliphaz can only press upon Job the same old assertions—he must be guilty of something, and given the extent of Job's sufferings, it must be something serious! He can only offer wild speculations, of course, but nonetheless, he charges that Job's sins must be nearly endless (22:5). Most of these speculative accusations concern sins of omission. Perhaps Job has taken a garment as collateral and not returned it promptly (22:6).[108] Maybe he has refused water or food to someone in need (22:7). Perhaps he has used his position of influence to seize some neighbor's land (22:8).[109] Maybe he has neglected widows and orphans (22:9).[110] Because of just such sins, Eliphaz asserts, Job now is overwhelmed by the dark waters of divine reprisal (22:10-11).

Job may have thought that his sins were hidden—that God was so remote in the heavenlies that he could not penetrate the thick atmosphere separating earth from heaven, but God sees all, and he is fully aware (22:12-14)! The assumption that God was oblivious was the folly of many a wicked man, and each one perished by an early death when spurning the truth of God's omniscience (22:15-17). Such men, just as Job has done, might even claim that their prosperity came from God, but

---

[107] Here, the interrogative הֲמִיִּרְאָחֶךְ (= "Is your fear of him...") refers to fear in the sense of piety, not terror.

[108] In a society where subsistence living was common, the Torah required the pledge of a garment to be returned on the same day (Ex. 22:26-27; Dt. 24:10-13). In 1960, a 7th century ostracon was discovered from the Israelite coast that specifically mentioned the garment as a cloak by day and a blanket by night. A farm worker named Ha-saar-Asam had his garment taken as a penalty by a certain Hoshayahu ben Shabay, because he apparently had not met his daily quota, and he set down in writing his plea for its return, saying, "[Please return] my garment. If the official does not consider it an obligation to retur[n]/[[your] ser[vant's garment, then hav]e pi[ty] upon him/[and re]turn your [se]rvant's [garment]. You must not remain silent [when your servant is without his garment]," BASOR 295 (1994):49-55.

[109] That this passage is in the 3rd person seems a bit odd. In the Qumran version of Job, the passage is prefaced by the phrase "and you say," which suggests that this was an arrogant claim of Job.

[110] The Torah, of course, urges protection of widows and orphans as a fundamental obligation in the social order (Ex. 22:22-23; Dt. 27:19).

Eliphaz will have none of that sort of nonsense (22:18). Rather, when the righteous see the downfall of the wicked and the destruction of their property, they rejoice (22:19-20).

For all his speculative accusations, one can at least say that Eliphaz has Job's best interests at heart, since in back-to-back imperatives he now appeals to Job to repent. Unlike Zophar, who has little capacity for mercy, Eliphaz urges Job to "settle with God" and receive God's instruction (22:21-22).[111] If he does, all will come right, and he will be restored (22:23).[112] The meaning of the reference about putting gold upon the dust is uncertain (22:24-25).[113] Most interpreters take it to mean that Job should find his gold in God rather than in riches. If he does, then God will become the source of his enjoyment, and once more he will find intimacy with God (22:26-28). God will hear his prayers and the future will be clear. Of course, Job's complaint all along has been that God doesn't seem to hear him, and Eliphaz's assertion that repentance is the way toward closeness to God is not generally wrong—but in this case, it is wrong for Job, since Job has done no evil. It will become a great irony that in the end Job will be the intercessor who will pray for Eliphaz (42:7-9)!

Eliphaz's final words in the Hebrew text, as they stand, are very difficult. Literally, they read, "When they are abased, you will say [it is because of] pride; and he will save the downcast.[114] He will deliver [the one] not clean,[115] and he will escape through your clean hands." By the time most Versions arrive at a rendering, the passage appears reasonably smooth in English, albeit unclear in meaning, but there is a good deal of scholarly guess-work going on behind the scenes. Who are the

---

[111] The use of the Hiphil form of the verb סָכַן (= to be accustomed to) probably has the nuance of "come to terms with". Several versions render it as "agree" (RSV, NRSV, ESV), while others render it as "submit" (NIV, NIB, NLT) or something comparable (NAB, NASB, NET). Also, this is the only passage in the book that uses the word *torah*. References to the law of Moses in Job are conspicuously absent.

[112] The Niphal form of the verb בָּנָה (= to be built up) appears in the Masoretic Text (followed by KJV, JPS, ESV, NET). However, the LXX has the verb ταπεινόω (= to humble), and some Versions opt for this reading (so RSV, NJB).

[113] The word בֶּצֶר is a bit of a puzzle. Normally, this trilateral root (with different pointing) refers to grapes, but that can hardly be the meaning here. Most lexicons treat it as gold ore (so Holladay), since it seems parallel to Ophir, the place where Solomon sent ships for gold (cf. 1 Kg. 9:26-28; 10:11), and is juxtaposed with silver. If so, the Hebrew text of 22:24 reads, "And put gold upon dust and Ophir in the rock of the wadi." Most interpreters take this to mean that Job should give up his gold, either throwing it into the river or perhaps returning it to the stream-bed from which it was dug, but admittedly, these are scholarly guesses.

[114] Lit. "lowly of eyes" (an idiom for being downcast)

[115] Some translations seem to miss the grammatical function of אִי, which serves as a negative marker, now widely recognized, because it appears both in Hebrew and Phoenician. Hence, renderings like "him who is innocent" (RSV, JPS, NAB, NJB), or worse, "the island of the innocent" (KJV), should be rejected in favor of "him who is not innocent" (so RV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, ESV, NLT, NIB, NET).

"they" and who is the "he" in 22:29?[116] In the end and without emending the text, perhaps all that can be said is that Eliphaz seems to be exhorting Job that restoration is possible, either through God (if the translator assumes that God is the subject) or through Job himself (if the translator assumes that Job is the subject and reclaims his status as a righteous intercessor through personal repentance).

Job Responds (23-24)

Job opens his response by acknowledging once again his bitterness and suffering (23:1-2).[117] God's hand has been heavy against him,[118] and he bemoans his lack of access to God. Eliphaz had asserted that Job must put things right between himself and God, but Job's plight is that he cannot find any way to do so, since God seems hidden (23:3). If Job could only lay his case before God's tribunal, then he would hear the answer he so desperately desired (23:4-5). He was fully confident that God would be fair, and indeed, that if God would hear his case he would be vindicated (23:6-7)!

But therein lies the seemingly insurmountable problem! God was not accessible! Job has searched in every direction—east, west, north and south—but God is just as elusive as ever (23:8-9)![119] Still, Job is gradually coming to realize that even if he never fully finds the answer, God *does* know his plight, and in the end, this whole wretched experience will be revealed to be, not a punishment for sin, but a test of Job's unswerving faithfulness. Job may not know where to find God, but God surely knows where to find Job, and in this Job will be satisfied. The realization is beginning to dawn on him that in this test, he will emerge on the other side as pure gold refined by fire (23:10-12). God stands alone, which is to say, he is sovereign.[120] He accomplishes his own ends without assistance, and if this is true generally, it will be true for Job in particular (23:13-14). Job might not understand

---

[116] Some scholars emend the pointing, and in some cases even emend the consonants, to find an acceptable rendering, see some of the options in Rowley, pp. 157-158. For translators who take the pronoun "they" to refer to people in general, then the word גֵּוָה is sometimes taken, not to represent arrogance, but rather, to the act of lifting someone up (so NIV, NIB, NET, NLT), thus bringing it into parallelism with the following phrase about saving the downcast. In the final phrase of 22:30, some translations change the "he" to "you", thus making it refer directly to Job (so RSV, NJB, NAB, JPS), while others change it to "they" to make it parallel with the "they" in 22:29 (so NRSV, NLT).

[117] The Hebrew word מְרִי (= rebellion), as it stands, seems to be an ironic admittance that if Eliphaz has accused Job of being rebellious, Job intends to continue as a "rebel". However, many translators understand the word to be a form of מָרָא (= bitter, so KJV, RSV, NRSV, NAB, NIV, ESV, JPS, NET, NIB, NLT), as in Ruth 1:20. This latter understanding has a precedent in the Targums, the Syriac and the Vulgate.

[118] The Masoretic Text has "my hand," but most translators follow the LXX, which reads ἡ χείρ αὐτοῦ (= his hand), i.e. God's hand.

[119] The geographical orientation of the ancient Near Eastern person is toward the east. Hence, "forward" means to the east, "backward" means to the west, "left" means to the north, and "right" means to the south.

[120] The Hebrew reads וְהוּא בְאֶחָד (= "And he [is] in one..."), which some versions take to mean "unchangeable" (so ESV), Better, however, is the idea that he "stands alone" (so NRSV, NIV, NIB).

God's intent in allowing this crucible, but he instinctively acknowledges that God knows precisely what he is doing! Before such an all-powerful, all-knowing Being, Job can only stand in awe (23:15-16)! Still, even in the face of this divine hiddenness, Job is willing to speak (23:17).[121]

If chapter 23 is sufficiently clear, chapter 24 is not! Translators all agree that the Hebrew in many lines is very difficult. In addition, many of Job's expressions, particularly in verses 18-24, seem at odds with what he stated earlier, since they seem to argue that the wicked will certainly be summarily judged by God, the very thing Job argued against in chapter 21. Hence, one will find considerable variety in the English Versions, both in translation as well as the arrangement of the text. Some, concluding that there have been dislocations, have rearranged the order of the verses (so JB). Others have attributed at least some of the passages to Bildad or Zophar rather than Job, particularly in light of Bildad's brevity and Zophar's silence (e.g., NAB). Still others conjecture that some passages are interpolations inserted into the text by later editors. Some translators insert the words "you say" before 24:18 (words that appear in no ancient text or version), treating Job's words as implied quotations of his friends (so RSV, ESV, NET). Several early translations render the verbs as optatives rather than declarations, which is to say they express what Job wished might happen rather than what actually does happen (LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta). Finally, there are scholars who treat the chapter as a collection of free-floating and disconnected poetic units (e.g., Snaith).[122] Hence, any interpretation of chapter 24 must be offered with a certain degree of tentativeness in view of its inherent difficulties.

Job begins with the question as to why God has no fixed times for judging human depravity (24:1). His friends have argued that God distributes judgment quickly, but as Job observed earlier, any close observation of real life indicates that this is not necessarily the case. Evil people often survive to old age (cf. 21:7ff.). Various crimes seem to go unpunished, ranging from land-grabbing (24:2) to theft and oppression (24:3-4). The poor are forced to glean from the oppressor's vineyard or hunt wild game to survive (24:5-6). Because they have pledged their garment as security, sometimes they are compelled to sleep without even a covering, often wet and miserable (24:7-8). Heartless creditors have snatched their very infants from widowed mothers (24:9). Poorly clothed, hungry and thirsty, they labor on their oppressor's farms (24:10-11). All the way to early death marches this unrelenting oppression, and though the victims of this exploitation cry out for divine mercy, God

[121] The Hebrew in 23:17 is quite difficult, literally reading, "For I was not annihilated from the face of darkness, and from my face gloom covered." As it stands, the Hebrew is nearly unintelligible and has given rise to various emendations and conjectured interpretations reflected in the English versions. I have followed the sense of the ESV, NASB, NET, NIB and NIV.

[122] Norman Snaith, *The Book of Job* (Epworth 1945).

allows it to go on (24:12). These criminals include murderers, adulterers and house-breakers, who shut themselves in during the daytime so they can perpetrate their atrocities under the cover of night (24:13-17).

The insertion of "you say" at the beginning of 24:18-20, while not in the Hebrew text, may be implied (so RSV, ESV and NET), and there is a precedent in 21:19.[123] If this is Job's unannounced allusion to the words of his friends, he is sarcastically parroting their former assertions that all such crimes are swiftly adjudicated by God, who sweeps the wicked away or melts them like snow in the sun so that they die quickly. Of course, this is a position with which Job disagrees (chapter 21). In response, Job persists in the observation that very often such crimes seem to go unpunished, the oppressors living lengthy lives of security. Their deaths are much like everyone else's, not sudden but "like all others" (כַּכֹּל). Such a theological problem concerning the postponement of divine justice certainly was not unique to Job (cf. Ps. 73). In any case, Job concludes by challenging his friends that they cannot prove otherwise (24:25).

Bildad Speaks (25)

This, the final speech of Bildad, is the shortest one in the book, while Job's response will be extensive. Zophar has now disappeared altogether and will only be mentioned briefly at the very end (cf. 42:9). Not a few scholars have attempted to rearrange the verses in order to achieve a full third round of speeches, but their lack of consensus over how this should be done suggests that, at best, they may be entertaining a forced symmetry, and in any case, such a structure is ambiguous if not mistaken. As mentioned previously, Bildad's brevity and Zophar's silence may only be a rhetorical device signaling that the three friends have by this time fully spent themselves. In any case, there seems no compelling reason to address the text other than the way it stands.

Bildad's answer is less acerbic than formerly, where he repeated his cause-and-effect theology and a confirmed belief in summary divine justice in the present life (chapter 18). Here, he contents himself with a series of rhetorical questions about how any lowly human could possibly think he would be justified before God.[124] The whole world bows low before the omnipotence of God, whose sovereignty is

---

[123] What seems to be a similarly unannounced quotation of his friends was used in 21:19. This, of course, is only one way of handling the difficulties of 24:18ff., especially since the dialogue seems to be attributed to Job himself. As mentioned earlier, other scholars either treat them as a gloss or transfer them to one of Job's friends directly. If, indeed, these sentiments are to be attributed to Job, then Job must be accused of wavering or at least inconsistent at some level.

[124] Though his initial words in the Hebrew text are formed as a declaration, and the English Versions follow suit, they are in the form of a question in the LXX, where the passage begins with τί γαρ (= for if). The subsequent sentences in 25:3-4 are all questions in both the MT and the LXX.

absolute and whose armies are innumerable (25:2-3a).[125] The extent of his jurisdiction is universal, so that there is no place where his ethical light does not penetrate (25:3b). Even the celestial bodies seem dim and unworthy, much less a mere human, who compared to God, is nothing more than a maggot or a worm (25:5-6).

On the face of it, this brief speech by Bildad seems to parallel things Job himself has said about the seeming impossibility of being in the right before God (cf. 9:2, 15ff.). The difference between them, however, is along the lines of hope versus despair. Job realizes, of course, that compared to God he is infinitesimally small—but nevertheless he has hope that the God, whose companionship he seeks, will reveal himself in the end (cf. 13:15; 14:14-17; 19:25-27; 23:10, 14). Bildad, on the other hand, consigns humans to the level of vermin for whom relationship with God is unthinkable.

Job Responds (26-27)

If the entirety of chapters 26-31 belong to Job, which on the face of it appears to be the case, then this is the longest speech in the book. However, there are reasons for thinking that another voice or even voices can be heard, particularly in chapter 28. Some scholars also suggest that various sections of this lengthy speech should be reassigned to Bildad or Zophar, especially in chapter 26. While in my view such theories of dislocation are unnecessary, the poem in chapter 28 is another matter. In any case, here chapters 26-27 will be treated as the words of Job, the poem in chapter 28 as an independent unit, and chapters 29-31 as the final appeal of Job.

One thing about Job: in spite of his suffering, he is not hesitant about mocking his friends and their paltry advice! Earlier, some of his rejoinders were heavily sarcastic (cf. 12:1; 16:1), and here he is no less acerbic in his response to Bildad, who has chided him like a helpless, powerless empty-head, while assuming for himself the paternalistic role of counselor and wise man (26:1-4).[126] Job's final stinger is the metaphor about "breath," which could refer to the breath of God, but in this case, probably refers to Bildad's windiness.[127]

Job does not long dwell on Bildad's presumptuousness. Rather, he embarks on a full and elegant description of God's majesty. The roles are now reversed, and as Andersen has observed, Job will teach his supposed teacher![128] In describing

---

[125] Once again, as in 4:18 and 15:15-16, Bildad may be alluding to a heavenly conflict among the angels which was resolved by the Almighty's forced "peace".

[126] The pronoun suffixes (תָ) are all singular, so presumably Job is addressing Bildad.

[127] The word נְשָׁמָה, like רוּחַ, is one of those flexible words that can refer to human breath (e.g., Ge. 2:7; 1 Kg 15:29; 17:17) or the divine Spirit (2 Sa. 22:16; Job 37:10). Job's question, "Whose breath...?" sarcastically implies that the words of Bildad have not come from God!

[128] Andersen, p. 217. As already mentioned, I attribute the following passage to Job himself. To be sure, a number of scholars have attributed it to Bildad, including Rowley, Pope, Dhorme and Newsom, among others, largely due

God's greatness, Job moves from the underworld to the visible world to the celestial world. In view of God's omniscience, the realm of the dead is utterly open—literally naked—to God (26:5-6).[129] The observable world is equally dependent upon God's creative and sustaining hand. The word "north" or "Zaphon," while it might possibly refer to the great mountain in the Lebanon Range, more likely is a poetic reference to the dwelling place of God (cf. Ps. 48:2; 89:11-12; Is. 14:13; Eze. 1:4).[130] The "void" (תֹּהוּ = emptiness), a word apparently borrowed from the creation account in Genesis (cf. Ge. 1:2), is the context of God's creative handiwork, while the idiom "hanging the earth on nothing" (literally, "without what?") points toward God's infinite power (26:7). That God can fill the clouds with water like a huge bag or a wineskin without it bursting equally describes his omnipotence (26:8). He can hide the moon behind clouds (26:9)[131] as well as map out the surface of the seas all the way to the horizon, the boundary between sunlight and darkness (26:10).[132] The "pillars" upholding the heavens, possibly a metaphor for the mountains, quake before the divine epiphany, this imagery probably referring to the mighty crash of a thunderstorm (cf. Ps. 18:7-15; 77:18). God calmed the churning waters by his

---

to the abrupt transition from Job's sarcastic rejoinder in 26:1-4 to the poem about God's immeasurable majesty in 26:5-14. However, there seems no compelling reason to assume a textual dislocation. Abrupt transitions are not wanting throughout the book, and given what we already have heard from Bildad, this does not seem to be the sort of thing he would say. To be sure, Bildad has spoken of God's omnipotence (cf. 25:2-3), but he seems primarily preoccupied with God's capacity to bring summary judgment (cf. 8:3-4; 18:5-21). The majesty of God in the broader sense seems more consistent with Job's view of God than with Bildad's view. Hence, the opening phrase, "And Job answered and said..." should be allowed to stand.

[129] That the dead are "under the waters" is likely drawn from the metaphor of death as drowning, more or less along the lines of 2 Sa. 22:5-6//Ps. 18:4-5. Earlier, Job used the term שְׁאוֹל to refer to the realm of the dead (cf. 7:9; 17:13; 21:13 24:19), and here he does so again (see Footnote #49). It is probably better to simply transliterate this word as *sheol* (so ERV, RSV, NRSV, NAB, NASB, ESV) or render it as "netherworld" (so JPS, NET, NLT) or "realm of the dead" (so NIV, NIB) rather than translate it as "hell" (KJV), since for too many people, the English term "hell" conjures up images that would have been alien to Job. The term אֲבַדּוֹן (= destruction) is often transliterated as well (so ERV, NAB, NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV), since it seems to be a synonym for *sheol*.

[130] The idea of God "stretching out" the north seems more applicable to the heavens than the earth (e.g., 9:8). Many scholars have pointed out that Mt. Zaphon is the abode of the Canaanite deities, similar to Mt. Olympus in Greco-Roman mythology. Indeed, Ps. 48:2 pointedly compares Mt. Zion with Mt. Zaphon as the "city of the great King".

[131] There is a tricky homonym here between כִּסֵּא (= throne, MT) and כֶּסֶא (= full moon), both of which would have been identical in the early unpointed Hebrew texts. Most modern versions opt for "moon," based on the surrounding context, but a few translate it as "throne" (so ERV, JPS, KJV and the LXX). Both readings make sense: the moon being covered by a cloud or the throne of God concealed by clouds (cf. Ps. 104:3).

[132] The image here is of an architect inscribing a map of the seas. We actually have such an ancient map of the world inscribed on a clay tablet (British Museum, ME92687). Found at Sippar on the east bank of the Euphrates and dating to about the 7th or 6th century BC, it depicts the world as circular. In the center of the map is a hole made by the compass of the architect from which he drew two concentric circles, the inner circle representing the known world of Mesopotamia and the outer one representing the world-encircling seas.

almighty power, shattering Rahab, the mythological monster of chaos (26:12-13).[133] Elmer Smick appropriately observes that, while using stock imagery familiar to people in the ancient Near East, the biblical text here demythologizes the Akkadian myth, treating the turbulent sea not as the god Yam but as the churning waters of natural phenomena.[134] Job's point is not to legitimize the deities of the ancient Near Eastern pantheons; Job is strictly monotheistic. However, like other biblical authors he uses the imagery and vocabulary of these myths to accentuate the omnipotence of God. In the end, all these references to God's mighty acts are but a whisper of his power and the barest hint of his majestic works (26:14).

The reader, of course, must bear in mind that when Job describes the universe he is speaking phenomenologically, which is to say, he describes the world from the vantagepoint of visual observation as well as human limitation, while couching his description in poetic metaphors and images that serve to reinforce the mystery of God's Being. One should not attempt to draw from Job's cosmology some sort of scientific view of the universe any more than one should treat his use of stock mythological imagery as a journalistic report about the creation. This is poetry and must be read as poetry. Still, the description of God's majesty is a powerful indication of Job's wonder and appreciation for God's greatness. This is the God whom Job desperately wants to reveal himself, and unlike Bildad, who can only see God in terms of penal justice, Job longs for the vindication he instinctively knows is bound up in God's moral character.

Job now concludes his speech, and the text employs a new formula to introduce Job's final remarks (27:1). Earlier, apart from 3:1 in Job's opening dialogue, the consistent phrase has been וַיַּעַן אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמַר (= "And Job answered and said..." cf. 6:1; 9:1; 12:1; 16:1; 19:1; 21:1;23:1; 26:1). Here, however, a much longer phrase appears: "And Job again took up his parable and said..." (27:1), and the longer phrase will be used again in 29:1. That the phrase appears in the middle of Job's speech has aroused suspicion that perhaps this section, or at least this phrase, is from a later hand. Better is Andersen's understanding that this phrase simply marks off chapter 27 as a closing statement, thus forming literary "book ends" between the opening lament in 3:1 and Job's final response to his friends.[135]

Job begins this concluding response to his friends with an oath formula, "As

---

[133] Rahab, the term used here, is the ancient name in Ugaritic texts for the mythological chaos monster (see Footnote #61). The poetic parallelism with נָחָשׁ בָּרִחַ (= the fugitive serpent) makes clear that this is what the text intends (*contra* the KJV's rendering as "the proud"). Job's reference to the fleeing serpent parallels a similar reference in Is. 27:1.

[134] That the author is not referring to the god Yam is clear in that the definite article is used. Had he been referring to the god Yam by name, he would not have used the definite article. E. Smick, "Job", *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 4.968.

[135] Andersen, p. 219. For the use of the term *mashal* in 27:1 and 29:1, see the comments in the introduction under "Cultural Context and Genre".

God lives..." (cf. 1 Sa. 14:39, 45; 2 Sa. 2:27; 1 Kg. 17:1, etc.). By introducing his comments in this solemn fashion, he once more affirms that his words are absolutely true. God's name is invoked as the ultimate source of justice, for only God can truly arbitrate between the accusations of Job's friends and Job's insistence on his innocence. For reasons unknown to Job, God has allowed this tragedy (27:2), but despite the insinuations and outright condemnations of his friends, Job holds fast to his claim of moral integrity (27:3-6). His conscience is clear! By speaking of his "righteousness," Job is not claiming sinlessness (cf. 31:33-34), but rather, that he is in the right and his friends are not. Job is not challenging God's justice (in spite of the fact that some interpreters read the text in this way); rather, by this oath he is appealing to God for true justice and vindication. He closes with yet another oath formula, "Far be it from me..." In more contemporary terms, he is saying to his friends, "I'll be damned if I knuckle under to your aspersions" (27:5a)!

The entire next section (27:7-23) amounts to Job's curse upon his friends and their constant recriminations. The formula, "Let my enemies be..." should be taken as an imprecatory curse,[136] and since his friends have falsely recriminated Job, he responds by recriminating them. Hence, the reference to "the enemy" in 27:7, while it is formed in general language, more specifically is an insinuation directed toward the trio of friends who have "risen up against me" (27:7). They have become like the godless who have no hope in God during a crisis, since they have ignored him during the other times in their lives (27:8-12).[137] Such a person is doomed to perish through war, hunger, disease and death, and even his wives will be happy to be rid of him (27:13-15). His wealth will dissipate, and others will take over everything he has accumulated in a life-time of hoarding (27:16-19).[138] He is haunted by overwhelming misfortunes, which engulf him like a flood or fly at him like a desert sirocco from the east (27:20-23).

In this extended curse, Job is warning that the very things his friends have said about him might very well recoil on their own heads. They have not hesitated to condemn Job as a secret sinner, but the "seat of the scornful" (cf. Ps. 1:1) is a dangerous place, and the disaster one envisions for others might very well become one's own fate!

---

[136] Not a few interpreters have reassigned this passage to Zophar (so Rowley, Pope and various others). However, if the words are understood as imprecatory (such as are found in the imprecatory Psalms), then they are a rhetorical device, and there is no reason to deny such an expression to Job. The Hebrew jussive is often used as a curse formula (cf. 3:4, 7; Ps. 35:6; 69:22, 25; 109:12-15; Je. 20:14b), and imprecatory rhetoric, as here, is often hyperbolic.

[137] The plural "you" in 27:11 and the "all of you" (כֻּלְּכֶם) in 27:12 confirms that Job has his friends in view.

[138] A number of translators follow the precedent in the LXX by taking the reference to a moth to actually refer to a spider (so RSV, NAB, NASB, NJB, NLT). The LXX reads, σῆτες καὶ...ἀράχην (= a moth and...spider). Spider webs are notoriously fragile, and this fits the metaphor of the transitory accumulation of wealth. Alternatively, moths build cocoons, which are abandoned after the larva stage, so either way, the metaphor works.

Interlude: The Search for Wisdom (28)

The poem in chapter 28 has aroused considerable scholarly debate. In the first place, it can stand alone, and nothing directly links it to the preceding dialogues between Job and his friends. It is not introduced by an identifying clause, such as the other speeches in the book, and indeed, the succeeding chapter 29 begins with the same formula as in chapter 27, "And Job again took up his *mashal*...". This, in turn, seems to set off chapter 28 as an interlude. Theoretically, because no speaker is identified, the poem could be taken as a continuation of Job's speech in chapter 27, and some headings in various versions of the Bible (headings which are not part of the biblical text) take it in just this way (e.g., ESV). Against this is the fact that the mood of the poem is quite different than what the reader so far has seen of Job. Job has been continually agonizing in the midst of his suffering, but this poem seems aloof, peaceful and unruffled. It doesn't seem to fit very well with any of Job's friends, either. Their words have been largely bombastic.

Perhaps the best solution is to read this poem as the voice of the narrator. The exchange between Job and his friends has now reached an impasse. Each has offered his own brand of wisdom, urging the cause-and-effect theology of sin and retribution in the present life. Job, for his part, has bluntly and stubbornly disagreed with them, arguing that very often there are no obvious repercussions to sin in the present life. As such, then, the poem on wisdom serves to demarcate what has gone before (the rounds of exchange between Job and his friends) and what will follow (a series of monologues given respectively by Job, Elihu and God).

Virtually all interpreters agree that this composition on wisdom is one of the most elegant in the Bible. The poem is carefully crafted with parallelism at every level. The structure is clearly marked with linguistic dividers, setting off verses 1-11, 12-27 and 28.[139] Wisdom in the ancient Near East specialized in everything from medicine to craftsmanship to diplomacy, and the Israelite concept of wisdom is especially captured in two words, חָכְמָה (= wisdom, aptitude) and בִּינָה (= understanding, insight), so much so that they are often paired, just as they are in 28:12 (see also Pro. 1:2; 4:5, 7; 8:14; 9:10; 16:16). Wisdom for the Israelites tended toward an educated self-discipline resulting in sound judgments about life and the

---

[139] Biblical Hebrew has two types of clause relationships joined with the *waw* conjunction, conjunctive and disjunctive. The signal for the difference between conjunctive and disjunctive clauses is the type of word to which the *waw* conjunction is attached, so that when the וְ is linked to a non-verb, the succeeding material is disjunctive. This is precisely what happens in 28:12, where in the expression וְהַחָכְמָה (= And wisdom...), the conjunction is attached to a noun. The final word in 12:28 shifts focus from exploring the question, "Where is wisdom to be found?" to the conclusion, "It is to be found in the fear of the Lord."

way it is to be lived. It was the expression of religion outside the cult, and wise men or women, along with priests and prophets, formed a triple resource for guidance. In chapter 28, the poet, as narrator, stands outside the tensions created between Job and his friends. He is, as it were, a neutral observer, calmly but objectively exploring the source for true wisdom.

The poet begins with a series of technological examples of wisdom in the ancient world. Ingenious humans have learned to mine silver, refine gold, and smelt iron and copper (28:1-2). They have found ways to illuminate dark underground shafts in order to extract ore (28:3), even finding precious treasure in obscure regions by such dangerous tactics as hanging from ropes in order to extract minerals from cliffsides or quarries (28:4-5).[140] Precious stones and gold dust, of course, are the end in view of such prospecting (28:6). Subterranean passages unknown to bird or beast (28:7-8) have been explored by humans, who have chiseled rock and dug into the mountain depths, cutting subterranean channels and damming up streams in order to find hidden treasure (28:9-11).

This extended description of scouring the earth for precious metals and stones is hardly arbitrary. Rather, it is a rhetorical way of begging the question. Humans have clearly demonstrated their cleverness in acquiring silver, gold, iron, copper, lapis lazuli, and "every precious thing"—but they have been spectacularly unsuccessful in finding wisdom, which is much more precious than gold dust!

Hence, the abrupt turn to the implied question, now posed directly: "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (28:12, 20). Where, indeed? At this point, Job and his friends have exhausted themselves in debate looking for it, but they seem no closer than when they began. In the meantime, God has remained silent. Unlike precious metals and stones, wisdom cannot be discovered by scouring land and sea (28:13-14). It can't be purchased like some commodity (28:15). Its value is far beyond gold or gemstones or pearls or any of the precious objects that humans consider desirable (28:16-19). So, where is it, and how

---

[140] We know very little of mining operations in the ancient world, and references in the Old Testament are sparse (e.g., Dt. 8:9), since mining in general was unknown in Palestine proper. There is, however, archaeological evidence of copper refining at Ezion-geber from about the time of Solomon, cf. S. Parker and D. Whitcomb, "'Aqaba," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 1.153-154. Generally, precious minerals were imported from such outlying places as Tarshish (Spain?) and Uphaz (Je. 10:9; Eze. 27:12). Admittedly, the Hebrew in these passages is difficult, and the difficulty is reflected in the various English Versions, which often have said more than the Hebrew text actually states. For instance, there is no word for "miner" in 28:3 (as in the NRSV), but the text simply says "he." Similarly, the word "shaft" is not in 28:4 (as in the RV, RSV, NRSV, JPS, NAB, NASB, NIV, ESV, NET, NLT, NIB), but rather, the word "wadi," which many translators have taken to mean shaft because of the context and the previous use of the word "mine" in 28:1 (though the NJB renders it as "ravine"). The reference to "bread" in 28:5 is almost a complete mystery. If it is not a metaphor for describing the way miners earn their bread, the meaning can only be conjectured, since in Hebrew poetic structure the word "bread" should parallel the word "fire," and there is no obvious relationship between them. Scholars have suggested everything from volcanic activity to the use of fire to split rocks. Nonetheless, the general theme of searching in the earth seems sufficiently clear.

can one acquire it (28:20)? Alas, wisdom is hidden from all creatures, whether creatures in the air or on the earth, and it is equally hidden from those in the underworld (28:21-22). Only God knows the path to wisdom, for only he sees everything from horizon to horizon (28:23-24).[141] In his creative work, he embodies wisdom in his ordering of wind, water, rain, and lightning (28:25-26). In the lightning storm, his mystery and power, and in particular, his wisdom, are declared, for it is in God's role as the Creator of all these things that wisdom is to be perceived (28:27). Carol Newsom has cogently remarked, "The wisdom that makes the crafting possible is known only in the exercise of that skill. It is the faculty of the maker, and yet that wisdom is also worked into every aspect of the thing that is made."[142] Indeed, this is the power of God's wisdom even for the modern person, who now knows the intricate workings of the water cycle in ways Job could never have imagined but still must stand in awe of the One who made it so!

If, indeed, God alone knows the path to true wisdom, then the final declaration to all humans is concise but poignant: true wisdom and understanding must derive from reverence for God (28:28; cf. Pro. 1:7; 9:10; Ps. 111:10).[143] Indeed, the poet now subtly commends Job himself, for his basic character quality from the beginning was that of "a man who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1, 8; 2:3). In all the debates between Job and his friends, we have come full circle. Job may not have yet found an answer to his dilemma, but he certainly was following the path of wisdom in yearning for God to speak!

The Monologues (29-41)

Offsetting the cycles of speeches between Job and his friends is now a set of monologues. Unlike the previous cycles, these are not argumentative exchanges. Some interpreters treat them as soliloquies, though of course, Job is not alone. Indeed, Job's words in chapters 29-31, which will be his final appeal, matches his opening lament in chapter 3. Three voices will be heard in these monologues, Job, Elihu and God, which will bring the reader to the denouement of the book.

Job's Final Appeal (29-31)

As in 27:1, this lengthy speech of Job is introduced with the longer preface indicating that he is resuming his *mashal*. Here, he yearns for the happiness he once enjoyed amidst the esteem of his community. Formerly, he was deeply conscious of

---

[141] The word "God," placed as the initial word, is emphatic in this sentence, intended as a direct contrast with the futility of human effort.

[142] Newsom, p. 533.

[143] While the expression "fear of the Lord" can mean outright fear of God, it can also mean reverence for God (Pr. 2:5), which is the meaning intended here.

God's providential care (29:2-3). He was in the prime of his life,[144] relishing a close relationship with God while surrounded by his children (29:4-5). His herds were prosperous,[145] and his olive presses poured forth oil (29:6).[146] Even more important, he was held in high regard by the larger community, taking his honored place in civil affairs at the city gate (29:7).[147] He was shown deference by young and old, not to mention the city leaders (29:8-10).[148] The reason for such esteem was well-attested by everyone who heard and saw Job's continual benevolence to the poor and the orphans (29:11-12). He ministered to those on their deathbeds and succored widows in their distress (29:13). His life was an exemplary pattern of righteousness and social justice, particularly to those who were disadvantaged (29:14-16). He was a champion against those who preyed upon the weak (29:17). Ironically, all these behaviors were the very things that Eliphaz had accused Job of neglecting (cf. 22:5-9), but Job could hardly have reflected upon them here if they were not true and publicly acknowledged.

In view of his paternal care for those most at risk in the community, Job had assumed he would be rewarded with a long and healthy life (29:18-20). He was sought after by others for his counsel, and his wise words were eagerly embraced like spring rains upon a thirsty soil (29:21-23). When others were discouraged, his cheerful visage gave them hope (29:24).[149] He provided direction to the community like a chief or a king, serving both as a leader and a benefactor (29:25).[150] Such was his former life before tragedy struck.

Now, in the aftermath of his downfall, everything was different. The expression **וְעַתָּה** (= but now), which punctuates the next section three times (30:1, 9, 16), underscores Job's changed circumstances and divides the section into strophes. In the first, he laments his current social humiliation, where he is mocked by younger men of questionable character whose family pedigree was even lower than dogs (30:1). With irony, he asks what aid such social derelicts might offer him (30:2)? They were like scavengers, surviving on roots and leaves, men whom others drive out for fear of thievery (30:3-5). They lived in wadis, caves and the brush, the

---

[144] Lit., "in the days of my harvest", i.e., days of warmth and blessing
[145] Lit., "my steps washed in curds"
[146] The "rock" probably refers to the stone weights for pressing olives.
[147] The city gate in times of peace functioned as a convening place for city officials as well as a small claims court (cf. Dt. 21:19; Josh. 20:4; Ru. 4; 2 Sa. 19:8; 1 Kg. 22:10).
[148] The Torah even required such deference, though of course, we do not know Job's age (cf. Lv. 19:32). Still, since his children seem to have been grown, he must have been at least middle-aged (cf. 1:4, 18).
[149] Here, since the Hebrew text is ambiguous, it is difficult to decide whether Job means that he would not let the discouragement of others affect him (so ERV, JPS, NET), or, as I have taken it here, he was a positive influence upon others to lift them from despair (so RSV, NIV, ESV, NLT).
[150] The closing paragraph of the book in the LXX actually says Job was a king.

nameless rabble[151] who must be content to survive on society's edge (30:6-8). Yet even among this riffraff, Job was taunted and scorned (30:9-10). These were the very people on the social margins that Job had once assisted, even weeping for them (cf. 29:14-16; 30:25), but now, they held him in contempt. God had loosened his tent cord, and everything was now in a state of collapse (30:11a).[152] His mockers seemed to have no restraint, kicking him away and assaulting him like a city under siege (30:11b-14). In all this relentless outpouring of disdain, Job was overwhelmed: his former place of honor had been blown away, and his former well-being had evaporated like a cloud (30:15). For the English reader who has been taught not to mix metaphors, this flurry of diverse images can be hard to follow, but it must be kept in mind that in his misery, Job was not attempting smooth transitions. Rather, he was describing the tumultuous circumstances he now experienced in contrast to his former glory.

Beyond the humiliation heaped upon him by others, Job still contended with the deterioration of disease in his own body. His bones ached, and he could hardly get any sleep (30:16-17). Scholars have struggled to understand the reference to his disfigured clothing, but in the larger context, it must refer in some sense to his physical misery (30:18).[153] Again, as in 30:11, many versions insert the word "God" in 30:18-19 because of the singular form of the verb. Yet in all these horrendous blows, both socially and bodily, God had remained silent (30:20). This, for Job, was the most crushing experience of all and seemed inexplicably cruel and unfathomable (30:21). He had been blown about as though by a raging storm, and death seemed near (30:22-23).

From the midst of this unanticipated and unexplained suffering, Job voiced his anguished cry for help (30:24).[154] Like the psalmist who felt abandoned by God, and certainly like the cry of dereliction by Christ, he felt the awful reality of being completely God-forsaken (cf. Ps. 22:1; Mt. 27:46//Mk. 15:34). How could this have

---

[151] The word פִּרְחַח, used later in 30:12, is a *hapax legomenon*, but "rabble" is the conjecture of several versions (ERV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NAB, NET), though "brats" is an interesting option (NJB).

[152] While several translations insert the word "God" in 30:11 (so RSV, NRSV, NIV, ESV, NJB, NET, NIB, NLT), a direct reference to the deity is not in the Masoretic Text. However, since the *Pie*l verb "he has loosened" is singular in form, and the surrounding verbs are plurals, this insertion is a reasonably conjecture. The meaning of the "cord" or "rope" is somewhat ambiguous. Many take it to refer to a bowstring (so NRSV, NASB, NIV, NAB NLT, NJB, NIB), but given Job's state of collapse, I think that a tent cord is the more likely metaphor.

[153] Quite a range of possibilities have been explored, including that his clothing was stained with phlegm, that God was strangling him like a tight-fitting garment (so NIV, NET, NIB, NLT), that his clothes hung loose upon him due to emaciation, and so on. The difficulty of the Hebrew makes any conjecture tenuous.

[154] The Hebrew in 30:24 is quite difficult. Literally it reads, "Surely, he does not send forth his hand against a heap of ruins, if in his disaster to them __?__" [the meaning of שׁוּעַ, the final word, is unknown, though it appears again in 36:19]. Holladay suggests "cry for help," and most translators follow this meaning based on context, though admittedly it is a guess. The LXX offers little help. The English Versions display considerable diversity in attempting to make sense of the verse, but most agree that in some sense Job is describing an appeal for help.

happened to one who once was the benefactor of the needy (30:25)? He had expected good in return for his charity but experienced only misery and visceral agony (30:26-27). His skin black and peeling and his body burning with fever, his pleas for help ignored, he had become ostracized like a desert creature (30:28-30).[155] Where once there had been music, now there were only wrenching grief and tears (30:31).

To understand the climax of Job's final appeal in chapter 31, the reader must appreciate the language of cursing. Curses are a speech-act inviting divine judgment. While often they contain a verb or noun directly specifying that a curse is intended, often enough they do not. However, even without the immediate vocabulary of a curse, certain types of expressions are understood by scholars to be curses nonetheless. This is the case here. Job's final expression comes in the form of a negative curse, which is to say, he disowns the accusations against him and invites God's judgment if he is guilty. Such an oath of exoneration had precedent in the ancient world, both in biblical literature and beyond.[156] At the end, Job will conclude by saying, "The words of Job are ended" (31:40), an affirmation and final signature that throws the burden of proof upon the court, and this case, upon God (cf. 31:35a). Job, the accused, stands as it were in court, but his opponent has refused to speak. In this case, God is as the accuser and Job is as the accused, but God has remained silent. Hence, Job offers an elaborate series of oaths designed to affirm his innocence. The lengthy series of if-clauses invite upon Job's own head divine repercussions if he has committed any of the crimes he lists (31:5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 38, 39). The if-clauses come in two forms, a longer one in which he says, "If I have done such and such, may such and such happen to me," and a shorter one, "If I have done such and such..." with the consequences unstated. If no evidence to the contrary was forthcoming, then these oaths stood as assertions of innocence and exoneration.

In all, Job will utter oaths in several categories: innocence of sexual dalliance (31:1-4, 9-12), innocence of dishonesty (31:5-8), innocence in social obligations (31:13-23, 31-32), innocence in the use of wealth (31:24-25), innocence of idolatry (31:26-28), innocence of vindictiveness (31:29-30), innocence of harboring hidden sins (31:33-34), and innocence of exploiting others (31:38-40a).[157] Verses 35-37 are, in effect, a parenthesis in which Job calls upon God to respond (the NIV and NIB actually put the passage in parentheses, which is appropriate).

---

[155] Jackals and ostriches are animals living on the fringes of human habitation (cf. Ps. 44:19; Je. 9:10-11; Is. 13:21; 34:13; 43:20).

[156] This is the character of guilt-oaths (cf. Ex. 22:9-13; 1 Kg. 8:31-32), the filthy water curse (Nu. 5:16-28), and the force of Samuel's questions to Israel (1 Sa. 12:3). There is a striking parallel in the Egyptian Book of the Dead as well, where a deceased man stands before Osiris and offers a long list of sins he has not committed, which in turn implies that he is innocent, cf. *ANET*, p 34.

[157] Some scholars have discerned a complicated structure to the oaths, including two series of seven, 31:5-22 and 31:24-34, each set off by intervening material, cf. Smick, 4.991-992.

The first category concerns sexual sin against unmarried women (31:1-4). This initial statement does not begin with an if-clause, though such a word might well be implied (or perhaps the word "since" is implied), given the word מָה (= how) in the succeeding clause.[158] In view of our contemporary world of voyeurism and pornography, Job's "covenant" is all the more striking, and while he could not have known it, many centuries later Christ also would teach that sexual sin begins with the eyes (Mt. 5:28). Job is not merely denying the act of seduction and rape, but more to the point, even the thought of such a thing. The word בְּתוּלָה (= virgin) distinguishes this passage from the later one about a neighbor's wife. Here, Job intends to describe his purity with regard to young unmarried women. His underlying motive for purity concerned how God would regard him, and ultimately, how God would judge him (31:2-3). As a man of prosperity with many servants (cf. 1:3), he would have been in a prime position to take advantage of the young women in his household. However, like Joseph, Job understood that sexual sin was not only a sin against another person, but also a sin against God, and God sees all (31:4; cf. Ge. 39:9)!

In the next category Job affirms his basic honesty, and this oath commences the series of if-clauses. Job denies that he had lived a life of falsehood and deceit (31:5), and he invites the scrutiny of God as the ultimate confirmation of his integrity (31:6). The phrases אַחַר עֵינַי הָלַךְ לִבִּי (= "my heart has walked after my eyes") and בְּכַפַּי דָּבַק מְאוּם (= "a blemish has clung to my palms") are idioms, the first describing the act of looking at the possessions of others, which leads to covetousness, and the second, describing the stain of theft (more or less what we mean in modern parlance when we describe someone with "sticky fingers"). If Job has done any of these things, he invites a curse upon himself.

The third category returns to sexual sin, but this time concerning married women (31:9-12). Job takes oath that he has never attempted to entrap another man's wife. Indeed, adultery was an offense numbered in the decalogue and a capital crime under the Torah, which may be why Job mentions "the judges" (cf. Ex. 20:17; Dt. 22:22). Adultery was like the consuming fire of the underworld (Pro. 6:27-29)!

The next oath concerns exploitation and oppression (31:13-15). Job has never denied justice to any of his servants. In social relationships of inequality, the person in power can easily take advantage of those under him, but since Job was the weaker party in relation to God, and since he desired justice from God, who is the most powerful of all, he conscientiously offered justice to those under him as well. The person in power must always remember that God created both him and the person

---

[158] However, some translators take the word מָה to be a negative marker, which is also possible, and if so, then the statement would be, "...not to gaze upon a virgin" (so NEB, NIV, NAB, NIB, NLT, NJB).

with less power. Job was far ahead of his time in recognizing that all humans, even slaves, have rights guaranteed by God himself.

Regarding the helpless and poor—and in the ancient world, there were many such people—Job had shown himself to be generous and compassionate. He gave food,[159] clothing, and sustenance to widows, orphans, and the poor (31:16-23). Eliphaz had accused Job of neglecting just such benevolence (cf. 22:5-9), and this charge Job flatly denies (cf. 29:12-17). His life-long practice had been to respond to the needs of others.[160] If his arm ever had been raised against the powerless, he invited God to dislocate that same arm from its socket.[161]

Related to his generosity to the poor was Job's refusal to hoard wealth (31:24-25). Earlier, Eliphaz had implied that Job was avaricious and should lay his gold aside (cf. 22:24), but Job contends that he has not put his trust in wealth.

Further, Job has not fallen into the trap of idolatry (31:26-28). He has never worshipped the sun or the moon, the solar deities that perennially were objects of veneration in most of the surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures. The act of kissing the hand was probably a pagan gesture of homage (cf. 1 Kg. 19:18; Ho. 13:2b).[162] To do so would be to call down judgment upon himself from "the judges" for false worship, and idolatry under the Torah was a capital offense (cf. Dt. 17:2-7). It is not without significance that while Job seems to have lived in Edom (see the comments in the Introduction concerning *Cultural Context and Genre*), several of his comments seem to demonstrate a familiarity with the requirements of the Torah.

Vindictiveness was also a sin that Job avoided (31:29-30). Hardly anyone is without enemies, but the downfall of an enemy should not be cause for private triumph. Of course, such a sin could only be adjudicated by God, since it is harbored in the thoughts and intents of the heart. Job's ethics here seem to rise above and beyond the sentiments expressed from time to time in the imprecatory psalms.

Additionally, everyone in his whole household could testify to Job's habitual hospitality (31:31-32). Entertaining travelers was important in the ancient world, since such strangers were vulnerable to abuse (cf. Jg. 19). Indeed, the Torah repeatedly urged such hospitality (cf. Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lv. 19:10; 23:22; 25:6; Dt. 10:18-19; 14:28-29; 16:11, 14; 23:7; 24:17, 19-21; 26:12-13).

Hypocrisy, like vindictiveness, was a sin to be adjudicated by God (31:33-34).

---

[159] The phrase "and have eaten my morsel alone" refers to a refusal to share his food with others.

[160] The idiom אִם־לֹא בֵרְכוּנִי חֲלָצָו (= "if his loins have not blessed me") probably personifies the body of the poor man that "blesses" the one who gives him a fleece for warmth. While the idiom itself seems odd to English ears, the succeeding line, which is a synonymous parallelism, makes clear the intended meaning.

[161] The phrase כִּי־אֶרְאֶה בַשַּׁעַר עֶזְרָתִי (= "because I saw my helper in the gate") probably refers to some sort of legal transaction conducted in the city gate (see Footnote #147). This seems to refer to Job taking advantage of his superior station to swing the decision in his favor by influencing one or more of the city elders.

[162] Literally, the idiom is וַתִּשַּׁק יָדִי לְפִי (= "and my hand has kissed my mouth"), which is tantamount to blowing kisses to the sun or moon (so NAB, NASB, NET, NJB, NLT), cf. Pope, p.235.

It followed hard on Adam's disobedience, when the primordial human blamed his wife for his transgression of God's command (Ge. 3:12).[163] Here, Job denies that he ever harbored hidden sins in order to avoid shame before others, refusing to go out in public for fear that he would be exposed.[164] Job, as mentioned earlier, does not claim sinless perfection. Rather, he claims to have taken responsibility for his failures.

Now comes an interlude, a penultimate statement before his concluding oath (31:35-37). Earlier, Job had wished that his painful suffering could be recorded on a scroll or inscribed on a lead sheet (cf. 19:23-24). Here, he metaphorically describes a legal document, the record of his foregoing oaths of innocence. He would sign it himself with his own "mark" and call for God to respond.[165] He longs for Almighty God to put any indictment against him in writing as well.[166] If he had such a document, he would display it prominently.[167] He was prepared for divine scrutiny, and he longed to be able to defend himself in court, holding his head high (like a prince) because he was confident of his innocence.

Now follows Job's final oath, this one concerning the ethics of land-ownership (31:38-40a). The metaphor of the land crying out against Job if he had succumbed to avarice seems clear enough (cf., Ho. 4:3), but translators have struggled with the phrase נֶפֶשׁ בְּעָלֶיהָ הִפָּחְתִּי (= "I have caused to __?__ the life/soul of her owners"). Presumably, the *ba'als* (= "lords" or "owners") have reference to former owners who were exploited. The Hiphil verb נָפַח, on the other hand, has proved elusive. As a Hiphil verb, it should have a causative nuance, and it concerns the act of breathing or blowing. It has been taken to mean "caused to die" (so KJV, ERV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NET, NJB, NLT) or "disappointed" or "grieved" or "broken in spirit" (so NAB, JPS, NIV, NIB). Either way, Job denies having exploited the land to his own benefit, and if he has done so, he invites upon himself the ancient

---

[163] The expression כְּאָדָם (= "like Adam") as been taken by many translators as a general reference to human behavior, since the word *'adam* can simply mean human (so RSV, NRSV, NAB, NIV, ESV, JPS, NJB, NET, NIB, NLT). Here, however, I think there may be a deliberate reference to Adam's sin in Eden (so KJV, ERV, NASB).

[164] The word חֹב is another *hapax legomenon*, which most translators render as "bosom." Holladay, however, suggests the pocket of one's garment.

[165] The "mark" or "signature" appears here as a Hebrew ת (formed like an *X* in ancient script), the final letter in the Hebrew alphabet. It is the same mark described by Ezekiel as placed on the foreheads of those who grieved over Jerusalem's sins (cf. Eze. 9:4).

[166] That this is a legal metaphor is clear from the language סֵפֶר כָּתַב אִישׁ רִיבִי (= "a scroll [which] my man of lawsuit has written"). Most translators render the word "man" (אִישׁ) as "adversary" or "accuser," i.e., God. Some scholars have understood this to be, not an indictment, but a document of acquittal, cf. N. Habel, *The Book of Job [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), p.439.

[167] The idea of wearing such a document on one's shoulder or as a crown may seem odd to the modern reader, but it should be remembered that cylinder seals were worn around the neck (cf. Ge. 38:18, 25), David's vizier carried the royal key on his shoulder (Is. 22:22), and the Israelites wore phylacteries prominently displayed on their foreheads or forearms (Ex. 13:16; Dt. 6:8; 11:18).

curses of Adam and Cain (cf. Ge. 3:17-18; 4:11).

This final, lengthy speech of Job concludes with the forlorn expression, "The words of Job are ended" (31:40b). Job has now said all he can say, and he resigns himself to await an answer from God.

The Speeches of Elihu (32-37)

Job has consigned his case to God, praying and hoping that God will speak. Indeed, God will speak, but before he does, the voice of a fourth friend is to be heard, the voice of the young man Elihu ben Barachel. The cycles of arguments with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are over. The original three friends have concluded that Job is hopelessly self-righteous (32:1), and they have fallen silent. Job has fallen silent, too. But whence comes this younger man, Elihu, who seems to intrude into the drama, not only unexpectedly, but awkwardly? He will give a lengthy dissertation in which he rebukes Job and his three friends, asserts divine justice, and finishes up with a proclamation of God's majestic power. However, though Elihu will address Job directly, there will be no exchange between him and Job as was the case with the other friends. What Job thought of Elihu's ruminations, we are not told. After he speaks, Elihu will disappear altogether. At the end of the book, God will address the three original friends (42:7-9), but Elihu is left unmentioned. It is almost as though he had not even been there. Indeed, with respect to the drama between Job, his friends and God, the reader could easily jump from the end of chapter 31 to the beginning of chapter 38 and not feel that anything of significance had been missed.

Not a few scholars have concluded that Elihu belongs to a subsequent stage of the book, a voice not originally part of the drama but added later, either by the author himself, or more likely, by another hand, who felt the inadequacy of what had been compiled to this point. There are some significant reasons underlying such a suggestion. For one thing, as is frequently pointed out, not only does the story seem quite complete without Elihu, what he has to say, while spoken at great length, seems theologically and poetically feeble compared to what has gone before. Elihu is notoriously wordy, but his contribution is less substantial than one might have expected. At various points he quotes or alludes to the speeches that have preceded him, which presumes he was present and listening (though unmentioned), and some have suggested he sounds more like a reader than a participant. Further, the language of Elihu (in Hebrew) seems rather different than the language of the others. Scholars have compiled various comparative word-lists and idioms to show this difference. According to some linguistic experts, Elihu's speech also contains a sprinkling of Aramaisms, far more than in the earlier parts of the book. Another difference is that Elihu addresses Job by name directly, something the other friends never did (cf. 33:1, 31; 37:14). At times, Elihu refers to Job in the third person, talking past him to the

others almost as though he were not present (32:12; 34:5, 7, 35-36; 35:16). Finally, Elihu's name is omitted at the end of the book, when God rebukes the original three friends (cf. 42:7-9). Is this the ultimate dismissal—not to name him at all—or does this signify that God tacitly approved of Elihu's theologizing? Or, as many scholars conclude, is this omission of Elihu's name conspicuous because he was not part of the original composition?

A good deal of ink has been expended in this discussion, and at the end of the day, we can only say that the canonical form of the book has come down to us with Elihu firmly fixed within it. Both the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls contain the Elihu speeches (though the LXX version is somewhat shorter), so the textual tradition, Elihu included, goes back at least a couple of centuries before the time of Christ. The modern reader cannot pierce this historical veil further. At the very least, one must concede that even if Elihu's monologue was added later, either by the author himself or even by someone else, it has been carefully integrated into the larger story and performs an important function as a foil for what has gone before and an anticipation of what is yet to come. Elihu will offer a fourth perspective on what has been said, better, perhaps, than the other three friends, but limited nonetheless. At the end, God will provide the divine perspective. Hence, in spite of the objections (which are not unsubstantial), Elihu must be left intact.

Elihu's First Monologue (32-33)

Elihu's monologue is divided into four speeches, each demarcated by some variation of the opening phrase, "And Elihu answered and said..." (32:6: 34:1; 35:1; 36:1). Shifting briefly from poetry to prose, Elihu's first speech is introduced with a description of his anger,[168] both at Job, who in his view made himself out to be more righteous than God,[169] and at the three friends, who condemned Job but were unable to prove their allegations against him (32:2-3).[170] As such, Elihu, from the beginning, joins the three others in assessing Job as self-righteous. Elihu's pedigree is briefly offered, and as a Buzite, he would have been a relative of Job (cf. Ge. 22:21), another eastern desert-dweller (Je. 25:23-24). As a younger man, he had waited for his elders to finish their dialogue, as custom required, and when the three friends had finally exhausted themselves, he took advantage of the ensuing silence to speak his own

---

[168] The standard idiom for anger is here used twice: חָרָה אַפּוֹ (= "his nose became hot"), and it will appear again in 32:3 and 32:5.

[169] This sentence employs the standard comparative form.

[170] It is of interest that the *sopherim*, the scribes who at a relatively late date began to count the letters of the Torah to preserve its integrity, also "corrected" the text in a few places, maintaining records of both the uncorrected text (original text) and the corrected text that ends up as the Masoretic Text from the Leningrad Codex. Job 32:3 contains one of those corrections in which the original text reads וַיַּרְשִׁיעוּ הָאֱלֹהִים (= "they condemned God") rather than the current MT which reads וַיַּרְשִׁיעוּ אֶת־אִיּוֹב (= "they condemned Job"). A few English Versions follow the uncorrected reading (so NJB, NLT).

mind (32:4-5).

Elihu begins, rather elaborately, with his reluctance to speak at all, given his age and their seniority (32:6-7).[171] However, at the same time he urges that age alone is not necessarily the fount of understanding; rather, divine inspiration is wisdom's true source (32:8-9). Hence, he asks for their attention so he can offer his own brand of knowledge (32:10). He had waited to speak, of course, listening to those older than himself, but in the end the three friends were unable to refute Job (32:11-12). Indeed, Elihu's language about listening for their "wise words" is tinged with sarcasm, and he warns them about assuming that nothing further needs to be said or that they should simply leave Job for God to sort out (32:13). Job has not yet interacted with Elihu as with the others, and Elihu is confident in his own ability to offer something more substantial (32:14). Rather pompously, Elihu asks whether or not he should remain silent in the face of their inadequate arguments (32:15-16). He feels compelled to fill the vacuum with knowledge of a better quality (32:17). Indeed, he says he is ready to burst at the seams with a truly impartial contribution (32:18-21), and he adds, with some self-deprecation, that he does not even know how to recognize titles,[172] since God would dispense with him if he did (32:22).

All this elaborate rhetoric seems overstated to modern ears, though it may have been better appreciated by an ancient audience more attuned to orality. In any case, the substance of Elihu's lengthy preface in the entirety of chapter 32 can be summed up as simply, "I am about to say something." He addresses himself directly to Job (33:1-2), claiming integrity of heart and inspiration from God (33:3-4). He assures Job that he, Elihu, is human, just as Job is, and Job has nothing to fear from him (33:5-7). Nonetheless, his speech comes across as patronizing, and his challenge to Job, "Answer me, if you can" (33:5a) is belittling. To parody the words of the great Bard, "Elihu doth protest too much, methinks."

Elihu has been listening to Job's claim of innocence (33:8-9; cf. 9:21; 10:7; 11:4; 16:17; 23:7, 10-12; 27:4-6; 31:1-40) and the charge that God has treated him as an enemy or a prisoner (33:10-11; cf. 10:14-17; 13:24-27; 19:6-12). (The careful reader will note that Elihu omits Job's admission that he is not sinless, cf. 7:21; 13:26; 31:33-34. Job has only claimed that the disaster he is experiencing is undeserved.)

Now, Elihu begins to rebut Job's arguments, first asserting that God is greater than humans (33:12). Such a statement, which will be the basis for his line of reasoning, shows a talent for the obvious but seems intended to suggest that Job's concept of God is inadequate. Elihu takes umbrage at Job's complaint that God

---

[171] While several versions use the word "opinion," this rendering may be too weak. The Hebrew דֵּעַ (= knowledge) smacks more of confidence than speculation. The same will be true in 32:10 and 32:17.

[172] The word כָּנָה (= "title") means that Elihu will not treat anyone—even his aged counterparts—with special respect.

remains silent (33:13; cf. 9:3). Against this, he asserts that God does indeed speak, but in different ways and not always directly. Sometimes he reveals himself in dreams or visions (33:14-18) and sometimes amidst sickness (33:19-22). The problem is not that God is silent but that humans are not listening (33:14b). If they will only be sensitive to it, God "opens their ears" in night visions, urging them to turn from their sins so that they will not perish.[173] Of course, Job has admitted to having nightmares (cf. 7:14), and Elihu uses this confession to suggest God is trying to break through to him. Sickness, also, can be a redemptive chastening from God. Elihu's description about pain, loss of appetite, and emaciation seem especially applicable to Job, and by implication, he suggests that if Job will only listen, he will hear God speaking. Alas, while Elihu at least foregoes the punitive aspect of suffering, as expounded by the other three, and advocates a redemptive aspect in Job's tragedy, his insights fall short of what Job desperately wants. Job is not interested in some general application, but rather, something specific about his own circumstance. If he has sinned, how or in what way?

Continuing, Elihu enlarges upon how God might use a mediator to communicate, in this case, an angel, and how Job might properly respond (33:23-28). Such an angel, however rare,[174] might bear a message of mercy in the midst of a man's trouble, promising restoration and healing. The sufferer could then turn to God in prayer and be delivered.[175] After restoration, he would rejoice over this redemption from death and the forgiveness of sins.[176] Elihu's words concerning an angel-mediator likely goes back to Eliphaz' denial that such a mediator existed (cf. 5:1). Job, for his part, has longed for just such a mediator (cf. 9:32-33) and even affirmed that such an advocate might be found in the heavens (cf. 16:19).

In all these ways, Elihu urges, God repeatedly reveals himself (33:29), and it is all to the purpose of redeeming a man from death (33:30). Earlier, Job had wished he had never been born (3:1, 11; 10:18-19) and longed for death (6:8-9; 7:16, 21; 10:1, 20-22; 14:13; 17:13-16). Elihu says that God speaks in these mysterious ways precisely to preserve man from death. Job must observe and learn, and if he has nothing to say in response, he should continue to listen to Elihu's wisdom, since

---

[173] Pope makes a case, based on Akkadian cognates, for rendering the final phrase in 33:18 as "river of death" (so NAB, NASB, NET, NJB, NLT, NRSV) rather than "perishing by the sword" (so KJV, ERV, RSV, JPS, NIV, ESV, NIB), p. 250.

[174] Lit., "one from a thousand" (33:23a)

[175] The expression לְהַגִּיד לְאָדָם יָשְׁרוֹ (= "to declare to man his uprightness") has been taken by translators in two ways, either to vindicate him (so KJV, NRSV, JPS, NET, NLT) or to tell him the right thing to do (so ERV, RSV, NAB, NASB, NIV, ESV, NIB, NJB). The "ransom," which usually refers to the compensation of an injured party (cf. Ex. 21:30; Nu. 35:31-32; Is. 43:3), may refer either to the repentance of the sinner or that the angel-mediator stands surety for the sufferer, cf. Newsom, IV.570.

[176] Lit. "and he is pleased with him, and he sees his face with a shout [of joy]" (33:26b); to "see God's face" is to be forgiven and accepted.

Elihu’s only purpose was to see Job vindicated (33:31-33).

Elihu’s Second Monologue (34)

Turning to other listeners, those he describes as “wise men”, Elihu now solicits their help in dismantling Job’s defenses (34:1-4). It is unclear whether or not these “wise men” are simply Job’s three friends. Earlier he didn’t seem to regard the original three as all that wise (cf. 32:3, 11-12), so many if not most interpreters understand the reference to be to a wider circle of listeners. Job had offered the analogy of tasting food and testing ideas (cf. 12:11-12), which was his way of saying that what his friends were dishing out was unpalatable. Here, Elihu uses the same metaphor but promises that his brand of “food” will be better.

In view of Job’s claim that he was “in the right” and that God had removed his “right” (cf. 12:4; 13:18; 27:2, 6), and further, that his friends had judged him to be an outright liar[177] in spite of the fact that he was innocent (cf. 13:5-6),[178] Elihu asserts that Job has become implacable. He cites the earlier accusations that Job was a scoffer traveling in bad company (34:7-8; cf. 11:3; 15:16, 25-26). He censures Job for saying that it was futile to try to please God (34:9), probably based on Job’s assertion that divine judgment was not consistently forthcoming in the present life (cf. 9:22; 21:7-26). Of course, Job had never explicitly said that it was useless to try to please God, so Elihu is extrapolating this accusation by extension.

Once more calling on the approbation of the “wise men,”[179] Elihu asserts that God does not make errors of judgment (34:10).[180] He metes out justice commensurate with human behavior (34:11-12). Earlier, Job had observed that God destroys both the blameless and the wicked (cf. 9:22) and that bandits and the impious seemed secure (12:6). Elihu took this to mean that Job had accused God of perverting justice. By a rhetorical question, Elihu contends that all living things depend upon God to sustain them, and it is his sovereign right to withdraw life

---

[177] The Piel verb in the line עַל־מִשְׁפָּטִי אֲכַזֵּב (= “against my judgment, I am a liar”) has created special challenges for translators, particularly since it is unclear who has called Job a liar. His friends have certainly done so, but the preceding line mentions God. Nowhere has Job said that God accused him of lying, and indeed, God will later say that what Job said about him was right (cf. 42:7b). Nonetheless, the LXX implies that it is God who has accounted Job to be a liar, since it uses the 3rd person singular form ἐψεύσατο δὲ τῷ κρίματί μου (= “but he lies about my case”). Some English Versions follow the LXX (so NEB, NJB, AB), some relegate the charge to Job’s friends (so NLT), and some leave the translation neutral (so RV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, JPS, NIV, NIB). Some change the statement into a question, i.e., “Should I lie about my case?” (so KJV, NASB, NET), while others suggest that it is the judgment against Job that is the lie (so NAB). Here, I have followed the MT and, in light of 13:4, the understanding that it is Job’s three friends who have made the accusation.

[178] Most translators have emended the word חִצִּי (= “arrow”), which may be a reference back to 16:12-13, by adding a letter so that it reads מחצי (= “wound”), as in Is. 30:26. The reading “my arrow is incurable” would be nonsensical. The NAB conflates the two by rendering the word as “arrow-wound”.

[179] Lit., “men of heart”, which most translators render as “men of understanding”

[180] To emphasize his point, Elihu uses the oath formula, “Far be it from God to...”

whenever he chooses (34:13-15). Upon this basic affirmation of divine sovereignty and righteousness, Elihu counsels Job[181] that he can never justifiably pass judgment on Almighty God (34:16-20). It is inconceivable that God would govern the universe unjustly or stand under the condemnation of a creature like Job! As the sovereign Creator, he equally judges kings and nobles,[182] both the rich and the poor, withdrawing from them life as he sees fit, sometimes suddenly and sometimes mysteriously. Job had wondered why God did not have set times of judgment (cf. 24:1), and he had described criminals who work under the cover of darkness, thinking their crimes would go undetected (cf. 24:13-17). Elihu insists that God sees all (34:21-22), and he is under no obligation to hear individual court cases such as Job has desired (cf. 13:3, 18; 23:3-7; 31:35-37), nor does he need to listen to evidence, since he is omniscient (34:23-24). His judgments are dispensed according to his universal knowledge, punishing openly those who transgress (34:25-28). However, even if he remains silent, a silence that Job has found deeply troubling (cf. 13:24; 23:3, 8-9; 30:20), the sovereign God is beyond human censure (34:29-30).

Scholars all agree that the Hebrew in the final paragraph of chapter 34 is particularly difficult, especially 34:31-33.[183] Elihu's point in this rhetoric seems to be that no one who has ever experienced discipline from God could then expect to be repaid in human terms, especially if the man ends up rejecting God's instruction. Job must choose between the way he thinks the world should be directed and the way God actually directs it—and the implications should be obvious that no human

---

[181] Here, the singular verbs indicate that Elihu is now addressing Job directly.

[182] The word בְּלִיָּעַל (= "Belial") in 34:18, usually translated as "worthless one," is of uncertain origin, but in general refers to wickedness. Several centuries later in Jewish apocalyptic this word will become a title for the devil.

[183] The introductory clause, "For has anyone said to God..." is followed by the difficult נָשָׂאתִי לֹא אֶחְבֹּל (= "I have carried; I will not act corruptly"). The verb חבל is problematic in that there are three homonyms with this spelling, the verbs "to bind", "to act corruptly" and "to be pregnant." The last of these can be dismissed at once, but the other two are both possibilities, though the idea of offense seems most likely. The meaning of these obscure words has been variously handled by translators. The general consensus about the first clause is either that he has endured punishment (here, the word "punishment" must be supplied, so KJV, ERV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, JPS, NAB, NET) or he has carried guilt (here, the word "guilt" must be supplied, so NIV, NIB, NLT). The second clause is usually taken to mean that he will not offend further (here, the words "any more" or something comparable are often added). The opening clause in verse 32 is equally difficult: בִּלְעֲדֵי אֶחֱזֶה אַתָּה הֹרֵנִי (= "Teach me except for I see"). This usually is taken to mean something on the order of: "Teach me what I do not see" (here, some substantive, usually the word "what," must be added to make sense of the line), which in turn is explained by the second clause, "If injustice, I will not do [it] again." Verse 34:33 is the most difficult of all. The opening words הַמֵעִמְּךָ יְשַׁלְמֶנָּה (= "Will he repay from with you?") is usually taken to mean, "Will he repay you on your terms?" or something comparable. The second phrase, כִּי־מָאַסְתָּ (= "because you have rejected") is usually rounded off by supplying either "him" (i.e., God) or "it" (i.e., instruction), though the NIV offers the dynamic equivalency, "You refuse to repent." The third phrase כִּי־אַתָּה תִבְחַר וְלֹא־אָנִי (= "because you will choose, not I") is usually understood to mean that Job must answer the question, though exactly what are Job's choices is unclear. The final phrase וּמַה־יָדַעְתָּ דַבֵּר (= "And speak what you know") invites Job to respond.

could be so arrogant as to think he could do a better job than God! Once more appealing to the "wise men",[184] Elihu says they all should concur that Job's position was impossible—ignorant and lacking insight (34:34-35). He even says he wishes Job's trial would continue,[185] since Job's arguments sound like something derived from the counsel of the wicked (34:36). Elihu concludes with a rather blunt accusation, similar to the ones leveled by the first three friends, that Job is a rebellious sinner, slapping away[186] at his friends while offering only empty, wordy excuses. Hence, Job deserved to be tested to the limit!

Elihu's Third Monologue (35)

Elihu's next monologue addresses two issues that greatly disturbed him, both cited in the opening and prefaced by the question of whether Job was just in his observations (35:1-3). The first issue is the same one he raised with the "wise men" in the previous speech, the claim of Job to be "in the right" (cf. 34:5; 13:18). Here, however, he takes it up with Job directly and includes the others peripherally (35:4). In the second, he addresses the question he put in Job's mouth earlier, "What is the advantage of being good?" (cf. 34:9). Job has not put things in quite such stark terms, but Elihu extrapolates what he believes to be Job's position.

His answer is largely drawn from previous speeches, some from Job's own mouth, and it covers little new ground. He asserts that God is higher than the heavens (35:5; cf. 9:8-10; 11:7-8; 22:12), that God, the impartial Judge, is unmoved by human sin (35:6; cf. 7:20), and that God is equally unmoved by a righteous life (35:7; cf. 22:3). Elihu's version of God seems to be a divine impassivity. He cannot conceive of God being pleased with creatures who are faithful or grieved when they go astray. Hence, he concludes that Job's "wickedness," which he already has assumed, could only have an effect on other humans like himself, certainly not on God (35:8).[187] To be impartial, at least for Elihu, also means that God is aloof, and nothing Job could do, good or ill, would affect God.

Continuing, Elihu argues that God does not hear the pleas of people in distress, because they are filled with pride. Since such cries are self-centered, God will not listen (35:9-13). Earlier, Job had observed that people dying in the cities cry out for divine help, but God allows their suffering to continue (cf. 24:12). Elihu counters by saying that even though humans are of a higher species than beasts, and even though

---

[184] As in 34:10, the Hebrew idiom is "men of heart".

[185] The first word in 34:36 (אָבִי) is problematic in that normally it would mean "my father." The Vulgate actually translates it this way (*pater me*), but the resulting line, "My father Job is tried to the end..." makes no contextual sense. Most translators opt for the KJV rendering indicating a desire.

[186] The verb סָפַק means to clap or to slap, and the idiom in the longer phrase בֵּינֵינוּ יִסְפּוֹק (= "he slaps between us" or "he claps between us") can be taken in more than one way. There is no object of the verb in the Hebrew text, so translators sometimes add "his hands", though the NAB renders it "brushing off our arguments."

[187] The idiom "son of Adam" or "son of man" in 35:8, as in the Book of Ezekiel and elsewhere, refers to humanness.

God gives them "songs in the night," still he does not answer them because of their sins. Their cries for help are empty, since they only cry out for relief, not so that they may seek after God himself.

This, then, sets up Elihu's charge against Job. Working from the general to the specific, he argues that Job's complaint that he cannot see God is nothing more than insolence (35:14; cf. 23:8-9). Job's repeated attempts to present his case before God in court are impertinent, and as he has said previously, God is omniscient, and he does not need to hear arguments about evidence (cf. 34:23-24). All this waiting around for God to show himself is entirely misdirected. To the contrary, God is even restraining his anger in Job's case (35:15),[188] so as before, Job's words are just empty talk (35:16; cf. 34:35).

Elihu's Fourth Monologue (36-37)

The final speech of Elihu falls into two sections, the first dealing with the redemptive character of suffering (36:1-21) and the second extolling God as the incomparable teacher (36:22—37:24). Unlike the previous speeches, in which he drew directly upon various statements made earlier by Job, this final speech no longer interacts with Job's words through quotations, though, of course, he still has in view Job's general position. At the same time, Elihu here seems more nuanced and less harsh than in his second and third speeches, where he had dismissed Job as a rebel spouting empty talk. As in the opening section, Elihu begins with a rather wordy and elaborate preface, pleading patience and indicating that now he intends to defend God's righteousness (36:1-3). However, he cannot avoid a touch of hubris by also adding that his offering of wisdom is wide-ranging, implying that such wisdom is probably inaccessible to ordinary people (36:4).[189]

The gist of his argument will be that God uses suffering as a means of testing and purification. The omnipotent God does not reject the innocent (36:5).[190] At the same time, neither does he preserve the life of the wicked, but he puts right the

---

[188] Once again, there is some ambiguity in the Hebrew text. Some versions extend the words "you say" from 35:14 into 35:15 (so NET, NLT). The meaning of the *hapax legomenon* פַּשׁ is uncertain, and the reader will see some variation in the versions at this point, ranging from "transgression" (RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, NET) to "arrogance" (ERV, JPS) to "extremity" (KJV) to "wickedness" (NIV, NIB, NLT) to "life" (NAB) to "rebellion" (NJB). All of these are contextual guesses.

[189] It is unclear whether the final phrase in 36:4, תְּמִים דֵּעוֹת עִמָּךְ (= "complete knowledge [is] with you") directly refers to Elihu himself (which many commentators regard as sheer arrogance) or perhaps to the words he believes God has provided. Some translators add additional words, such as, "One who has..." (so RSV, NRSV, NIV, NIB, ESV) or "You have a man of..." (so NJB, NLT) or something comparable.

[190] In the Hebrew text, there is no object to the verb יִמְאָס. It simply reads, "And he does not reject..." The KJV began the tradition of adding the word "any" (in italics) to complete the thought, and this lead is followed by many translators (so ERV, RSV NRSV, ESV, JPS, NASB, NET, NIB, NIV, NLT). However, based on the parallel line in 36:7 that God does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous, the NJB completes the thought in 36:5 as, "God does not reject anyone whose heart is pure." This approach seems to better reflect what Elihu could be expected to say.

wrongs of those who are oppressed (36:6). God does not ignore the righteous; indeed, he elevates them as though they were kings (36:7)! Even when the righteous find themselves in distressing circumstances, God uses these very hardships as a teaching instrument to lead them to repentance (36:8-10).[191] If they will listen, he will reverse their calamity (36:11), but if they refuse, they merely sign their own death warrant (36:12). This whole line of reasoning seems to mirror much of what was said earlier by the other friends (cf. 18:5-21; 20:1-29), and of course, it is precisely what Job says is NOT happening in the world (cf. 21:7-18, 29-30; 24:1-12, 21-25)! Elihu's reference to those who do not listen to this divine teaching instrument leads him to castigate the godless. They nurse anger, refuse to turn to God for help, and end up dying young among the male prostitutes of the fertility cult (36:13-14).[192] Those who are willing to learn from their times of distress, on the other hand, will be delivered (36:15)! The implication, of course, is that Job should observe and learn.

The next section is beset with considerable difficulty, both in the Hebrew text and its interpretation. Ancient and modern versions show a wide diversity of translation, some treating the section as a series of warnings (so NEB), some as a series of accusations (so NJB), and some as both (so ESV). The idea of being "wooed" or "enticed" from the mouth of distress (הֲסִיתְךָ מִפִּי־צָר) suggests that Job is being gently led away from danger toward a place of restoration (36:16),[193] but he must take care or he will be "wooed" in the opposite direction, seduced into cynicism or the attractiveness of wealth (36:18).[194] The meaning of 36:17 is very difficult and may be insoluble.[195] The meaning of 36:19 and 36:20 is equally

[191] Lit., God "uncovers their ear" (and the same idiom will be used in 36:15)

[192] The term קְדֵשִׁים (= "male prostitutes") is sometimes rendered by the dynamic equivalency "shame" (so RSV, NRSV) or "unclean" (KJV, ERV), but the term for male prostitute is sufficiently well-known in the Old Testament that there is no doubt about its basic meaning. Sacred prostitution, the use of ritual sex to ensure the fertility of the land, was morally detestable (cf. Dt. 23:17-18; 1 Kg. 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kg. 23:7). Apparently, this feature of Canaanite religion was similar to what Herodotus would later describe as a regular practice in the Babylonian temples of Aphrodite. Not much is known of this practice outside its biblical references, and some scholars argue that, lacking corroborating external evidence, we must be reserved in what we say about it.

[193] The nuance of the verbal tense is unclear, even though the verb is an unconverted perfect. Some versions treat it as a subjunctive (i.e., "he would like to" or "he would have", so KJV, ERV, NJB), others as a present tense (it is common in Hebrew poetry to use the perfect tense to describe habitual activity, so NAB, NIV, NIB, NLT), and still others as a simple past tense (so RSV, NRSV, JPS, NASB, ESV, NET).

[194] The nuance of the word כֹּפֶר is equally problematic, some rendering it as "ransom" (so KJV, ERV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, ESV, JPS) and others as "bribery" (so NAB, NET, NIV, NIB, NJB, NLT). The use here probably is to be linked to the appearance of the same word in 33:24.

[195] Some versions translate the passage so that it refers to the judgment that has already fallen upon Job (so ERV, NIV, JPS, ESV, NIB). Others, by emending the text, translate it so that it refers to Job's neglect in matters of social justice (so NJB). Still others render the passage so that it refers to Job's obsession with finding legal resolution as to whether the godless will actually face judgment (so NRSV, NLT).

obscure, even though 36:19 is clearly stated in the form of a question.[196] With a final warning, Elihu urges Job to avoid wrong-doing and learn from his experience (36:21).[197]

If Job is obsessed with justice, Elihu urges him that he should rather be focused on the majesty and power of God as the ultimate teacher (36:22). Since God is supreme and answerable to no one but himself (36:23), Job ought to join the universal chorus extolling this greatness. Instead of critiquing God's justice, Job should exalt God's mighty power, which is evident to all humans, even though they can perceive it only from a distance (36:24-25). This greatness of God cannot be fully comprehended by finite humans, of course, for God is not only powerful but also eternal (36:26). Still, from the majesty of the storm and the elemental forces of nature, humans can at least catch a hint of his divine greatness (36:27ff.). Elihu now begins an extended description of how God superintends the elements of the natural world, a description that will continue until the end of this fourth monologue. In doing so, he will spell out in detail what St. Paul will mention briefly many centuries later, that is, that God's power and godhead are clearly visible in the created world (cf. Ro. 1:20). Most important, this lengthy hymn of praise based on God's power in the storm will prepare the reader for the final voice in the book, the voice of God, who at last will speak to Job out of the storm.

Elihu begins his description with the water cycle of evaporation, distillation and rain (36:27-28). He progresses to the lightning and thunderstorm, which provides precipitation to sustain crops for food (36:29-33). The exact mechanisms he intends from the viewpoint of an ancient person is not always apparent, but the overall effect is clear enough.[198] The sheer immensity of volume and pyrotechnics in the thunderstorm can only inspire terror and awe (37:1). Elihu directs his words to the wider circle of listeners,[199] attributing the crack of thunder to the divine voice

---

[196] The sentence in 36:19 begins with the interrogative הֲ. While there are multiple of renderings of this verse in the English Versions, most agree that in some sense Elihu's question suggests that any resolution to Job's suffering will not come from within his own resources. Elihu's warning in 36:20 that Job should not "long for the night" might be a metaphor that he should not be too quick to wish for death, since midnight is the time of the death of the wicked (cf. 34:20). Again, there are a wide variety of translations in the English Versions, all of them scholarly guesses at the intended meaning.

[197] As with the preceding verses, the meaning of the phrase כִּֽי־עַל־זֶה בָּחַרְתָּ מֵעֹנִי (= "for because of this you chose from affliction") is obscure. It might mean that Job prefers evil to affliction (so NAB, NASB, NIV, NIB). If one revocalizes the verb from active to passive voice, it suggests that Job's affliction is the means by which God is testing him (so NET, NJB, NLT, NRSV).

[198] The metaphor of the pavilion or canopy or booth (36:29) envisions God's celestial habitation (cf. Ps. 18:11). The relationship of rain to the "roots of the sea" continues to be puzzling (36:30). The imagery of covering his hands with lightning is evocative but clarified by the succeeding line, indicating his ability to direct lightning strikes as he intends (36:32). The reference to cattle rising (36:33b) possibly refers to the animals' anticipation of the coming storm, though a number of translators, by revocalizing the text, have eliminated the reference to cattle altogether (so RSV, NRSV, NAB, NJB, NLT), cf. Newsom, IV.590.

[199] The plural imperative in the שִׁמְעוּ at the beginning of 37:2 makes this clear.

(37:2-5).[200] Winter storms, of course, bring yet another kind of precipitation, both snow and cold rain (37:6), forcing both man and beast to find shelter (37:7-8).[201] If thunder is the voice of God, then the wind is his breath, bringing ice, cloud, moisture and more lightning (37:9-11).[202] He directs these intense forces of nature over the whole earth, using them to accomplish his divine purposes for correction, for the benefit of the land, or for kindness (37:12-13).[203]

Turning from the larger group to address Job directly, Elihu challenges him with a series of probing questions, questions that seem to anticipate some of the questions later to be asked by God. Still based on his description of the storm, Elihu pointedly asks Job if he can discern how God governs these elements, commanding the lightning and poising the cloud formations, while Job swelters in the heat as he awaits the relief of a cooling rain (37:14-17).[204] Can Job in any way affect the condition of the sky when it is like a bronze mirror (37:18)?[205] The obvious answer being negative, Elihu then edges his challenge with sarcasm, chiding Job to "teach" his friends how to approach God with his court case, since their perceptions of God are shrouded in darkness (37:19).[206] Clearly, Elihu took umbrage at the notion that someone should inform the Almighty that Job wanted to speak with him (cf. 9:35; 13:22; 23:4-5; 31:35-37)! To expect such an encounter would be to court disaster, for any lowly human confronting God should expect to be "swallowed up" (37:20)!

Picking up the thread once more from his observations about the natural

---

[200] The idiom כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ (= "wings of the earth") refers to its extremities and sometimes gets translated as "corners".

[201] The phrase בְּיַד־כָּל־אָדָם יַחְתּוֹם (= "he seals the hand of every man") is probably an idiom referring to winter shut-in, and several English Versions have provided dynamic equivalencies, such as, "he shuts up all humankind indoors" (NAB) or "he causes everyone to stop working" (NET, similarly NIV, NIB, NJB, NLT).

[202] In 37:9, the KJV (also, the NASB) renders the term חֶדֶר (= "chamber") as "out of the south", following a similar reference in 9:9. However, while there is direct reference to "the south" in 9:9, there is no such modifying phrase in 37:9.

[203] The first of the three if-clauses is אִם־לְשֵׁבֶט (= "if for the rod"), which most interpreters understand to be an idiom for punishment or correction. The geographical reference to the land seems to fit awkwardly between "correction" and "kindness," leading some scholars to emend the text, substituting רצה (= "payment" or "acceptance") for ארץ (= land). Some versions add qualifying words, such as, "to water his earth" (so NIV, NIB). Others eliminate the reference to the earth altogether (so NAB, NLT).

[204] A number of versions render the *hapax legomenon* מִפְלָשׂ as "balancing" (so KJV, ERV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, JPS, NET, NJB), since it may be from the same root as the word "balance" (cf. Pro. 16:11; Is. 40:12). Others opt for "poising" (so NIV, NIB).

[205] The Hiphil form of the verb רָקַע (= "to stamp" or "to be hammered out") derives from the same root as the noun רָקִיעַ, used in the Genesis creation account to describe the dome of the heavens (cf. Ge. 1:6-7).

[206] Two factors should be considered in interpreting 37:19. First, the verb עָרַךְ (= "to set in order") was used by Job previously to describe the preparation of his case before God (cf. 13:18), so we should probably understand it the same way here. Second, it is unclear whether the phrase מִפְּנֵי־חֹשֶׁךְ (= "from the face of darkness") refers to the hiddenness of God (as in Ps. 18:11) or the darkness of human ignorance. Either way, if Job is unable to do anything about the weather except endure it, he certainly would be unable to debate his case before God.

elements, Elihu concludes this final speech by describing the abatement of the storm, when the sky has cleared and the sunlight is almost too bright for the eyes (37:21). Just so, the epiphany of God will shine forth like gold (37:22).[207] God, who is invisible and unapproachable in his greatness, will remain true to his essential moral character of justice. He will never violate his righteousness by oppression (37:23).[208] This is why he is deeply revered by all people (37:24).[209]

Obviously, Elihu's final speech prepares the way for God to speak, and especially, the lengthy theme of the divine storm as well as the hint of a divine epiphany offer a transition into the final monologue from God. That being said, the reader must still assess Elihu's contribution to the conversation. As mentioned earlier, his role is more ambiguous than the other friends, since in the end God says nothing about him, either good or bad. It is fair to say that the Elihu speeches are more nuanced and occasionally seem to rise above at least some of the petty assaults of the original three friends. In several aspects, his reasoning is elevated beyond the crass insinuations of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. His perspective that suffering can be redemptive is to be frankly acknowledged, though, of course, this cannot be accepted as a comprehensive explanation. At the same time, his commitment to the impassivity of God and his assumption that there is a direct relationship between the natural order and the moral order of the universe cannot be sustained. As Carol Newsom has cogently put it, "Lightning may be attracted to metal, but it is not attracted to evil."[210] Hence, Elihu remains a somewhat shadowy figure in the book, and the value of his contribution is muted by his occasional pomposity.

The Voice of God and the Responses of Job (38:1—42:4)

At long last, we are ready to hear the voice of God, something for which Job has been desperately longing for what seems an interminable length of time (cf. 9:35; 13:22; 23:3-7; 31:35-37)! Before we do, however, it is necessary to broach once more the subject addressed briefly regarding Job's opening response to Eliphaz, the issue of voice tone. As mentioned then (see page 27), when reading a text without hearing the audible voice of the author, the reader is compelled to assume the tone.

---

[207] Lit., "from the north gold comes..." Many translators have added the word "splendor," thus finding an implied parallelism for the later word "majesty." That God shines forth "from the north" is in keeping with the north as the abode of God (cf. Eze. 1:4; Ps. 48:2; Is. 14:13).

[208] The Hebrew reading here is difficult, וְרֹב־צְדָקָה לֹא יְעַנֶּה (= "...and abundant righteousness he will not oppress"). The problem is the nuance of the Piel form of the verb, which can mean "to humiliate" or "to oppress" Most interpreters take this to mean that God, because of his abundant righteousness, will not mistreat anyone.

[209] The final line is problematic: לֹא־יִרְאֶה כָּל־חַכְמֵי־לֵב (= "he does not see the wise of heart"). Is this an idiom for conceit (so KJV, ERV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, JPS, NASB, NET)? By repointing the verb, the final line can be read, "Surely all [the] wise of heart fear him!" (so NLT, NJB). If one reads the final statement as a question, what appears to be negative ends up as a positive, i.e., "...for does he not regard all the wise in heart?" (NIV, NIB). Either of these latter two options seem to offer a better concluding statement.

[210] Newsom, IV.593.

Here, the reader must decide what tone is to be heard in the divine voice. There may be clues in the verbiage that might swing the reader in some particular direction, but still one must be cautious. Any assumption carries a risk, because it might be easily misconstrued, but the reader can hardly remain neutral, either. There is no doubt that God poses a series of very pointed questions to Job. The issue, then, is whether these questions are to be heard as coming from a friend or an enemy. Those interpreters who read Job as cynical or as antagonistic against God during his long ordeal tend to read the divine questions as thrusts aimed at crushing Job in humiliation. The tone of the questions is assumed to be acerbic and biting. This assumption, it seems to me, is unnecessary and indeed is against the flow of the whole book, since in the end God will say of Job that he had spoken what was right (cf. 42:7b). Better to hear these questions, probing though they are, as coming from a friend to a friend.

The content of the divine speeches is surprising. Job had asked for a written list of specific charges (cf. 31:35), or at the very least, a verdict of exoneration (cf. 13:18; 23:3-7, 10-12). Neither of these is forthcoming. Rather, God voices a series of questions that invite Job to observe the world, and in doing so, he will implicitly discover God within the world. Further, there is at least one feature that is conspicuous by its absence, the fact that in these speeches God does not offer a list of Job's offenses that "caused" his downfall nor any explanation as to why it all happened. His friends were not hesitant to level direct accusations (cf. 22:6-9), but God says nothing at all along these lines. While the reader knows from the outset that Job's great trial came about due to the aspersions of Satan and God's willingness to put Job to the test, Job knows nothing of this, and in the divine speeches, God does not explain. Of course, this is the central point of the book that the reader must firmly grasp—that Job can find resolution to his suffering without ever completely knowing the back story. As Andersen has so aptly expressed it, Job "does not see it all"; instead, "he sees God", and this makes all the difference![211] Job had felt that he had been abandoned by God, but the divine speech indicated that God was not aloof, and more to the point, Job could experience the presence of God even in the midst of suffering.

God's First Speech (38-39)

The whirlwind from which God speaks recalls the extensive imagery of the storm in the Elihu speeches (cf. 36:27—37:13), a common context for theophanies (cf. Eze. 1:4; Na. 1:3; Zec. 9:14). Here, the reader once more encounters the divine name Yahweh, which has been conspicuously absent since the initial narratives.[212] The opening question, "Who is this darkening counsel in speech without

[211] Andersen, Footnote #1, p. 270.

[212] For its appearance in 12:9, see Footnote #72.

knowledge?" is a wry reference to Elihu's castigation of Job (38:1-2; cf. 35:16). Job is now invited to face God, the very thing he has repeatedly desired (38:3; cf. 13:22; 31:35).[213]

The questions God asks Job fall into two large blocks, the first concerning the mysteries of the created world (38:4-38) and the second concerning the mysteries of the animal kingdom (38:39—39:30). These questions, of course, are rhetorical and educational. They are not intended to humiliate Job (*contra* some interpreters), but rather, to reinforce to him that there were huge areas of knowledge that were simply beyond any human's capacity to understand. By implication, Job's crucible of suffering should be seen in that same light as well—something he experiences but may not fully understand. Also, because God now speaks to Job directly, he confers upon him an elevated status that is unique among all the creatures in the universe. Job is not an element of nature nor a plant nor an animal. He is a human, the creature with the highest dignity of all (and indeed, made in God's own image). Job had invited God to call, and he said that he would answer (cf. 13:22)—and now, the very thing he desperately desired was actually happening!

The Mysteries of the Created World (38:1-38)

The initial sequence of unanswerable questions concerns the origins of the universe, the "who" and "what" and "where" issues. Humans, even though they were the apex of creation, were certainly not around to see it all happen (38:4)! The imagery of foundations (38:4), measurements and the surveyor's cord (38:5), footings and a cornerstone (38:6) all depict the universe as God's great architectural project, the building of a cosmic temple. Still, if humans were not there to see it happen, the angels were, and they watched with admiration, amazement, and spontaneous song (38:7)![214] The "sons of God," of course, are referenced earlier in the book as the spiritual beings who belong to God's heavenly council (see pages 14-15). The origins of the ocean are described with the metaphor of child-birth, the gushing forth of the natal fluids from the "double-doors" of the womb (38:8).[215] The clouds continue the birthing metaphor, here depicting the bands of cloth used to wrap an infant (cf. Eze. 16:4). Just as the strips of cloth were wrapped around the child from navel to feet, so the clouds and thick darkness surrounded the primal sea as in

---

[213] The Hebrew idiom "gird now your loins like a man" indicates readiness (cf. Ex. 12:11; 1 Kg. 18:46; 2 Kg. 4:29; 9;1; Lk. 12:35; Ep. 6:14; 1 Pe. 1:13), more or less equivalent to the English expression "brace yourself."

[214] The origin of angels is not described in the Hebrew Bible, though their existence is everywhere assumed. Later, St. Paul will specifically say that all entities in heaven and earth were created by God through his Son, "things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16). The reader should note the synonymous parallelism between "the morning stars" and the "sons of God," indicating that both phrases refer to the same thing.

[215] The English Versions appropriately provide the interrogative "who" in 38:8, even though it is absent in the Hebrew Text. The Hebrew בְּדְלָתַיִם is pointed as a dual, hence "double-doors," and in the birthing metaphor, probably refers to the labia (see also 3:10).

Genesis 1 (38:9; cf. Ge. 1:2). The sea in the ancient world was often a threatening element, both in the Bible (cf. Ps. 74:13; Is. 27:1; Hab. 3:8) and in Mesopotamian creation accounts, where Tiamat, the sea-goddess, represented the chaotic powers of the oceans. Here, the sea is personified, and God set boundaries to curtail its threat (38:10-11).

The questioning continues, now concerning the demarcation of night and day. The darkness of night is depicted as a robe covering the earth, and the breaking of morning as "shaking out" the robe's folds (38:12-13). Just as light reveals what is hidden, so the shaking out of the robe of darkness reveals the hidden deeds of the wicked. Seal impressions[216] transform lumps of clay into recognizable images, and in the same way, the bright rays of the sun bring into sharp relief the profile of the land with each sunrise (38:14). With the coming of the morning light, the wicked are deprived of their preferred element, darkness, and can no longer raise their arm in violence, since all will be revealed by the light of day (38:15)![217]

From night and day, God turns to the sea once again, this time not its origin but rather its subterranean depths from which the waters emerge (38:16). The waters of the sea are often a symbol of death in Hebrew poetry (e.g. 28:14; Ps. 69:2, 14; Jon. 2:3),[218] and here they are linked to the "gates of death," the entry to the place of the dead (38:17). Just as Job has never explored these unreachable places, so he has never explored the expanse of even the visible land (38:18).

Now, the tour of the world turns to the horizon, where light and darkness are personified as entities traveling to their homes (38:19-20). The reader should bear in mind, of course, that Job's knowledge of the celestial world is largely phenomenological, not scientific, so these verses are not a means by which modern interpreters should attempt to define a cosmology. Already Job has shown himself to have a penchant for sarcasm (cf. 12:1-2; 26:1-2), and here Yahweh offers another wry sarcasm to Job, probably a play on the earlier jibe of Eliphaz (38:21; 15:7), though less acerbic. Still continuing in the realm of the atmosphere, God asks Job if he knows the origins of snow or hail (38:22), divine weapons that he sometimes uses for war (38:23; cf. Ex. 9:22; Jos. 10:11; 1 Sa. 7:10; Isa. 30:30; Eze. 13:13).[219] Did

---

[216] If Job's context is sufficiently ancient, the seal likely refers to a cylinder seal rather than a signet ring.

[217] The statement that for the wicked "their light is withheld" is a subtle oxymoron, since the "light" of the wicked is actually the darkness that covers their wicked deeds (cf. 24:17; Is. 5:20).

[218] The word תְּהוֹם (= the deep, the abyss), used in 38:16, derives from the same Semitic root as Tiamat, the goddess of chaos in the Babylonian creation stories, often associated with the sea. In the Hebrew Bible, however, "the deep" generally is not personified, but refers to the primal waters of the sea (Ge. 1:2; Ps. 33:7). By the time of the New Testament, "the deep" becomes a synonym for *hades* (cf. Lk. 8:31; Rv. 9:1-2).

[219] It is interesting to speculate about whether or not Job knew something of Israelite history in which God sent hailstones. Even as an Edomite (if, indeed, Job was an Edomite, see the Introduction, p. 8), he still might have been aware of some of these incidents.

Job know the source of light (or lightning?) or the east wind (38:24)?[220]

Transitioning to rain, God questions whether Job is aware that rain falls on uninhabited lands, not just the places with which Job is familiar (38:25-27). Humans might try to irrigate parched areas for farming, but God designs channels for the irrigation of places where no humans even live! Further, the origins of rain, dew, ice and frost were mysteries well beyond Job's ken (38:28-30)! The question of the "father" and "mother" of these phenomena, of course, must be answered in the negative. They are not deities but elements controlled by Yahweh. Moving to the heavens, God cites the stellar world (38:31-33). The constellations of Pleiades and Orion are well-known, though we are unclear about Mazzaroth and the Bear with cubs.[221] Still, the movements of cloud, lightning, rain and flood were totally outside Job's ability to control (38:34-35). Who imbued them with their wisdom, or what human could possibly influence them (38:36-38)?[222]

The Mysteries of the Animal World (38:39—39:30)

Following the large block of questions regarding the mysteries of the natural world, God now invites Job to explore the animal world in a series of vignettes.[223] The rhetorical interrogation about unsearchable categories continues. Could Job possibly conduct a hunt in order to provide meat for a pride of lions (38:39-40)? Hardly! This, the most ferocious of wild animals in the ancient Near East, was always a hostile predator and fearful for humans. No more could Job provide for the young chicks of the desert raven (38:41). Could he possibly know anything at all about the birthing patterns of the ibex, their gestation time, calving and rapid progress toward maturity (39:1-4)? And what about wild asses, which freely roamed the arid steppes of the Middle East (39:5-8)?[224] Who set them free if not God? The same for the wild ox, creatures of great strength and ferocity but virtually impossible to tame (39:9-12; cf. Is. 34:7).[225] Could Job ever expect to harness one to work his

---

[220] Since already God has talked about the origin of light in nearly the same words (38:19), a number of translators have suggested alternatives, including "lightning" (so NIV, NIB, NET, NJB).

[221] That these figures represent constellations seems clear from the context, but Mazzaroth is altogether unknown to us (in most English Versions, it is simply transliterated), while the "Bear" is sometimes taken to refer to Ursa Major.

[222] The meaning of the words טֶחוֹת and שֶׂכְוִי have long been bones of contention. The RV and KJV rendered them as "inward parts" and "mind/heart" (so, also, NASB, NRSV, ESV, NET, JPS, NLT). The RSV rendered them as "clouds" and "mists." Several versions translate them as birds, the ibis and the rooster (so TEV, NAB, NIV, NIB, NJB), which seems odd in the context of weather descriptions. All translations at this point are scholarly guesses, and the actual meanings have been lost in antiquity.

[223] The "water skins of the skies," of course, is a metaphor for the heavenly reservoirs of water. The chapter division would be better had it fallen between 38:38 and 38:39, but after a millennium with the present chapter division, we will have to live with it as it is.

[224] The term פֶּרֶא for "wild ass" or "onager" is derived from the root that means "to run."

[225] There is some discussion among scholars as to whether this creature is the desert oryx or the auroch, now extinct, but the KJV translation of "unicorn" leaves a good deal to be desired!

fields?

Next, the divine speech transitions from questions into a direct description, and God calls Job's attention to the ostrich. Ostriches, at best, are comical creatures, their plumage useless for flying and their eggs exposed (39:13-15).[226] They have a reputation for cruelty to their young (39:16; cf. La. 4:3), and altogether, they seem rather dull if humorous creatures (39:17). Though they cannot fly, they can run faster than a horse (39:18)! Perhaps Andersen is right when he suggests that these creatures were created just for God's entertainment![227]

Back to interrogations, God asked Job about horses.[228] Had Job given the horse its strength and agility or its courage in battle (39:19-25)? While horses are the only domesticated animal in the series, they still exude a wildness that is comparable to other untamable animals. The language of the quivering mane, the powerful stride, the snorting and pawing of the ground, the willingness to charge into bristling weaponry and the unrestrained eagerness at the sounding of the battle trumpet—all these things mark the horse as unique in the animal kingdom. The final query concerns the flight of birds, the hawk and vulture (39:26-30).[229] They soar heavenward in their southward migrations, building their nests in the highest crags, seeking out prey with incredible keen-sightedness, and scavenging on the corpses of those fallen in battle.[230]

The Divine Challenge and Job's Response (40:1-5)

At the beginning of his speech, Yahweh had challenged Job to face him (38:2-3), and now, after a lengthy series of unanswerable rhetorical questions, he challenges Job to respond (40:1-2). Once more the reader encounters the word for lawsuit (רִיב), see 9:3 and Footnote #59), which most English Versions translate as "contend." In his final appeal, Job had bluntly said that if God would only give him an audience, he would approach him "like a prince" (cf. 31:35-37). Now, Yahweh

---

[226] The translation of 39:13 is very difficult, since the word רְנָנִים is a *hapax legomenon*. The context suggests the creature is an ostrich, which is why most English Versions render it this way, but this is a guess (alternatively, the KJV has "peacocks"). Indeed, the LXX omits the passage altogether, and it may have been drawn from some other source, since it refers to God in the 3rd person (39:17). The verb עָלַס typically means "to rejoice" (so RV), but its *Niphal* form here is yet another *hapax legomenon*. Hence, the translations "flap" (so NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NIB, NLT) or "wave proudly" (so RSV, ESV) are further guesses. The word אֶבְרָה is the feminine form of the word אֵבֶר, which means "wing," but the following word חֲסִידָה is variously rendered as "stork" (so JPS, NET, NIV, NIB, NJB, NLT) or "love" (so RSV, NASB, ESV): these latter are guesses, also.

[227] Andersen, p. 281.

[228] Horses were not domestic animals in the ancient Near East as they would become in later eras. The horse was used primarily for one purpose, war, and in the earlier period primarily for chariotry (cavalry would come later).

[229] The two terms used, נֵץ (= hawk, falcon) and נֶשֶׁר (= eagle, vulture), are not as precise as we might hope, but the basic idea is not in doubt. Most English versions opt for the word "eagle" for the second bird, but the keen-eyed search for אֹכֶל (= food) in 39:29 and the eating of carrion in 39:30 seem more applicable to the vulture.

[230] In the Hebrew Bible, the term חָלָל (= "slain") is used mostly for humans, cf. Dhorme, p. 613.

has answered and returned to Job his challenge.[231] Job must answer! At this point, however, Job is suitably chastened, and his answer is less like a prince and more like a humble subject. Job concedes that compared to God, he is very small indeed,[232] and there is nothing he can say. The gesture of placing one's hand over one's mouth is the same as the one formerly given in deference to Job himself by those who once respected him as a man of great standing (cf. 29:8-10). Previously, Job had spoken boldly, but he will do so no more.

Yet, there is more to come. God is not yet finished speaking with Job, and there is still work to be done for the reconstruction of Job's understanding of God's ways. This brings us to Yahweh's second speech.

God's Second Speech (40:6—41:34)

The first divine speech was directed toward Job's penchant for wanting to know things about God that were unfathomable, and the litany of examples from the natural and animal worlds in chapters 38-39 pointed out just how far short Job's understanding fell in a universe filled with unfathomable things and creatures. Now, in a second speech, God addresses Job's complaint that life was not fair and that God seemed unreachable. Job's final challenge had been his insistent plea that God would put an indictment against him in writing (cf. 31:35), and if so, Job intended to defend his innocence, even to God himself, which is the whole thrust of the long series of "if" statements and curses in chapter 31. He believed God had taken away his "right" to justice (cf. 27:2). Such a challenge implied, even if not directly, that God's justice and integrity were somehow suspect. God offers Job no such indictment, either oral or written, but more importantly, in this second speech he demonstrates that Job's attitude needs adjustment, particularly his insistence that he had some inherent "right" to be vindicated by God in the present life. Just as Job was completely unable to understand the incomprehensible features of the natural world, he was equally incapable of directing the incomprehensible features of the moral world. It is to this point that the second divine speech is addressed.

Just as in the first speech, Yahweh speaks out of the whirlwind, ordering Job to brace himself for additional interrogation (40:6-7; cf. 38:3). The first question directly confronts the issue of God's moral justice (40:8). Was Job so insistent on his innocence that he would impugn God?[233] What follows, then, is a challenge that underscores the truth that God's justice in the world is not merely a matter of legalities, as though for Job to be right, God must be wrong, or for God to be right

---

[231] The term יִסּוֹר (= "faultfinder"? suggested by Holladay) is also a *hapax legomenon*, and it is unclear whether it is a rare noun or a verb derived from יסר (= to teach, give advice). English Versions take it either way.

[232] The expression in Hebrew is simply קַלֹּתִי (= "I am slight").

[233] Literally, the phrase תָּפֵר מִשְׁפָּטִי in 40:8 means "break my judgment."

he must immediately adjudicate all injustices in the world. Rather, Job must trust God to be just even though he could not understand what was happening to him. Hence, the question about God's power (40:9) is followed by an invitation to Job to consider how he might govern the moral world if he had the opportunity (40:10-13). If, so to speak, Job could assume the robes of God and display his moral outrage by immediately taking down the proud and the wicked, reducing them to the dust of death,[234] something he once complained was not happening (cf. 21:7-26; 24:1-25) but should happen (cf. 27:7-23), was he ready to take on such a responsibility? If Job could achieve justice in such a way, then God said he would concede that Job was capable of vindicating himself (40:14). The point, of course, is that Job was quite unequal to the task of governing the moral world, and consequently, he needed to rethink his mindset in this regard.

This first movement of God's final speech sets up what will follow, for in the succeeding passages, God once again will challenge Job to consider two incomprehensible and awesome creatures, both prime examples of pride, which God had created and allowed to live. Was Job, wearing the garments of God as judge, able to bring them down? Did he have an "arm" like God or a "hand" like God that could bring to heel these terrible and incredible creatures called Behemoth and Leviathan? Indeed, the second creature is bluntly described as having no equal on earth, the "king of the sons of pride" (cf. 41:33-34).

These two creatures described in Yahweh's second speech, בְּהֵמוֹת (= *behemoth*) and לִוְיָתָן (= *leviathan*), merit special consideration. In the first place, the English versions simply transliterate their names from Hebrew, so these words do not describe ordinary animals in the known world. That the names are proper is indicated by the fact that they appear in the Hebrew text with no definite article. Leviathan has been mentioned previously in Job (3:8, see Footnote #33), but both names are familiar from ancient Near Eastern literature outside the Bible in languages cognate with Hebrew, where they seem to represent supernatural creatures. Given this borrowing of mythopoeic language and titles, the modern reader of the Book of Job must grapple with their identity. Behemoth eats grass (40:15), but he also is called "the first of the works of God" (40:19a), which is to say, the first created being. Leviathan seems to live in the water (41:1), but out of his nostrils come smoke and fire (41:19-21). Further, in ancient Near Eastern literature, Leviathan is generally described as the monster with seven heads.[235] In

---

[234] Lit., the phrases in 40:13 are "hide them in the dust" and "bind their faces in hiddenness", both idioms for death.

[235] In the *keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, for instance, Leviathan is described as the "twisting serpent" and the "crooked serpent, the tyrant with seven heads" (1.5.I.1; 1.3.III.40-42). Indeed, a visualization of this creature can be found incised on a Sumerian shell from about 2600 BC, showing a seven-headed monster confronting a hero or

the Old Testament, the word *behemoth* can be used of beasts in general (12:7; Dt. 32:24; Ps. 8:7; 50:10, etc.), but *leviathan* usually has a connotation of the powers of evil (cf. Ps. 74:13-14; Is. 27:1). In Jewish pseudepigraphical literature, Behemoth is a male creature of the land located in a wilderness east of Eden (1 Enoch 60:7-8), while Leviathan, its female counterpart, comes from the sea (2 Baruch 29:4; 2 Esdras 6:49, 52). It seems probable that the two beasts in the Apocalypse of John in the New Testament, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land, are drawn from this same imagery (Rv. 13:1, 11).

With respect to the Book of Job, then, the interpreter must decide whether these two creatures are: 1) borrowed from the mythology of the ancient Near East, or 2) are symbolic of the powers of evil but described in mythopoeic language, or 3) are simply huge animals described in hyperbolic language to be read poetically but not literally. Since about the 17th century, Behemoth has traditionally been identified with the hippopotamus, while Leviathan has been thought to be a crocodile (or sometimes a whale, so NEB).[236] These identifications continue as the view of many interpreters, and indeed, the ESV offers footnotes that these powerful animals possibly are the hippopotamus and the crocodile (so also, Andersen, Rowley).[237] With the discovery of various ancient Near Eastern texts that describe these creatures as supernatural, however, other scholars opt for a mythological interpretation (Pope, Gunkel). Smick opts for a middle ground, contending that they symbolize incredibly powerful spiritual entities, though their features are described after the fashion of the hippopotamus and crocodile, using mythopoeic language.[238] If they are taken ultimately to represent spiritual powers of the sort that many centuries later St. Paul would describe as the *stoicheia*, "rulers, authorities, powers and dominion" (Ep. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 2:8, 20), then the challenge to Job was whether or not he was capable of bringing into submission such astounding other-worldly creatures of consummate pride.

One thing is clear: these creatures, whatever they are, were created by God and live under the dominion of God (40:15, 19; 41:33; cf. Ps. 104:26; Col. 1:16). How much Job could have known about them if they refer to spiritual entities is unclear, but he certainly would have been aware of the broader perception in the ancient Near East that such monstrous creatures existed, and indeed, this viewpoint

---

a god. Similarly, a cylinder seal impression discovered at Tell Asmar shows two deities confronting a seven-headed serpent-dragon, cf. T. Gaster, *IDB* (1962) 3.116.

[236] J. Walton, V. Matthews & M. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), p. 510.

[237] There are no known Hebrew words for the hippopotamus or the crocodile. If such words existed, which they may well have, they have long since vanished in antiquity. As such, the names Behemoth and Leviathan are, more or less, the English equivalent of "Beast" and "Dragon."

[238] Smick, 4.1048-1049.

is shared by the biblical authors.[239]

Behemoth (40:15-24)

Behemoth is the initial consideration, a being created just as Job was created (40:15). Certain features resemble the hippopotamus, such as, its diet of grass (40:15b), its great midbody (40:16), its powerful leg muscles and bone (40:17b-18), and its environment of reeds and marsh (40:21-22). Other features, however, did not fit so well with the hippopotamus. The hippo was certainly not the first created being, presumably being created on the sixth day of the Genesis narrative, along with the other beasts (40:19; cf. Ge. 1:24-25). The hippo's tail is hardly like a cedar (40:17a); it is rather short. The hippo does not forage in the mountains, and indeed, must spend most of its time submerged due to its great size (40:20). Finally, the Jordan River in Israel is not a very likely place to find a hippo (40:23). Hence, attempting to identify this creature with a known land animal, at the very least, is a challenge. To be sure, one must allow for poetic imagery and hyperbole, but that being said, even making such allowances does not eliminate the problem. Whatever this creature, he is unlikely to be captured by putting a ring in his nose like a ox (40:24)![240]

Verse 40:19b has been a considerable challenge to translate and interpret, with most English versions opting for a literal rendering, "Let him who made him bring near his sword" (ESV, so also RV, KJV, RSV, JPS, NAB, NIB, NIV, NJB, NRSV). Some would adjust the nuance slightly by reading, "The One who made it has furnished it with a sword" (NET, so also, Delitsch), where the "sword" is thought to be a metaphor for teeth or a weapon against enemies. Others repoint the text without changing the consonants so that it says he will "dominate his companions".[241] If we leave the text as it stands without emendation, it suggests that no one except the Creator was sufficiently superior and powerful to slay this fearsome creature, certainly not Job!

Leviathan (41)

A much longer description is given for Leviathan, occupying the whole of chapter 41. As with Behemoth, some features seem compatible with identifying

---

[239] A number of Old Testament and Apocalyptic passages employ the mythological imagery of a dragon-like creature who opposes God. The monster is variously called *Leviathan* (Job 3:8; 41:1; Ps. 74:14; Is. 27:1; cf. 2 Esdras 6:49, 52), *Behemoth* (Job 40:15-24; cf. 1 Enoch 60:7-9; 4 Ezra 6:49-52), *Rahab* (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps. 89:10; Is. 30:7; 51:9), *Tannin* (= dragon, Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 27:1; 51:9), *Yam* (= Sea, Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 51:10; Hab. 3:8), *Nahar* (= River, Ps. 93:3; Hab. 3:8) and *Nahash* (= Snake, Job 26:13; Is. 27:1), cf. M. Horsnell, *ISBE* (1986) 3.459; H. Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Creation Story," *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 35-40.

[240] The reading בְּמוֹקְשִׁים יִנְקָב־אָף (= "pierces the nose with snares") has resulted in a variety of possibilities, ranging from "barbs" (NASB), "traps" (NAB), "poles" (NJB) or a "ring in its nose" (NLT).

[241] Newsom, IV.619

Leviathan as a crocodile, while others do not.[242] The physical description of its powerful limbs, hide, teeth, back, scales, flesh, neck, and underbelly seem to fit the crocodile reasonably well (41:12-13, 14-17, 22-23, 30).[243] At the same time, the description of it as a fire-breathing dragon before whom "the gods" recoil does not (41:18-21, 25),[244] unless, of course, such a phenomenon is relegated to poetic hyperbole. The difficulty of capturing or killing such a terrifying creature is obvious (41:1-2, 7, 13b, 26-29). Fishhooks and ropes seem quite inadequate (41:2), not to mention harpoons (41:7, 29b), arrows (41:28a), sling stones (41:28b) or clubs (41:29a). Even if captured, to assume that such a being would plead for mercy seems absurd (41:3). It is altogether untamable (41:4-5) and useless for barter (41:6). No one who has come near such a ferocious creature and lived to tell about it would ever do so again (41:8)! Just the sight of it is so intimidating that any hope of bringing it to heel vanishes (41:9). It would be sheer madness to attempt to stand against it (41:10).

The meaning of 41:11a in the larger context is not immediately clear. Literally, the Hebrew text reads, "Who has encountered me and I repaid?" while the LXX reads, "Who will resist me and endure?" Is this intended as a verbal challenge from Leviathan, or more likely, is it an interlude describing the voice of God, suggesting that if it is complete folly to stir up Leviathan, then it is even greater folly to oppose God? Translators have offered both literal (so KJV, RV, RSV, JPS, NAB, NASB, ESV, NET, NLT) and dynamic equivalent renderings, ranging from, "Who has a claim against me that I must repay?" (so NIV, NIB) to "Who has ever attacked him with impunity? (so NJB) to "Who can confront it and be safe?" (so NRSV). The second line in 41:11b clearly seems to be the voice of God, who emphatically asserts that he owns every creature in the universe, Leviathan included.

Its "hard heart" possibly refers to the difficulty of finding a way to penetrate

---

[242] Leviathan, called Lotan in Ugaritic texts, was "slain" by either Mot, the god of death, or Anath, the goddess of war and love. While there is some evidence of crocodiles as far north as the streams of Palestine, the general references outside the Bible are mythological, cf. Pope, pp. 329-331.

[243] In 41:13, the creature's hide is described as פְּנֵי לְבוּשׁוֹ לְכֶפֶל (= "face of a double garment"), which several English Versions link with another word in the LXX and render as "double armor" (so RSV, NRSV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NIB, NJB, NLT). The critical word in the MT is רֶסֶן (= "bridle"), and if this reading is accepted, as it is by several versions (so KJV, RV, ESV, JPS), then the question concerns who can control Leviathan? However, the LXX reads θώραξ (= "breastplate"), apparently reading סִרְיוֹן instead of רֶסֶן, and other versions follow this lead for contextual reasons. The underbelly in 41:30 is described as חַדּוּדֵי חָרֶשׂ (= jagged potsherds).

[244] The KJV "neesings" in 41:18 is archaic for sneezing. The verb תָּהֶל אוֹר (= "flashing light") describes the vapor from the creature's exhalations, and its eyes are depicted as כְּעַפְעַפֵּי־שָׁחַר (= "like the eyelids of the dawn"), comparing its eyes with the red blaze of the rising sun (see 3:9). In 41:19, לַפִּידִים (= "torches") stream from its mouth along with כִּידוֹדֵי אֵשׁ (= "sparks of fire"). In 41:20, smoke pours out like vapor from a boiling pot or [burning] reeds (most translators add words like "burning" due to context). His breath in 41:21 is גֶּחָלִים תְּלַהֵט (= "blazing coals") and לַהַב (= "blade" or "flame"). For the reference to "the gods" in 41:25, see Footnote #246.

its thick hide to strike a fatal blow (41:24).[245] When it is aroused, the “gods” recoil in terror (41:25).[246] Its thrashing about leaves a sheen on the surface of the deep (41:31-32).[247] It is unrivaled in fearlessness and pride (41:33-34).[248]

So, what is the point in this long and elaborate description of such a fearsome and exotic creature? On the one hand, whether he is a mythological construct of a supernatural (though created) being or a crocodile, at least the major point surely is that he was quite beyond either Job’s ken or control. He represents the unfathomable, one of the wonders of God’s creation that defy explanation. By analogy, Job himself must be content in not knowing. There is mystery in the Almighty’s creation that cannot be entirely explained or unpacked by limited humans, and they must admit these limitations. What is true in terms of God and the created world is equally true in terms of moral and ethical categories. Job must trust in the character of the sovereign God, whether or not he can fully understand why things happen as they do. Though God takes Job on this extended tour of the created world, climaxing with the awesome Leviathan, at no point does he stoop to explain why Job’s tragedy occurred. Rather, he invites Job to trust in his power and character.

On the other hand, if the interpreter is willing to see in Leviathan (and Behemoth) the embodiment of a supernatural creature representing the chaotic powers of evil, and indeed, as a creature that elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is in opposition to God and can be taken down by God (cf. Is. 27:1; Ps. 74:14; Rv. 12:10; 19:19-20; 20:10), then the description of Leviathan takes on a deeper significance. In this case, it affirms that God is in control of those “principalities and powers” that oppose him, even the invisible spiritual powers that intrude into the fractured world of humans. There is no explanation about why God allows this evil to continue, so again, the principle lesson is one of trust without full comprehension. Still, it is trust at the deepest level. Only God can turn the power of evil upon itself, changing “ashes into beauty” (cf. Is. 61:3), and in the end, this reversal will come full circle for Job as well.

Does Leviathan represent the *satan* at the opening of the book? God does not say. Indeed, had he done so, much of the lesson for Job would have remained

---

[245] Lit., its heart is “just like cast stone.” The lower millstone, as opposed to the upper, would be the larger and heavier of the two. One is tempted to read the “hard heart” as fearlessness or a lack of compassion, but in the context of other physical descriptions, it seems more likely to refer to the difficulty of dealing this creature a death blow.

[246] Usually, we would understand the word אֵלִים in 41:25 to refer to the gods, and if, as has been suggested, Leviathan should be understood in a mythological sense, then rendering this word as “gods” makes perfect sense (so NRSV, NAB). Many English Versions, however, emend this word to אילים (as per the footnoted suggestion in the BHS), linking it with the word אַיִל (= “man of power”) and translating it as “the mighty,” which extracts from the passage any mythological nuance.

[247] Lit., “behind it he causes a shining path”

[248] Lit., “king over all the sons of pride”

unlearned, for if the fundamental lesson was one of complete trust, then it was not one of complete comprehension. Still, in taking a tour of the created world, Job observed enough of God’s sovereignty and creative majesty to warrant his trust in the midst of the things he could not understand. Especially, concerning Leviathan, it was a matter of trust in God’s sovereignty over this fearsome creature, however intimidating he might be. Therefore, it was wonderful for Job to be able to commit into the hands of an Almighty God the things he could not understand and could not change. Job was not able to manage the universe, but God could! Many centuries later, this same wisdom would be framed by an early Christian, who wrote: “But we know that to the ones who love God, he works all things for the good, to the ones called according to his purpose” (cf. Ro. 8:28). The point for St. Paul as well as for Job was not in the things he knew, but in the One he knew, and for Job, this would be sufficient.

Job’s Final Response (42:1-6)

The reader now comes to Job’s final response to Yahweh. His tour of the unfathomable natural world, the unexplainable animal world, and finally, the two formidable creatures of the moral/spiritual world have expanded Job’s horizons far beyond what he possibly could have imagined. He understands all too clearly that as a limited, finite human, he could never measure up to the task of governing the universe. God alone can do this, and humans, like himself, must be prepared to leave this governance in the all-powerful hands of God. The universe is both wonderful and terrible, and God, its Creator, is both all-powerful and all-wise. Still, in this widening expansion of his horizons, Job also has come to realize that God is mystery, and it was not his place to unpack this mystery. While Job did not discover the back story of his own tragedy nor the reason God had not yet adjudicated the gross injustices in the world, he has discovered God himself! That God would deign to speak to him, even in the midst of his suffering, reassured him that God was not aloof, and in a dim foreshadowing of the gospel, he realized that he could know God in the fellowship of suffering.

It is in view of all this that Job confesses, “I know that you are able [to do] everything, and no purpose of yours can be restrained” (42:1-2).[249] To Yahweh’s penetrating question, “Who is this concealing counsel without knowledge?” (cf. 38:2), Job now responds, “Therefore I declared [what] I did not discern, [things] too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (42:3)! This *Niphal* participle of the verb

---

[249] Virtually all translators follow the *Qere* reading here (יָדַעְתִּי = “I know”) rather than the *Ketiv* reading (יָדַעְתָּ = “you know”), see Footnote #76. The KJV rendering of the final phrase, “*no* thought can be withholden from thee,” which takes the word מְזִמָּה to mean “thought,” is too weak. Rather, the word indicates “plan” or “purpose” (cf. Je. 23:20).

פָּלָא (= "to be marvelous, extraordinary"), which is used similarly in Psalm 131:1, accentuates the positive. Job has been set free from the narrow confines of his former worldview. The *satan's* slanderous prediction that Job would curse God to his face (cf. 1:11; 2:5) has been proved absolutely false! Twice Yahweh had demanded that Job hear him and be prepared to answer (42:4; cf. 38:3; 40:7), and earlier Job had refused (cf. 40:4-5). Now, Job is willing to speak, for he realizes that his former knowledge of God was only comparable to a dim rumor, but now he has seen the Lord (42:5)! His vision of God is not physical, of course, but that makes it no less real and no less personal. God has spoken, and Job has listened! His doubts have now vanished, and his understanding of God has risen to a new height. In view of all this, Job now retracts his former doubtful ruminations and bows in deep reverence (42:6).[250] The *Niphal* form of the verb נָחַם (= "to be sorry"), which commonly is translated as "repent," can also mean "to be consoled," but in either case, it should not be taken in the sense of penitence. Job is not here confessing sin.[251] He is frankly and fully recognizing his limitations as a man of "dust and ashes" (an idiom for human mortality, cf. Ge. 18:27), while gratefully accepting the comfort brought to him by the voice of God.

God's Rebuke of Job's Friends (42:7-9)

In neither of his long speeches did Yahweh reference any of the arguments of Job's friends, but he does so now. He addresses Eliphaz, presumably the oldest of the trio (cf. 15:10, see Footnote #80), but includes the others as well (42:7), and he bluntly assesses their contributions as failures. Ironically, all of the friends condemned Job, implying that God's anger was turned against him. Now, at the end, it is Yahweh who is angry at them![252] It was not, of course, that his friends did not say many things that were true, or for that matter, that everything Job said was correct. Rather, their conclusion that sin is immediately punished while righteousness is immediately rewarded—their cause-and-effect theology, which they then applied to Job's case—was absolutely wrong. They had argued that Job brought this tragedy on himself, and this was certainly not the case. Indeed, Job had spoken what was "right" about God, and whatever else this might mean, it must surely include his unwavering trust in a Redeemer who would someday "stand upon the earth," and by implication, right the wrongs of the world (cf. 19:25-27). Job also had asserted that God was fully aware of him, using this experience to refine him in

---

[250] The verb מָאַס (= "to reject" or "despise") in 42:6 has no object, so the reader must supply an object. Many English Versions add the word "myself" (so RV, KJV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NET, NIV, NIB), some supply "my words" or something comparable (so JPS, NAB, NJB, NLT), and at least one leaves it without an object (so NASB).

[251] A more typical word for turning from sin would be שׁוּב, which is not used here.

[252] The Hebrew idiom literally is "my nose has become hot against you" (see Footnote #168)!

the fire of suffering, and as the sovereign God, he would complete his work in Job (cf. 23:10, 13-14). In this, Job was quite right as well!

The deepest irony, of course, is that God now demanded of Job's friends that they suffer the ultimate ignominy, going to Job so that he might offer a sacrifice and prayer in their behalf for their folly (42:8)! The large size of the sacrifice suggests the enormity of their error. Still, they did so, and God accepted Job's gracious prayer in their behalf (42:9).

No mention is made at all of Elihu. It raises the question as to whether God's silence means Elihu was reasonably correct (or at least less offensive than the others), or that he experienced the ultimate dismissal as a theological fly-weight. Given his pomposity and tendency to expound at great length on rather obvious truisms, the latter option seems more likely.

The Restoration (42:10-17)

After Job's generous prayer, God turned about his ordeal, doubly restoring what he had lost in the invisible contest with the *satan* (42:10). That his ordeal is regarded as an imprisonment or captivity accentuates that he had been oppressed by an enemy, and in this case, the ultimate enemy, who was the *satan*,[253] though the behind-the-scenes activity in the heavenlies still remained unknown to Job. Still, Job's restoration does not spring from his acknowledgment of some hidden sin, since there was no hidden sin, but from his intercession in behalf of his three doubtful friends. His relatives and acquaintances now came to offer gifts and condolences in view of his great trial (42:11),[254] though it begs the question of where they were when he really needed them![255] That Yahweh is said to have brought upon Job this ordeal is only in keeping with the general viewpoint of the Hebrew Bible that all events derive either from God's direction or his permission, even those events that are considered "evil" or even those that come from the instigation of the *satan* (cf. 2 Sa. 24:1;1 Chr. 21:1).

The numbers of Job's livestock were doubled (42:12; cf. 1:3), which in turn lends a stereotypical character to the story. The number of his new children remained the same, and we should assume that his wife, mentioned briefly at the beginning,

---

[253] The phrase וַיהוָה שָׁב אֶת־שְׁבוּת (= "And Yahweh turned the imprisonment/captivity of Job...") is translated quite literally by the KJV, though most modern English Versions offer a dynamic equivalency, such as, "restored the fortunes," or something comparable. However, even though they are in idiomatic English, the dynamic equivalencies lose the emphasis of the line.

[254] The קְשִׂיטָה (= "an ingot of silver") is not a coin but a measurement of weight (unknown to us), cf. Ge. 33:19; Jos. 24:32. Coinage was invented much later, and according to Herodotus, in the second half of the 7th century BC.

[255] Some interpreters suggest that these gifts and visits should be taken as retrospective, which is to say, they happened during Job's ordeal and were the means by which he was restored, cf. Newsom, IV.635, but this seems doubtful in view of 19:13-15, where it describes Job as abandoned by his family.

was still with him (42:13; cf. 2:9).[256] His additional three daughters are singled out for their beauty and because Job included them in his inheritance rights, a feature generally counter-cultural in the patriarchal society of the ancient Near East (42:14-15).[257] Job lived out his life to the very old age of 140, the equivalent of two normal life-spans (cf. Ps. 90:10), and he lived long enough to see his great-great grandchildren (42:16-17).

The Septuagint offers a lengthy addendum about five verses that is absent in the Masoretic Text. It begins with the interesting line, "It is written, however, that he (i.e., Job) will rise again with those whom the Lord raises up," an apparent reference to 19:25-27. In this addendum, the LXX identifies Job as a descendent of Esau, locates him and his friends in Edom, gives a brief pedigree, names his wife as an Arabian, and describes Job as an Edomite king. The historical value of these comments is uncertain, and there is no reason to believe they were part of the original text of the book.[258]

The Answers of Jesus to Job

Later references in the Bible to Job are sparse, confined to one instance in the Old Testament (Eze. 14:14, 20) and one in the New (Ja. 5:11). Paul makes a passing reference to a line from Eliphaz (1 Co. 3:19; cf. Job 5:13), and he cites a line from one of Yahweh's monologues (Ro. 11:35; cf. Job 41:11). There are a number of allusions and verbal parallels which, while not direct quotations, surely demonstrate the familiarity of New Testament writers with the book.[259] Still, perhaps the most profound link in the New Testament with Job's ordeal comes not from quotations or even allusions, but rather, from implicit answers given by Christ to the searching questions and longings of Job.

The issues with which Job struggled are universal. His penetrating questions arising out of his profound experience of suffering are timeless. He moaned, longing that that his deep distress might be calculated (6:2-3). He puzzled over how it was even possible for a lowly human to confront a sovereign and holy God and be counted righteous (9:2, 14-20). He wondered if there was anyone in the whole universe who could legitimately arbitrate between human creatures and Almighty God, someone who, as it were, was capable of "laying his hand on us both," simultaneously putting one arm around God and the other around Job, so as to bring

---

[256] The form of the number "seven" in the Hebrew text for his additional sons is unusual. Typically, the number seven is שִׁבְעָה, as used in 1:2, but here it is שִׁבְעָנָה, which some have regarded as an ancient form of the dual, and hence, fourteen sons, cf. Dhorme, pp. 651ff.

[257] The names of the three daughters are Dove (יְמִימָה), Cinnamon (קְצִיעָה, cf. Ps. 45:8) and Mascara Bottle (קֶרֶן הַפּוּךְ, lit., "horn of eyepaint").

[258] For a full translation, see Pope, p. 354.

[259] For a listing of verbal parallels and allusions, see the index in *The Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed. (United Bible Societies).

them together (9:32-35). In his lowest moments, he even theorized about whether or not God allowed human suffering because he enjoyed it (10:3-4). More importantly, he wondered if God, because he longed for relationship with his creatures, might be willing to cover over their sins (14:16-17). He writhed over the issue of why there was such inequity in human suffering (21:23-26). He wrestled with God's silence in the face of such suffering (23:3-9; 30:20), and he opined that God had no apparent times for judgment, so that justice might be served (24:1). At the end, he passionately yearned for God to hear him (31:35).

Though Job could not have known it, these profound questions and deep longings would be answered in the incarnation of God's Son. *Does God understand human suffering?* Jesus was made like his human fellows in every respect; he suffered and was tested to the limit (He. 2:17-18). As the Servant of the Lord, he bore their griefs and carried their sorrows (Is. 53:4). *Could humans be righteous before an infinitely holy God?* Since they have been justified by faith, they now have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:1). They have been reconciled to God by the death of his Son, and much more, they shall be saved by his life (Ro. 5:10). *Is there a mediator who can fully relate to both God and human life?* There is one mediator between God and humans, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Ti. 2:5). *Does God somehow perversely enjoy human suffering?* Certainly not! The people of faith may confidently cast all their cares upon him, for he cares for them (1 Pe. 5:7). *Would God cover over human sin so that he might enjoy relationship with his creatures?* They have been given true fellowship, for the blood of Jesus cleanses them from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). Their fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 1:3). *But what about justice—will there be justice in the end?* When the Lord Jesus comes, he will "bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God" (1 Co. 4:5). *What, then, about the divine silence; would God ever speak?* "In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (He. 1:2). Even more, he is able to sympathize with humans in their weakness, inviting them near to the throne of grace, where they may assuredly receive mercy and find grace to help in their time of need (He. 4:15-16).

Perhaps the words of George MacDonald are as fitting a conclusion as can be found, when he wrote:

> *The Son of God suffered unto death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like his.*[260]

---

[260] Cited by C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*