

2017

# The Exoneration of Job: A Discussion of the Joban and Yahwistic Speeches

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## Recommended Citation

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OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

CARL GOODSON HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR THESIS

THE EXONERATION OF JOB:

A DISCUSSION OF THE JOBAN AND YAHWISTIC SPEECHES

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FALL SEMESTER 2016

## Introduction

The book of Job requires its reader to reckon with a rather weighty and unpleasant matter: suffering. Specifically the book speaks in the uniquely difficult setting of the suffering of the righteous. The history of mankind is testament to the inevitability of suffering in the lives of every individual and community. No one enjoys it, and no one is able to postpone its touch indefinitely; all will eventually drink from its cup. Frequently, suffering cannot be escaped, it can only be endured. That is precisely why it is critically important to see the wisdom shone in the book of Job concerning this dour part of life.

The story of Job is one *par excellence* to provide perspective on suffering. Job's character is established in the prosaic introductory portion of the book: he is seriously committed to Yahweh, fearing him—this is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7). This characterization of Job is attested by the narrator (Job 1:1), by Yahweh (Job 1:8; 2:3), and by the accuser (Job 1:9). It is clear that Job has done nothing to merit the calamity that befalls him. Yet for being “pure and upright, one who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8), calamity unimaginable falls upon Job. This paragon of devotion to Yahweh loses, in one fell swoop, his livestock, servants, and 10 children (Job 1:13-19), and is subsequently afflicted with, probably, a horribly disfiguring strain of leprosy. Surely, if anyone is acquainted with suffering, it is the righteous and stricken Job.

So what does Job do? The text recounts that, after losing his wealth and children, he holds fast to his integrity in devotion to Yahweh. The man mournfully cries out, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. May the name of the LORD be blessed!” (Job 1:21). The narrator assures the reader that, in his mourning, Job does not sin, nor does he charge God with moral impropriety (Job 1:22).

Job's response is effectively, "Yahweh may do as he pleases; may his name be blessed." Sadly for Job, the tragedy is not done; that is when he is stricken with a terrible disease, and his wife exhorts him to curse God and seek death. Though Job longs for death as a release from his suffering (Job 3), he refuses to compromise his integrity by cursing Yahweh. He rebukes his wife and rhetorically asks, "Should we receive what is good from God, and not also receive what is evil?" and the narrator again assures that Job does not sin by what he says (Job 2:10).

As is evident in the text, Job is begun with the titular character being established as the paragon of everything the tradition of Proverbs promises; he has lived a long and meaningful life that is filled with manifold blessings and is characterized by wisdom, righteousness, and equity. Very suddenly Job is thrust into an unthinkable situation. Seemingly accursed, he loses absolutely everything Lady Wisdom promises those who love her: the favor of God and mankind (Prov 3:4), material wealth (Prov 3:10), and sound sleep (Prov 3:24); instead, he receives everything promised to those who do not revere Yahweh: a whirlwind of dread and disaster (Prov 1:26-27), vulnerability (Prov 4:6), confusion (Prov 4:19), poverty (Prov 6:11), ill repute within the community (Prov 6:33), and harm (Prov 8:36). How can this be? That question plagues Job far worse than any of his physical losses; throughout the book the reader observes Job mournfully and futilely trying to comprehend his enigmatic circumstances, to fit together the seemingly incongruent puzzle pieces of conviction and experience—"Yahweh is almighty, just, and good, yet I, though blameless, am nevertheless stricken by heaven." Refusing to relinquish either piece of the puzzle, Job repeatedly and varyingly wrestles with each in an attempt to fully know that he yet has Yahweh's favor.

This study aims to determine whether Job, staunchly established as innocent in the prosaic introduction of the book, maintains his blamelessness throughout the lengthy poetic

corpus. The speeches of the dominant characters, Job and Yahweh, will be examined in order to determine whether Job is in the end exonerated by Yahweh's poetic words despite the harsh statements made in the man's own speeches.

## Job's Speeches

### **Job 3**

Job 3 is the beginning of the book's lengthy poetic corpus (Job 3:1-42:6), and its opening words immediately seize the reader's attention. Job, a paragon of wisdom and devotion to Yahweh, has lost his wealth, family, and health in two consecutive annihilating waves. Cursing Yahweh because of the calamity that has befallen him, Job has hitherto resisted, though respectively predicted and urged to do so by the accuser and his wife (1:11; 2:5, 9), and, just at the end of chapter 2, he is seen painfully mourning, accompanied by his friends (2:13). Though clinging to his integrity, the man is devastated. Suddenly 3:1 reads, "After this Job opened his mouth and cursed . . .,"<sup>1</sup> and the reader is horrified Job is about to sin against Yahweh, but then the verse ends with, ". . . the day he was born," and the reader breathes a complicated sigh of relief.<sup>2</sup> Thereby does the already compelling book of Job increase in complexity.

Chapter 3 may be classified as a curse-lament divided into three sections: heading (vv. 1-2), curse (vv. 3-10), and lament (vv. 11-26). This speech is quite special and complex; in it, Job powerfully expresses his longing to be immediately relieved of his suffering. This sounds similar to a common lament, whereby a worshiper implores Yahweh to deliver him from trouble, but this is something else entirely. Job does not merely request Yahweh's assistance in his time of woe; he begs to have his very existence annihilated.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations of Scripture in this paper are taken from the NET, unless noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The complication of the reader's relief is due to the avoidance of doing evil (not cursing Yahweh), which is certainly good, and the gravity of cursing the day of birth, which, though not an act of evil, is certainly troubling.

<sup>3</sup> John E. Hartley, *Job*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), 88-89.

Job's bemoaning of his existence is two-pronged; he deplores the day of his birth (vv. 3a, 4-5) and the night of his conception (vv. 3b, 6-7).<sup>4</sup> Job fuses these two times (v. 3), and links them together as the two inseparable components of the inception of his existence.<sup>5</sup> He wishes enchanters<sup>6</sup> (v. 8) to prevent the dawning of that day (v. 9) because it allowed him life and trouble (v. 10).<sup>7</sup> The motivations for this curse, deeper than the surface sheer horror of his lot, lie in the painful questions about his being permitted to live in order to suffer so terribly (vv. 11-12) and his inability to be at peace (v. 13).<sup>8</sup> Rather than remain in such a hostile relationship with Yahweh, Job would rather have never come into existence.

The tone of this speech is uncommonly gruesome. Job's curse is rife with thematic traces of anti-creation, chaos, and destruction.<sup>9</sup> In the ancient Near East (ANE) it was held that the ongoing dawning of days was a continuation of the first creative acts of divinity.<sup>10</sup> Creation was considered, in sum, to be the divine ordering and invigorating of chaos, "an unorganized and lifeless mass of water overshadowed by total darkness."<sup>11</sup> Craving to be made utterly nonexistent, Job expresses his desire that the day of birth be erased, the creative process that formed it undone, and reclaimed by primordial chaos-darkness.<sup>12</sup> Antithetical to Yahweh's

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Here, "enchanters" refers to any beings allegedly able to perform powerful incantations against the cosmic creative process. See also John H. Walton, *Job*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 120-123.

<sup>7</sup> Hartley, 92.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also Walton, 120.

<sup>11</sup> Hartley, 91.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

decree, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3), Job cries out, “That day—let it be darkness!” (v. 4a).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, he calls for the night of his conception to be taken by darkness, that moment of fertility be blotted out and rendered sterile in the primeval void (vv. 6-7).<sup>14</sup>

Embittered with the prospect of his beginning being irrevocably regarded by Yahweh, Job morosely considers the question about his living beyond birth (vv. 11-12, 16) only to crave and be denied the peace he deems only death able to bring (vv. 13-15, 17-19). Job wishes he had died at birth (vv. 11-12) or been stillborn (v. 16) because he considers the existence of those in Sheol to be preferable to his languishing in his current trouble (vv. 13-15, 17-19). This view of the nether realm of the dead is uncharacteristically positive;<sup>15</sup> Sheol is typically described as a dark place where Yahwistic worship doesn’t occur (Ps 6:5), a gloomy locale absent of all which makes life meaningful: work, planning, knowledge, wisdom, and so on. (Ecc 9:10b).<sup>16</sup> However, Job focuses on the permanent cessation of all earthly struggles for all the dead. In Sheol, he would be asleep with the great men, who are at peace though their palaces are now desolate and their past riches are gone, and the least of men, who are now relaxing free from all task and toil (vv. 13-15, 17-19). This unwholesome preference for death over life provides a somber look into the loathsome nature of Job’s trouble.

Against the background of dark Sheol portrayed idyllically, Job turns to complaining about the brutal misery of life (vv. 20-26). He bitterly wonders why Yahweh gives life and hides death from those miserable people who would rejoice at death and exult over a final end to their

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 92. See also Walton, 119.

<sup>14</sup> Hartley, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Walton, 123.

<sup>16</sup> “Sheol,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 1520-1522.



agony (vv. 20-22). Narrowing his focus to himself,<sup>17</sup> Job complains that his tragic circumstances have cut away all meaning and purpose for his life, yet he continues to live (v. 23a)<sup>18</sup>, and Yahweh has isolated him from all aid (v. 23b).<sup>19</sup>

Job concludes this horribly wonderful speech by complaining that his restless existence (v. 26) is filled with sighs and groanings (v. 24).<sup>20</sup> He mourns that what he has long dreaded has occurred (v. 25). Given his characterization as a man careful to revere Yahweh, it is probable that what Job has feared befalling him is the loss of his Lord's favor.<sup>21</sup>

## **Job 6-7**

Job's second speech succeeds the first speech of Eliphaz the Temanite (ch. 4-5). In response to Job's curse-lament (ch. 3), Eliphaz explains Job's adversity as a case of Yahweh's retribution for Job's sin and folly.<sup>22</sup> This prompts Job's speech, which is two-pronged; he responds to the friends (ch. 6) and he addresses Yahweh (ch. 7).<sup>23</sup>

First, in his address to the friends (ch. 6), Job powerfully cries out because of his anguish, and wants the friends to consider his grief (vv. 2-13). Job says that his misery is beyond measure

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<sup>17</sup> Hartley, 99.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Job's phrasing here is an ironic twist of the accuser's words recorded earlier in the book (1:10). The accuser asserted that Yahweh had given Job unhindered success by placing a protective hedge around the man. Job complains that Yahweh has hedged him in in order to block any aid from reaching him.

<sup>20</sup> Hartley holds that "shrieks" is a better candidate for translation of the Hebrew word than "sighs."

<sup>21</sup> Walton, 124. Job seems to almost equate his wealth, family, and health with Yahweh's favor. This is understandable, but it is also not precisely correct. Job is no longer experiencing Yahweh's favor (in losing all that he had), which is likely a part of what he feared, but the reader is certain that Job is still looked upon favorably by heaven's eyes—though this reality is unknown to Job.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel J. Estes, *Job*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 29-31, 35-37.

<sup>23</sup> Hartley, 130.

(vv. 2-3) because Yahweh has set himself against Job and is bringing him affliction (v. 4). Job goes on to bemoan his deprivation (vv. 5-7).<sup>24</sup> He proceeds to again call out for death (vv.8-13). Beginning a theme, Job expresses again his longing for death as a release from his suffering (vv. 8-10). Concluding this section of the speech, Job deplores his afflicted state by utilization of a series of rhetorical questions (vv. 11-13)<sup>25</sup> that elaborate his inability to escape or improve his doom—he can only suffer.<sup>26</sup>

Second, in his address to the friends, Job speaks out, wanting them to consider him—as a person—and their treatment of him (vv. 14-30). Job accusingly compares the friends to *wadis*, streambeds in the wilderness that are dry during much of the year, but become fast-flowing with water after a rain (vv. 15-21).<sup>27</sup> The point to this barbed simile is that the friends, like the wadis, are not a reliable source of support,<sup>28</sup> and Job bitterly points out that they have no cause for dealing with him in such a way, for he has asked of them only kindness (v. 14)<sup>29</sup>—nothing of monetary value (v. 22) or of great sacrifice of trouble (v. 23) is ever requested of them. The friends have hitherto assumed that Job must be guilty of sinning against heaven (4:7; 5:17), and with that deduction Job is unsatisfied.<sup>30</sup> He urges the friends to make known to him what he has

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<sup>24</sup> Estes, 39; Elmer B. Smick, “Job,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 675-921; Hartley, 132-133. Precisely of what Job is being deprived is not clear. Estes and Smick hold he is being deprived of wholesome counsel and comfort, i.e., the friends’ words are worthless. Hartley holds that Job is deprived of abundance, i.e., his soul recoils at his misfortune.

<sup>25</sup> Hartley, 135.

<sup>26</sup> Smick, 738.

<sup>27</sup> Estes, 38-39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> The NET translates *hesed* as “kindness,” and that is certainly a critical part of understanding the meaning behind the word; Job undoubtedly wants kindness shown by the friends. The word means, in sum, “covenantal love.”

<sup>30</sup> Walton, 163.

done to merit such grievous treatment from Yahweh (v. 24),<sup>31</sup> and charges them with cruelty (vv. 26-27)—the kind of cruelty that would even “gamble for the fatherless, and auction off [a] friend” (v. 27), that is, treat the helpless as merely a means to secure payment for a debt.<sup>32</sup>

Job concludes by urging the friends to reconsider their judgment against him (vv. 28-30). He desperately wants them, with boldness, honesty, and understanding, to face him in all his loathsomeness (v. 28), for he is indeed a person in the right.<sup>33</sup> Job craves for the friends to reach out and acknowledge him for what he is, to not reject or dismiss him as a sinner, fool, or liar (vv. 29-30).

The last half of Job’s second speech (7:1-21) is directed at Yahweh.<sup>34</sup> In language reminiscent of Ecclesiastes,<sup>35</sup> the lament proper<sup>36</sup> unfolds and Job mourns the harsh brevity of life (vv. 1-10). He bemoans the harsh plight of humankind: the servant labors, longing for a brief time of relaxation (v. 2a) and the hired man anticipates even meager wages (v. 2b).<sup>37</sup> Those existences are hard, but Job asserts that his own lot is worse; the slave is able to enjoy the coolness of the coming shade and the hireling looks forward to using his wage to purchase bread

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<sup>31</sup> Hartley, 140. It is unclear, in 6:25, whether Job is recognizing his own words, though truthful, as troublingly difficult or accusing the friends of hardheartedly speaking truths at him. Both are certainly the case.

<sup>32</sup> Estes, 40-41.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. See also Hartley, 141.

<sup>34</sup> Having just beseeched the friends to face him (6:28a), Job suddenly turns to address Yahweh in chapter 7; this is somewhat ironic.

<sup>35</sup> Walton, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Hartley, 142.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

for his family, but Job cannot find any respite from his hardship.<sup>38</sup> Job has been appointed<sup>39</sup> “months of futility and nights of sorrow” (v. 3); nights of tossing and turning yield him no rest (v. 4); the disease he was stricken with absolutely ravages his skin and body (v. 5). Bitterly Job calls his loathsome and agonizingly fast-passing life “hopeless” (v. 6).<sup>40</sup> After this, in asking Yahweh to remember him, Job petitions Yahweh to act favorably toward him so that his fleeting life, currently worthless, does not pass without meaning (vv. 7-10); Job does not want to die without ever again experiencing the good things in life.<sup>41</sup>

As the lament proper ends, the complaint against Yahweh begins (vv. 11-16).<sup>42</sup> Job proclaims his readiness to voice his anguish in an unbridled manner (v. 11). Rhetorically and sarcastically Job asks Yahweh, “Am I the sea, or the creature of the deep, that you must put me under guard?” (v. 12). Obviously Job is not a chaotic monster, but he feels as if Yahweh is treating him as if he were heaven’s cosmic foe.<sup>43</sup> Evidencing this, Job complains that Yahweh has so tormented him, even robbing him of restful and forgetful sleep (vv. 13-14), that he would prefer a violent and choking death over life (v. 15). Voicing his utter loathing of life (v. 16a), Job requests that Yahweh “leave him alone, for [his] days are *hebel*” (v. 16b). This description of life as *hebel* is familiar to readers of Ecclesiastes (cf. Eccl 1:2; 12:8). The word has an extensive semantic range: “meaningless,” “futile,” “fleeting,” and “enigmatic;”<sup>44</sup> all of those translations

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Hartley notes that this phrasing indicates that Yahweh has determined Job’s grim fate.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>44</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O’Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 194.

are here contextually appropriate and fitting. Job feels that his life is quickly passing (v. 6) and his purpose is obscure to him (3:23), and his existence is therefore pointless (7:3).

Concluding his speech, Job parodies the psalmist; he asks Yahweh, “What is mankind that you make so much of them, and that you pay attention to them? And that you visit them every morning, and try them every moment?” (vv. 17-18; cf. Pss 8:4-5; 144:3-4). The regard of Yahweh that enraptured the psalmist only deepens Job’s misery, for he feels he is being placed under surveillance and oppressive judgment against every minute flaw.<sup>45</sup> Continuing to question Yahweh, Job asks him to look away from him for even a bit of time (v. 19). Job, wishing to be left alone rather than be left to suffer in such a hostile relationship with Yahweh, concludes by begging Yahweh to forgive him of whatever he is being punished for, and to do it quickly, for he feels he is near death (vv. 20-21).<sup>46</sup>

## **Job 9-10**

Succeeding the first speech of Bildad the Shuhite (ch. 8), Job begins his third speech (ch. 9-10). In response to Job’s second speech, Bildad waxes analytical on the justice of Yahweh, but he does so in a manner so callous and cold that he even explained the deaths of Job’s children (1:18-19) as a natural consequence of their own iniquity (8:4).<sup>47</sup> The response by Job is, again, two-pronged; he makes known his inner thoughts (ch. 9)<sup>48</sup> and he prays to Yahweh (ch. 10).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hartley, 150-151.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>47</sup> Estes, 50-51, 53-54. See also Smick, 742.

<sup>48</sup> Hartley, 165. See also Estes, 56. It is unclear whom Job is addressing in chapter 9. Given the third-person references to Yahweh, one can be fairly certain that this is not a prayer. It is possible to read chapter 9 as either an address to the friends or a soliloquy.

<sup>49</sup> Estes, 56, 62.

Given Bildad's focus on Yahweh's justice, it is fitting that Job's speech be preoccupied with what he currently wants most: to be justified by Yahweh.<sup>50</sup> Job begins by voicing his concurrence with Bildad's assertions of heaven's justice (9:2); though aggrieved, Job affirms that Yahweh is just. In his tormented mind, accompanied by his zeal for being declared righteous, Job ponders how this dispute between him and Yahweh might be settled.<sup>51</sup> Two options he considers: disputes might be settled in a court case where the winner is frequently he who can articulate most persuasively and refute arguments so completely that his opponent is unable to respond; disputes might also be settled between two parties by way of a wrestling match, wherein the victor is he who is strongest. In both scenarios would Yahweh prove to be the greater and Job the lesser.<sup>52</sup> Recognizing that it is futile to contend with heaven (v. 3), Job presents a hymn (vv. 4-13) that extols the indomitable wisdom and power of Yahweh. Most notably, in verse 13, Job notes that Yahweh is the vanquisher of the helpers of Rahab, that is, the forces of chaos. Wise beyond opposition (v. 4), sudden and terrible in judgment (vv. 5-9),<sup>53</sup> unstoppable in deed and mysterious in thought (vv. 10-11), and answerable to no man (v. 12), Yahweh is the transcendent and immanent Creator who crushes the chaotic monsters arrayed against him the deeps.

If the cosmic forces of disorder cannot face Yahweh, then Job rhetorically asks how he can possibly do so (v. 14). At the point of insistence of innocence and recognition of divine supremacy, Job considers the few options left to him (vv. 15-21).<sup>54</sup> If Yahweh were to answer

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>51</sup> Hartley, 166-167.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>53</sup> Estes, 57-58. See also Walton, 167-171.

<sup>54</sup> Estes, 58.

Job's call to him, then Job would be unable to answer Yahweh's call to him in turn (v. 15b);<sup>55</sup> the only course he could pursue would be to beg for mercy (v. 15c). Job further ponders what would happen if Yahweh were to answer the summons, and he bitterly speculates that his God would not truly listen to the grievances (v. 16).<sup>56</sup> In a verse full of poetic irony, Job complains that Yahweh is the one who "crushes with a tempest, and multiplies wounds for no reason" (v. 17).<sup>57</sup>

Resuming his complaint, Job says Yahweh allows him no rest and fills him with bitterness (v. 18). Job bemoans the impossibility of forcing Yahweh to declare him blameless; he is utterly powerless (v. 20) and Yahweh is beyond reproach (v. 19).<sup>58</sup> Accepting his dire lot in life, Job bitterly resigns himself to it (v. 21).<sup>59</sup> Wallowing in his anguish, Job angrily reckons all the world's evils to Yahweh, for no one is mightier than he (vv. 22-24).<sup>60</sup> This non-normative concept of Yahweh wantonly judging the righteous and the unrighteous with the same scourge reveals the depth of the pit of horror in which Job has fallen; still clinging to his integrity and the omnipotence of Yahweh, in the throes of pain, Job, half-blinded, reaches troubling conclusions.

Thinking that Yahweh will never deign to answer, and being incapable of facing Yahweh even if he would appear, Job laments the inescapable hopelessness of his situation (9:25-35).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> It is noteworthy that this is precisely what occurs in the book's conclusion: Yahweh answers the summons, and Job is unable to answer in turn (38:1-42:6).

<sup>56</sup> Hartley, 176.

<sup>57</sup> Estes, 58. See also Hartley, 176. At the beginning of the book, Yahweh tells the accuser he stirred him up to destroy Job without reason (2:3), as Job here complains. At the end of the book, it is through a tempest that Yahweh speaks to Job and brings final closure to him.

<sup>58</sup> Estes, 58.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Smick, 750.

<sup>61</sup> Hartley, 179.

Job first bemoans the rapid passing of his life (vv. 25-26); though the painful moments pass ever so slowly, he feels he is soon to die without ever again experiencing happiness.<sup>62</sup> These twin banes Job cannot forget or throw off (v. 27): the dreadful reality of his sufferings (v. 28a), and the sinking feeling that Yahweh does not consider him blameless (v. 28b). Job describes any attempt to present himself as righteous before Yahweh, who deems him guilty, to be *hebel*, that is, futile or in vain (v. 29).<sup>63</sup> In Job's mind, it is as if he were to cleanse himself with the strongest agents (v. 30), then Yahweh would but plunge him into a mire-pit of slime (v. 31);<sup>64</sup> nothing he does will be met with the approval of heaven. This is so because, at this point, Job fears Yahweh with a deep dread (vv. 34-35), and there is no way to effectively bring Yahweh and him together (vv. 32-33).

Having exposed his innermost thoughts (ch. 9), Job now turns to Yahweh in earnest and emotional prayer (ch. 10). In his misery he will not be silent (10:1). Begging for the contending between him and Yahweh to cease (v. 2), Job rhetorically asks Yahweh if it gives him pleasure to oppress his devoted servant while smiling on the sins of the wicked (v. 3).<sup>65</sup> This leads into a succession of rhetorical questions by Job that probe the limits, or, more correctly, the lack thereof, of Yahweh (vv. 4-7);<sup>66</sup> the point behind this questioning is that Job knows that the all-wise and limitless Yahweh knows he is innocent, and he is yet despised.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>64</sup> Estes, 59-60.

<sup>65</sup> Smick, 751.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Estes, 63.



Job goes on to declare to Yahweh how he feels about the treatment he has received from heaven (vv. 8-12). As a potter carefully forms a vessel, so Yahweh made Job but now wantonly destroys him (vv. 8-9); the favorable treatment he previously experienced at Yahweh's hands is no more (vv. 10-12).<sup>68</sup> Job then sorrowfully speaks his mind: it doesn't seem to matter whether he is guilty or innocent, for Yahweh is determined to ruin him (vv. 13-17).<sup>69</sup> Faced with this horrible thought, Job renews his previous wishes for non-existence and death (vv. 18-22). In effect, Job asks Yahweh, "If you are so intent on destroying me, then why did you even create me?" (vv. 18-19). Here Job wrestles with both the desire to dialogue with Yahweh about all that has happened and to be granted the relief of death. Resigned, Job concludes the prayer, effectively, by saying to Yahweh, "You have succeeded in ruining me, now, leave me alone to die" (vv. 20-22).

### **Job 12-14**

The fourth speech of Job (ch. 12-14) succeeds the first speech of Zophar the Naamathite (ch. 11), and it concludes the first speech cycle between Job and each of the three friends (ch. 3-14). Rife with insensitivity, Zophar's response transparently communicates that he considers Job to be a foolish sinner whom Yahweh would bless anew if the man would only repent.<sup>70</sup> Though longer than his previous speeches, Job's fourth response follows the same two-pronged approach: he addresses the friends (12:1-13:19) and he addresses Yahweh (13:20-14:22).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hartley, 186-187.

<sup>69</sup> Smick, 751.

<sup>70</sup> Estes, 68. Zophar's conclusions regarding Job and Yahweh (and, implicitly, himself) are revealed to fall short of heaven's standard at the end of the book, when Yahweh concludes speaking to Job (42:7-8).

<sup>71</sup> Estes, 74.

The friends have hitherto spoken to Job<sup>72</sup> in such a way that it is obvious they think themselves wise,<sup>73</sup> so Job answers their haughty aloofness with sarcasm (12:1-2) and asserts that, contrary to their scornful remarks, he indeed has understanding (v. 3). Bemoaning his experience, Job complains about the derision he, a blameless one, has received and the obvious proofs of the lack of infallibility of the retribution principle,<sup>74</sup> that is, the prospering of the unrighteous (vv. 4-6).

As the conjunction “but” indicates, Job moves on to a new subject.<sup>75</sup> The remainder of the chapter is devoted to extolling the wisdom (vv. 7-11) and power (vv. 14-25) of Yahweh. The first set of verses present the idea that the Creator has displayed his skill and wisdom through his creation, and from this display may man learn. Rhetorically Job then asks, “Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” (v. 12). The answer is, of course, affirmative, and Job’s point is that Yahweh is the wisest of all, for he is the most aged and long-lived.<sup>76</sup> This anticipated answer is made plain in verse 13: “With God are wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his;” this verse also transitions the focus from Yahweh’s wisdom to his power. The final set of verses present Yahweh as the omnipotent God who is indomitable in will. Subject to him are all things and persons (vv. 14-16); Yahweh is sovereign over all, from the least and the darkness to the greatest and the light. But with this wisdom and power, Yahweh,

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<sup>72</sup> The three friends have not truly spoken *with* Job, rather, they have spoken orthodox truths insensitively *at or to* Job, who is in desperate need of comfort and awareness of his pain.

<sup>73</sup> Hartley, 205-206.

<sup>74</sup> The three friends assume the absolute validity of the retribution principle, which is, simply stated, *the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer*. See J. H. Walton and Tremper Longman III, *How To Read Job* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 89.

<sup>75</sup> Hartley, 208-209.

<sup>76</sup> Hartley goes so far as to say that Job refers to Yahweh explicitly as “the Aged One” and “the Long-Lived One” in verse 12. See Hartley, 210-213.

according to Job in his exquisite agony, almost cruelly works difficulty and fashions hardship into the human world.

This is what Job knows to be true, so the friends ought to now be satisfied that he is not some lesser fool (13:1-2). Reaching the end of his patience with the friends, Job expresses his desire to speak and argue, not with them, but with Yahweh (v. 3). Calling the friends worthless (v. 4), Job effectively tells them to be quiet (v. 5) and listen (v. 6). Perhaps anticipating the friends' lack of acquiescence to his request for their silence, Job urges them to be more eager to consider what Yahweh would say *to them* and less eager to consider what they would say *for Yahweh* (vv. 7-13). Having said this, Job prepares himself, in the friends' hearing, to address the God he just described in 12:7-25 (13:14-19).<sup>77</sup>

Eager to speak with and argue his case before Yahweh (13:3), Job first asks to be spared from two things so that the meeting between him and Yahweh may take place: the removal of heaven's afflicting hand and the cessation of Yahweh's terror (vv. 20-21).<sup>78</sup> If these conditions are met, then Job feels confident he can either answer Yahweh's call or call Yahweh to answer his (v. 22). Job then asks to be made aware of the evils because of which Yahweh is afflicting him (v. 23); he proceeds to ask Yahweh, "Why do you hide your face and regard me as your enemy?" (v. 24). Rhetorically Job, effectively, asks Yahweh if he wishes to further his ruination (v. 25); he accuses Yahweh of tormenting him bitterly, as if still angry about Job's youthful sins, long-since confessed, so that he wastes away into nothing (vv. 26-28).

Speaking from his pain, Job intimates that, since his brutal experience is evidence of how Yahweh acts, then it would be better for man if Yahweh simply left him alone until his divinely

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<sup>77</sup> Hartley, 212.

<sup>78</sup> Hartley, 225-226. It is worth noting that, at the book's conclusion, Yahweh does not allow Job to dictate the terms of their encounter; Job's disease is not first ended and Yahweh does not veil his splendor.

appointed time of death (14:1-6). Flowing out of these verses are Job's words on the certainty and finality of man's death (vv. 7-12). Like men, trees have life and die, but, unlike men, whose deaths are fixed and static, there exists the possibility for saplings to sprout from the stumps of their predecessors.

Briefly, Job shows a glimmer of hope, or, more precisely, a less negative desire. Viewing his life as toil, Job braces himself to wait out his long service until Yahweh deigns to break his silence and answer (vv. 13-15).<sup>79</sup> And when he does answer Job, then he will no longer hold against him his sins (vv. 16-17). The desire Job has is a surprising one. He wants to be hidden from the wrath of Yahweh, but there is nowhere on the earth he could possibly be safe from heaven's fury. Therefore, Job asks to be placed beneath the earth, in Sheol. He feels that, hidden away in the deep void of darkness of the underworld, he could be preserved from the devastation that is his life until Yahweh deigned to bring about an end to the misery.<sup>80</sup> Here again is seen Job's desire to commune with Yahweh. But Job quickly drops this unrealistic wish, and, concluding his morose prayer to Yahweh, accuses heaven of eroding man's hope until he dies and enters oblivion (vv. 18-22).<sup>81</sup>

### **Job 16-17**

The second speech cycle between Job and each of the three friends (ch. 15-21) is initiated by Eliphaz the Temanite's second speech (ch. 15), which is followed by Job's fifth speech of the

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<sup>79</sup> In v. 14, it is possible Job is considering a possibility which he deems totally hypothetical: to be hidden away in Sheol until Yahweh's wrath is satiated and then to be resuscitated so that he may dwell in the bliss of Yahweh's favor once again. The longing of Yahweh for his creature in v. 15 could refer to the intensity of Yahweh's renewed zeal for Job after he has been resuscitated following the ending of heaven's wrath. See Hartley, 236-237.

<sup>80</sup> Hartley, 236.

<sup>81</sup> Estes, 88-89.

book (ch. 16-17). In his second speech, Eliphaz, previously the most civil of the friends, adopts a more prosecutorial tone, and insists that Job is a sinner who deserves to be punished.<sup>82</sup> At this point, Job seems fed up with the friends, as he devotes fewer and fewer words in his response(s) to them (16:1-6) and instead focuses ever more on Yahweh (16:7-17:16).<sup>83</sup>

Briefly addressing the friends (16:1-6), Job wonders why his “miserable comforters” (v. 2) bother to continue speaking to him so coldly when, if their situations were reversed, he would, instead of callously lecturing them, seek to comfort them. The last thing Job says to them during this speech explains why he persists in speaking: “But if I speak, my pain is not relieved, and if I refrain from speaking—how much of it goes away?” (v. 6). In other words, Job sees no reason to keep quiet since his agony continues regardless.<sup>84</sup>

Done talking to the friends, Job turns to prayer (16:7-17:16), and it consists of him praying both to and about Yahweh. As is his wont, Job begins with a complaint about his circumstances, and this persists through 16:7-17. The lamentation of Job is, of course, rooted in his feelings regarding his experience. He laments the loss of his family (v. 7) and the deterioration of his body (v. 8). Worthy of special mention is verse 9, wherein Job identifies Yahweh as the “adversary” who is destroying him. Though he does not use the same word used in chapters 1-2 to identify the accuser,<sup>85</sup> the connotation and meaning of the two words are cause for concern. The devastation he faces is not limited to the abandonment and opposition of heaven, but includes the rejection and scorn of man (vv. 10-11). Though this indeed perturbs Job

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<sup>82</sup> Estes, 92-92, 95-96. The rather dramatic change in Eliphaz’s tone from chapters 4-5 to chapter 15 is perhaps due, at least in part, to Job’s harsh words against the friends (e.g. 13:4-13).

<sup>83</sup> Walton, 213.

<sup>84</sup> Hartley, 258.

<sup>85</sup> Also worthy of mention is that the *satan*’s title can also be appropriately translated as “adversary.”

and worsens his suffering, he is painfully aware that all of his agonies are rooted in Yahweh's treatment of him, and so he focuses chiefly on that in his opening complaint. Feeling that Yahweh has made him a target to be pierced with many griefs from heaven's quiver (vv. 11-14), he concludes his complaint by grimly accepting his torment (vv. 15-16)—though he still asserts that he is pure (v. 17; cf. 1:8; 2:3).

Not wanting his painful lot to be eventually covered up and forgotten (v. 18), Job hopes for an advocate to call Yahweh to account for his treatment of him.<sup>86</sup> Though he knows his mortal days are few and numbered (v. 22), Job hopes that an advocate from heaven will intercede on his behalf (vv. 19-21). It would be easy to, on the surface, read these verses messianically, but it is critical to refrain from doing so. Job does not hope for the Messiah to intercede on his behalf because his sins are damaging to his relationship with Yahweh; he likely hopes for a member of Yahweh's celestial council to argue that Yahweh ought to act more leniently toward Job, as he has done nothing to merit such grievous punishment.<sup>87</sup>

Cycling again between hope and despair, Job laments, "My spirit is broken, my days have faded out, the grave awaits me" (17:1; cf. 13:20-14:22). Though Job feels Yahweh is treating him unjustly and has turned him into a social pariah, he bitterly, and somewhat ironically, turns to him for recourse, as he has no alternative since the friends have proven themselves to be mockers of his lot (vv. 2-9).<sup>88</sup> In verse 3, in particular, this is seen. His friends are unwilling to be Job's surety in his crisis, so he has no choice but to turn to Yahweh for mercy from his very own (perceived) wrath; this tension heightens the agony of Job's situation.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Estes, 100.

<sup>87</sup> Walton, 214-215.

<sup>88</sup> Estes, 100. See also Hartley, 268-269.

<sup>89</sup> Hartley, 268.

Before moving on to the conclusion of this speech, Job interestingly says, “But the righteous man holds to his way, and the one with clean hands grows stronger” (v. 9). It sounds as though Job, in his misery, is morosely reciting a maxim that asserts the well-being of the righteous and even the increasing thereof. It seems likely Job would once have held this maxim to be immovably true but, since his crisis began, suspects it is—and likely wishes it were still true. Job concludes the prayer by expressing his rejection of those people who despise him, angrily invites them to see him in all of his abject and wanton misery (v. 10), and decries himself as utterly bereft of hope in life and in death (vv. 11-16).<sup>90</sup> It is evident that Job wants his relationship with Yahweh to be restored.

## **Job 19**

It is obvious from Bildad’s second speech (ch. 18) that the communication between Job and the friends is breaking down. In the first five verses of his speech, Bildad sweepingly dismisses everything Job has said;<sup>91</sup> he then angrily lectures truth at Job, seeking to silence him (vv. 6-21). The point and sum of his insensitive lecture is this: the wicked suffer. This angry ranting speech is worthless to Job; though Bildad does not believe it, Job knows (along with the reader) that his is not a case of a wicked sufferer, but of a righteous one. The friend’s speech is not applicable to Job’s unique situation.

Hitherto Job has responded to the friends’ speeches with an address to both them and Yahweh, but this time Job focuses solely on the friends. Job begins his sixth speech (ch. 19) with scathing words that decry the friends’ treatment of him and introduce a significant theme in the

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<sup>90</sup> Estes, 100.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 110.

chapter: hopelessness (vv. 1-6).<sup>92</sup> The consuming hopelessness Job feels comes from his thinking that not he, as the friends surmise, but Yahweh, is the one who has erred.<sup>93</sup>

From this pit of confusion and despair, Job proceeds to complain about the wrongful injustices Yahweh has dealt him (vv. 7-22), and he wrestles with this tension between Yahweh's moral propriety and the question of whether heaven is in error. Though Job cries out for aid, there is no one who hears and rushes to bring him justice (v. 7).<sup>94</sup> The man can neither flee nor escape from his unhappy position (v. 8); he is publicly shamed (v. 9), and any ragged hope for renewal he might have is torn away (v. 10).<sup>95</sup> All these things Yahweh, in his burning anger, has done to Job, and he is treated as if he were heaven's foe (v. 11). So overzealously brutal does Job consider Yahweh's attack, that he compares it to a mighty army laying siege to a lowly tent (v. 12).<sup>96</sup>

This is but the attack itself; there are severe effects of Yahweh's mistreatment to which Job now turns (vv. 13-22). Though Job is stripped of wealth and health, his chief complaint here is the alienation and abandonment to which he is subject; in such a communal culture as the ANE, this fate is beyond bearing. Stricken by Yahweh in body and soul, Job is utterly forsaken. Job's family abandons and detests him (vv. 13a, 14a, 17b), even his wife (v. 17a); his friends shun him (vv. 13b, 14b); he is left and reviled by his former guests and servants (vv. 15-16); he is scoffed at and disrespected even by young children, who, in the culture of the ANE, learned

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<sup>92</sup> Estes, 116.

<sup>93</sup> Hartley, 283-284.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*



always to practice deference toward elders (v. 18).<sup>97</sup> Job mourns, “All my closest friends detest me; and those whom I love have turned against me” (v. 19). From ruin Job has only just been spared, cruelly, for now he is made to dwell in devastation (v. 20). This section of chapter 19 is ended with Job begging pity of the friends (v. 21), pleading with them to stop dealing with him so viciously with him, for Yahweh does so already (v. 22). Anticipating the failure of the friends to heed his need for pity, Job looks for some defense of his integrity (vv. 23-24).<sup>98</sup> He wants the record to show that he suffered unduly, without cause;<sup>99</sup> he doesn’t wish to be falsely remembered.<sup>100</sup>

Verse 25 merits special consideration. Literarily, it brings about a change in the tone of the chapter—Job turns from despondency to hope. It is perhaps the most recognized verse in the book of Job, and it is also one of the most debated.<sup>101</sup> Interpreted messianically, this verse offers the easy explanation that Job hopefully anticipates the redemptive work of Jesus, but this interpretation, as before, is not appropriate. There have been several suggestions for the possible identity of Job’s redeemer: Yahweh, a member of the heavenly council, or a man.<sup>102</sup> It is likely the identity of the referent is unknown because Job himself does not know who would take up his cause and defend his innocence. The man is painfully aware that mankind has abandoned him to his devastation (19:13-19), he considers Yahweh to be the source of his woes (19:7-12), and the text itself describes a supernatural accuser inciting Yahweh to destroy Job without cause

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>99</sup> Walton, 218.

<sup>100</sup> Hartley, 291.

<sup>101</sup> Estes, 118.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. See also Hartley, 294; Walton, 221.

(2:3). Desperately clinging to hope, however, Job anticipates someone, whether man or spirit or God, taking up the defense of his integrity. Not only that, but Job expects his hero to vindicate him where he now sits in a heap of ash and dung—the place of his humiliation is where he anticipates vindication.<sup>103</sup>

Resolved with this hope of vindication, Job awaits the day when he will be restored to Yahweh's favor, even in his body—ragged and wretched though he may be—his ultimate desire will be his before he departs to Sheol (vv. 26-27).<sup>104</sup> Job concludes this powerful chapter by warning the friends to beware the judgment against them their words to him may bring upon their heads (vv. 28-29).<sup>105</sup>

## **Job 21**

In chapter 20 the reader is presented with the second and final speech of Zophar the Naamathite, which precedes the seventh speech of Job (ch. 21). It is arguable that Zophar is, of the three friends, the least moved by Job's tragic predicament; his tone is that of an apathetic judge who does not listen, but assumes the evidence speaks clearly for itself. Zophar hears but does not listen to Job's protestations against the rigidity of the retribution principle, which all the friends hold to be true and self-evident. Blinded by his arrogance and assumptions, the only evidence in Job's case that Zophar considers is the man's treatment at Yahweh's hands. Having considered that evidence, and all but deaf to Job's cries, Zophar pronounces his judgment on the matter: the wicked suffer at Yahweh's hands.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Walton 221. See also Hartley, 294-295. It seems Job expects a heavenly response to arrive, albeit at the most bitter end, even as he sits in squalor on the earth surrounded by the attacking friends.

<sup>104</sup> Estes, 118. See also Walton, 220.

<sup>105</sup> Hartley, 298.

It is evident in Job's answer (ch. 21) that he is fed up with the friends' shoving of the retribution principle down his throat. Denouncing the retribution principle as an insufficient and imperfect way to understand how heaven interacts with earth, Job cries out against the divinely sanctioned prosperity of the wicked. He notes, "[the wicked] live out their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace" (v. 13). Going on the offensive, Job refutes and dismisses the friends' arguments, and brings to a close the second speech cycle (ch. 15-21).<sup>107</sup> The seventh speech of Job is three-pronged: an appeal for sympathy (21:1-6), a decrying of the prosperity of the wicked (21:7-21), and a final complaint against the friends (21:27-34).<sup>108</sup>

Job opens with an appeal to the friends, and the boon he craves of them is a simple one: Job wants the friends to show some sympathy, and thereby offer him some consolation, by attentively listening to him in his time of need (v. 2).<sup>109</sup> Of course, by now, Job anticipates a lack of acquiescence from the friends, but he nevertheless implores them to hear him out (v. 3).<sup>110</sup> Rhetorically Job asks, "As for me, is my complaint addressed to mortals? Why should I not be impatient?" (v. 4, NRSV). Job invites the friends to join him in being appalled at his lot (vv. 5-6), for the point behind his question is this: he feels near to death, and the eternal Yahweh refuses to answer the calls of his fragile servant.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Implicit in Zophar's speech is the inferred guilt of Job based solely on his suffering at Yahweh's hands.

<sup>107</sup> Estes, 128.

<sup>108</sup> Hartley, 310. The three divisions of chapter 21 are drawn from Hartley's work. However, the divisions differ somewhat, and this paper takes verses 22-26 to be more of an interruption in thought.

<sup>109</sup> Hartley, 310-311.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>111</sup> Hartley, 311. There is also present the idea that Job is under great duress because it is against God, not mankind, that he is launching his complaints. See also Smick, 796.

Moving beyond this, Job now begins his tirade on the prosperity of the wicked (vv. 7-22). The description of the wicked entails their longevity, potency, security, prosperity, and luxury (vv. 7-13). All this the wicked have, and yet, in a flagrantly arrogant manner resembling of Pharaoh, “they say to God, ‘Turn away from us! We do not want to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain if we were to pray to him?’” (vv. 14-15; cf. Exod 5:2).<sup>112</sup>

Job now turns his attention to the timing of Yahweh’s exacting of retribution on the wicked (vv. 17-21).<sup>113</sup> Earlier the friends have asserted, “Yes, the lamp of the wicked is extinguished” (18:5a); to which Job now counterquestions, “How often is the lamp of the wicked extinguished?” (21:17a). This opens a series of rhetorical questions (vv. 17-18), each effectively asking, “How often does Yahweh punish the wicked?” The answer Job assumes is, “Yahweh often does not punish the wicked.” Seemingly anticipating the not uncommon response that Yahweh frequently punishes the wicked by storing up misery for their children (v. 19a),<sup>114</sup> Job rails against this concept, arguing that it should be the transgressors who suffer wrath (vv. 19b-20), for what happens after their passing is nothing to them (v. 21).

After this, Job briefly stops and bemoans the mystery of death’s equalizing nature for the prospering and the suffering (vv. 23-26), which he both wonders at and dislikes, and he resigns himself to accepting that this is the way of things that Yahweh, who is above and beyond tutelage and counsel, has established (v. 22). Following this, Job turns to the friends and verbally spits in their faces (vv. 27-34). Anticipating vicious words from them, he accuses the friends of

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<sup>112</sup> Job is not, of course, making a direct reference to Pharaoh in verses 14-15, but the king of Egypt does serve as the Old Testament example *par excellence* of the wicked prosperer, which Job is describing in this chapter.

<sup>113</sup> Hartley, 316.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

preparing schematic words with which to further wrong and discredit him (v. 27).<sup>115</sup> Postulating that the friends will ask him to point out the established well-being of a wicked person in order for him to prove his point (v. 28), Job reveals that he would respond by rhetorically asking if they had ever considered the accounts of travelers (v. 29).<sup>116</sup> These experienced people would certainly report to the friends the widespread prosperity of the wicked (vv. 30-33). Job concludes this speech by rhetorically asking the friends, “So how can you console me with your futile words?” (v. 34a). They cannot, for “nothing is left of [the friends’] answers but deception!” (v. 34b).

#### **Job 23-24**

Beginning the third speech cycle (ch. 22-27) is the third and final speech of Eliphaz the Temanite (ch. 22). Arguably the least caustic of the three friends,<sup>117</sup> Eliphaz is nevertheless unhelpful and far from compassionate in tone. Portraying Yahweh as so far removed from the human sphere that mankind’s righteousness and wickedness is of little concern (vv. 1-5) and accusing Job of committing social injustice (vv. 6-11) and of misunderstanding divinity (vv. 12-20), Eliphaz ruthlessly counsels Job to cease being concerned with his personal prosperity and pursue a reestablishment of peace between himself and Yahweh (vv. 21-30).<sup>118</sup> Of course, none of this speech, steeped in the theology of the retribution principle, is applicable to Job’s unique circumstance. Job’s eighth speech (ch. 23-24) is evidence of the furtherance of communication

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<sup>115</sup> Hartley, 320.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. Travelers, as a consequence of their journeys, have extensive knowledge of ways and happenings and doings of peoples across the lands.

<sup>117</sup> Smick, 801, agrees with this reading of Eliphaz’s tone.

<sup>118</sup> Estes, 134, 137-139. See also Smick, 800-801.

breakdown between Job and the friends, for the speech does not address the friends or Yahweh, but is a soliloquy in which Job expresses his inner turmoil.<sup>119</sup>

The speech of Job can be divided into four sections that trace his line of thought through the two chapters. In the first section (23:1-12), Job works through his ardent desire to dialogue with Yahweh. Embittered that Yahweh has not positively responded to his pleas (v. 2), Job longs to know where he might obtain an audience with his Master (v. 3). Job is sure that, if he were enabled to speak with Yahweh, then he would hear Job's words against his treatment and answer him back (vv. 4-6). Somewhat disillusioned by his negative experiences, Job is nevertheless confident that his innocence would win for him his case (v. 7). But something hinders this: Job does not know where he can go to dialogue with Yahweh; Job cannot perceive his Lord's presence (vv. 8-9). That inability to press his case, however, does not shake Job's confidence in his innocence. Job knows that Yahweh knows that he remains true to heaven's way; implied in this assurance seems to be the questioning, "Why, then, does Yahweh not speak with me" (vv. 10-12)?

In the second section of the speech (vv. 13-16), the implied wondering at the back of Job's mind from the first section ("I am sure Yahweh knows that I am true to his way. Why, then, will he not speak with me and acquit me of wrongdoing?") gives way to explicit puzzling over Yahweh's nature and actions. Verse 13 (NRSV) records the confession, "But [Yahweh] stands alone and who can dissuade him? What he desires, that he does." Job's faith in the supremacy and justness of Yahweh is met with his knowledge, garnered from his negative experiences, of Yahweh's freedom to do whatever he pleases. This tension turns to apprehension

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<sup>119</sup> Estes, 140.

in verse 14;<sup>120</sup> Job has previously been sure of Yahweh's knowledge of his innocence (vv. 10-12), but now Job is certain that Yahweh has a multitude of things appointed for him that shall be heaven-accomplished no matter what (v. 14). Yahweh's plans for Job are unknowable to him, but he does know that what heaven has recently planned and accomplished in his life has been traumatic. Incomprehensibly, it seems that it is heaven's pleasure to torment Job. This "apprehensive agony"<sup>121</sup> then turns to reactionary terror in verses 15 and 16; he says plainly, "Therefore I am terrified at [Yahweh's] presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. . . . the Almighty has terrified me" (vv. 15, 16b, NRSV).

Despite the unwholesome dread he is feeling, Job is not cowed into silence, declaring, "Yet I have not been silent because of the darkness, because of the thick darkness that covered my face" (v. 17). Refusing to accept that Yahweh has abandoned him to desolation, Job cries out to his Master, craving his attention.<sup>122</sup> In the remainder of the third section of his speech (23:17-24:17), Job cries out to heaven regarding the wretched condition of mankind (24:1-17). In the first verse of the new chapter, Job, through rhetorical questions, bemoans that, though the divinely appointed times of exacting judgment are known to Yahweh, it seems that his mortal servants never live to see those times of deliverance.<sup>123</sup> Job goes on to describe for what injustices Yahweh's servants vainly await heaven's justice (vv. 2-17). The cruel do not love their neighbors (vv. 2-4); the poor and needy and innocent are treated oppressively with no sign of deliverance from heaven (vv. 5-12); the violent hate the light and operate their evils in the

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<sup>120</sup> Hartley, 341-342.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>122</sup> Hartley, 342. The darkness imagery of 23:17 is indicative of Job's inability to perceive the attention of Yahweh.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 345.

darkness (vv. 13-17).<sup>124</sup> Earlier, in 23:15-17, Job described himself as being forced into terror and darkness by Yahweh's mistreatment, and now, in 24:17, in a sort of bookend, Job describes the anguish of the weak, also neglected by Yahweh, who suffer at the hands of those who "are friends with the terrors of darkness."

Yet, despite all of this, the fourth speech section (vv. 18-25) reveals that Job is steadfast in his belief that Yahweh shall eventually judge evildoers. Verse 18a portrays Yahweh as powerful over evil, ready and soon to judge transgressors; "He is swift on the face of the waters." The allotment of the wicked is oblivion; they will lose everything, face cursing judgment, and then be forgotten as they are unmade (vv. 18b-24). Job concludes his speech by challenging anyone to refute the validity of what he has observed (v. 25).<sup>125</sup>

### **Job 26-27**

The last of the three friends is heard in the third and final speech of Bildad the Shuhite (ch. 25), which, further evidencing the deterioration of communication between Job and the friends, is noticeably short, being only six verses in length. In his abrupt speech, Bildad portrays Yahweh in a cold light: so exalted and mighty and perfect is Yahweh that he disdains mankind, viewing them as wretched and repulsive like maggot-worms (v. 6).<sup>126</sup> Of course, this warped view of heaven's justice, and its unhealthy theological and anthropological implications,<sup>127</sup> is of no benefit to the hurting Job. The text seems to indicate that Job, at last fully fed up with the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>125</sup> Estes, 149.

<sup>126</sup> Estes, 152, 155-156.

<sup>127</sup> Bildad's theology offers up a system common in the ANE but which is directly taught against in the Bible. Mankind is not a slave race groveling before divine tyrants, but is rather a creature made specially for relationship between heaven and earth.



friends, interrupts Bildad's speech and launches into his own (26:1-27:23).<sup>128</sup> Disgusted, Job acidly employs sarcasm to decry Bildad, and probably the other friends by association, as utterly useless—hollow and without value (26:1-4).<sup>129</sup> Proceeding from this is Job's own exaltation of Yahweh (vv. 5-14); after this, and in such a fashion that indicates his disallowing Zophar to speak, Job powerfully declares both his innocence (27:1-10) and his intent to chastise the friends (vv. 11-23).

As he gets into his speech, Job firstly offers up words on the great omnipotence of Yahweh (26:5-14). In praise of Yahweh's universal might, Job focuses on his Lord's rule over the underworld (vv.5-6), the skies (vv.7-9, 11), and the cosmic sea (vv. 10, 12-13); a concluding praise wraps up this section (v. 14).<sup>130</sup> As Creator, nowhere is beyond Yahweh's reign, including the furthest depths of Sheol; even this shadowy realm of the dead is laid bare before Yahweh's all-seeing eyes (vv. 5-6). By his very own might did Yahweh establish the earth and sky (v. 7), filling the latter with light and clouds (vv. 8-9), and holding it aloft on the pillars of heaven (v. 11). Beyond the boundary he established in the depths of time (v. 10) lies the cosmic sea of primordial darkness, housing the forces of chaos he conquered so that he might bring about creative order (vv. 12-13). All these marvelous acts of Yahweh are but glimpses of the wisdom and power he wields (v. 14).

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>129</sup> Hartley, 362-363.

<sup>130</sup> Using the cosmology of the ANE, Job portrays Yahweh as the almighty Creator. The ancients believed the earth to be a level plane suspended in a cosmic sea of chaos out of which Yahweh carved a space to establish and order his creation. The earth was also believed to be the middle ground between the underworld (a lower hemisphere beneath the earth), the realm of the deceased, and the heaven-sky (an upper hemisphere above the earth), the domain of divinity and celestial bodies. Yahweh worked with this ancient human conception of the cosmos in order to reveal himself to mankind.

The text does not specify whether Zophar is cut off from speaking by Job's tirade or if he simply refuses to say anything more, but speak he does not.<sup>131</sup> Instead, Job, done listening to the friends, continues with his speech (ch. 27), begun in chapter 26. The first portion of the new chapter (vv. 1-10) is a powerfully worded protestant declaration of Job's commitment to his integrity. The language of this section is that of an oath, albeit a complicated one.<sup>132</sup> Job swears openly that he will never assent to the urges of the friends (v. 5a) and that he will never stop clinging to his integrity (vv. 5b-6). That Job's vow to never assent to what the friends have said is paralleled with his vow to never let go of his integrity, in verse 5, signifies that the two are essentially related. The friends want Job to repent before Yahweh so that restoration will take place; to do this would in fact make Job guilty of sinning via falsehood, for the reader, the narrator, the accuser, Yahweh, and Job all know that he has done nothing that requires repentance.<sup>133</sup> The oath is further complicated because of the manner in which Job swears by Yahweh (vv. 2-4). In itself, invoking Yahweh is not unusual, but Job, in his vow to never let go of his integrity, invokes Yahweh as both the powerful Creator and the one who withholds from Job his due justice. In this is seen the further verbal expression of Job's inner turmoil over his convictions regarding Yahweh's nature and his negative experience at Yahweh's hands. Following this oath is a curse on Job's enemies, the wicked, who are described, through rhetorical questions, as hopelessly consigned to destruction (vv. 7-10).

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<sup>131</sup> Estes, 165. See also Hartley, 368. The unique introduction to chapter 27 in verse 1 could imply that Job awaited Zophar's response, which he declined to offer, after the close of chapter 26. On the other hand, the presumptuousness of Zophar in the past and the tone of Job in chapter 26 suggests that Job has no further interest in dialoguing with the friends, and that lends itself to a reading of Job forcefully proceeding with what he has to say.

<sup>132</sup> Hartley, 368-371.

<sup>133</sup> What's more, if Job confesses some imagined sin in an attempt to placate Yahweh, then the accuser's predictions will be proven correct.

The second portion of the chapter (vv. 11-23) is a scathing speech on the fate of the wicked; Job is intent on speaking instructively to his friends as they have hitherto done unto him. In a manner strikingly similar to what the friends have been saying, Job waxes poetical on the eventual and imminent doom of the wicked. Though they look to prosper now, the wicked have neither hope nor surety—thinking themselves secure, they are vulnerable to judgment. Whatever they amass will only, in the end, be of benefit to the righteous; their intentions and labors for their own good will turn in their disfavor as they are hurried along to judgment.

### **Job 29-31**

The narrator strategically places chapter 28 to give the reader pause and focus his attention. Mankind is surely able to accomplish great feats, such as extracting valuable, useful, and beautiful materials from beneath the earth even through great difficulty (Job 28:1-11), but he is unable to find wisdom (Job 28:12-13a), which is far superior to riches and greatness (Prov 3:14-15). Wisdom is beyond mankind's reach; he can neither find it (Job 28:13b-14) nor barter for it, for its worth surpasses the value of all which he extracts from the earth (Job 28:15-19). Wisdom is found in God alone (Job 28:23), and he who has it says to mankind, “the fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28).

Job 28 is unequivocally considered a wisdom poem, that is, a poem that is sourced in Israel's wisdom tradition.<sup>134</sup> Characteristically, wisdom poems are found at structurally significant points within their biblical books,<sup>135</sup> and Job 28 is no exception, occurring at the close of the three intense conversational cycles between Job and each of the three friends. This

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<sup>134</sup> J. A. Grant, “Wisdom Poem,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 891.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

placement is critical, and sheds light on the men's speeches: their wisdom is inadequate! Job cannot fit together what he knows to be true about Yahweh with the horrible trauma he is experiencing, and the three friends wrongly assume that they have a complete and thorough understanding of Yahweh's policies at work in Job's situation. Job is maintaining his belief in Yahweh's justice (Job 9:1) while also struggling to fit this doctrine with his experience of unmerited suffering (Job 10:1-3), and he desperately craves closure (Job 29-31; see Job 30:20). Job is farther along the path of wisdom than are his friends, but not one of them has absolute understanding.

The tenth and final speech of Job (ch. 29-31) follows the wisdom poem constituting chapter 28. Excruciated by his inability to fit together his convictions about heaven with his experience on earth, two incongruous yet indispensable puzzle pieces, Job cries out, "I did everything right!" This fascinating and moving speech is, in fact, an avowal of innocence crafted to cause Yahweh to bestir himself to respond to Job and his unhappy condition, and is broken up into three neat portions: a remembrance of former abundance (ch. 29), a lament (ch. 30), and an oath of innocence (ch. 31).<sup>136</sup>

Job longs for the days before calamity unimaginable befell him, when he was the living embodiment of what it means to live and enjoy a life of wisdom. Chapter 29 establishes Job as the wise man *par excellence*; his previous life reflected everything the peoples of the ANE expected to accompany a lifestyle devoted to revering Yahweh. Job was blessed by his closeness with Yahweh and his family (vv. 1-5; cf. Prov 2:1-8; 9:4; Ps 128:3). Living in prosperous abundance (v. 6; cf. Prov 3:9-10, 17, 23-26), Job was honored and respected in his community (vv. 7-10, 21-25; cf. Prov 3:4). This exemplary paragon was characterized by charity for the

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<sup>136</sup> Hartley, 385.

needy (vv. 11-13; cf. Prov 3:27-32), and he was defined by righteousness and justice (vv. 14-17; cf. Prov 1:3). Garbed in wisdom and radiating piety, Job had no cause to doubt the perseverance of his prosperity (vv. 18-20; cf. Prov 1:33; 3:2; Ps 1:1-3). Therein lies the seed of his anguish. Though Job never sullied his integrity, he was blasted with disaster and loss—that promised to befall the wicked, haters of Yahweh and his wisdom (cf. Prov 1:26-28). Job is being treated not like a wise man who fears heaven, but like a fool who shuns Yahweh.

Job expounds on the shame and suffering the devastation has brought him in chapter 30. In the first eight verses, Job describes a seedy underculture of thuggery, passed along from father to son,<sup>137</sup> from which he is now subject to abuse. The nature of these shifty men, social outcasts, contrasts sharply with the excellent repute Job previously enjoyed—described in the preceding chapter. Whereas he once basked in the praise of even those at the loftiest peaks of the social hierarchy, Job now suffers the scorn of even the lowliest of vagabonds (vv. 9-15).<sup>138</sup>

Job proceeds to the heart of his lamentation in verses 16-23, a passage filled with turmoil. Here Job complains about the painful treatment from heaven<sup>139</sup> to which he has been subjected by Yahweh himself.<sup>140</sup> In heaven's silence (v. 20), as Job's traumatized mind perceives it, the only response Yahweh has is to cruelly string Job along until he is finally brought to Sheol (v. 23). Job cannot understand why such horrors have befallen him. Though he was a paragon of

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<sup>137</sup> Walton, 316-317.

<sup>138</sup> Estes, 182-183, notes this tragic reversal, in Job's case a literal reversal of fortune, in not an uncommon literary pattern in the literature of the ANE.

<sup>139</sup> Walton, 317, interprets the actions against Job in 30:16-19 as belonging to night personified rather than Yahweh. But this reading seems irresponsibly inflexible in light of Job's previous assertion that Yahweh would "plunge [him] into a slimy pit" in 9:31a, an almost identical action as the one described in 30:19a, "He has flung [Job] into the mud." *Contra* Walton, see Estes, 184, and Hartley, 403.

<sup>140</sup> Rejected and abused by everyone surrounding him—the community, the wretched, and the friends—Job can only voice his complaint against Yahweh to Yahweh.

honor, openhanded (v. 24) and tenderhearted (v. 25), “darkness came” (v. 26). Tormented inside and out, refused aid by mankind, and a wretch fit only for the companionship of beasts, Job is completely miserable (vv. 26-31).<sup>141</sup>

Job concludes his speech by calling heaven to account (ch. 31); assuming a positive answer, Job rhetorically asks, “Does [Yahweh] not see my ways and count all my steps?” (v. 4). Utilizing a formula of “if I sinned, then may I suffer,” Job denies involvement in a number of heinous sins:<sup>142</sup> deceit (vv. 5-6), covetousness (vv. 7-8), lust (vv. 9-12), social injustice (vv. 13-23), trust in wealth (vv. 24-25), idolatry (vv. 26-28), vindictiveness (vv. 29-30), inhospitality to sojourners (vv. 31-32), corruption (vv. 33-34), and abuse of land (vv. 38-40).<sup>143</sup> In enumerating these transgressions, Job asks to be condemned for them if he is guilty but, implicitly, exonerated if he is innocent. Job has done all he can to force Yahweh to respond, either by activating the imprecations contained in Job’s speech or by exonerating him.<sup>144</sup> Officially calling on Yahweh to answer him in verses 35-37, Job cries out, “let the Almighty answer me!” (v. 35). Confident in his innocence (vv. 36-37) and earnest in his desire to speak with Yahweh, Job silently awaits his Master’s answer (v. 40c).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Hartley, 405, notes that, through rhetorical questions in 30:25, Job accuses Yahweh of not acting toward his servant as he had once acted toward the needy in comparative positions. Job had treated well those persons less prosperous than himself, but Yahweh is not likewise treating Job. Also noteworthy is the lack of investment poured into Job from the community that Job had once poured into it.

<sup>142</sup> Hartley, 409, notes that the usage of two sets of seven, or 14 total sins, is significant of Job’s assertion of total innocence from any wrongdoing.

<sup>143</sup> I am grateful to Hartley for his notice of the enumerated sin in 31:38-40b. My listing of sins, though strikingly similar to but in no way taken or adapted from his, would have been incomplete without his insight. See Hartley, 408-409.

<sup>144</sup> Hartley, 424.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

## Yahweh's Speeches

### **Job 38-40:2**

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (38:1), and the reader breathes in excited relief at Yahweh’s arrival; at last, he is here. However, rather than meeting the expectations of Job and the friends,<sup>146</sup> Yahweh surpasses them, going above and beyond what is expected in order to secure the greater good. Two details are worthy of preliminary notice before proceeding with the discussion. The first is the author’s first usage of the divine name, Yahweh, since 12:9—and 2:7 before that.<sup>147</sup> It is also worthy of note that Yahweh answers Job out of a whirlwind. Not an unheard of mechanism for revelation in the Old Testament (cf. Exod 19:16-19; Ezek 1:4; Zec 9:14; Pss 18:7-19; 77:18),<sup>148</sup> the storm probably conveys both Yahweh’s powerful majesty and the gravity of his business with Job—not his anger.<sup>149</sup>

Given the book of Job’s classification as wisdom literature, it is fitting that Yahweh assumes the role of master teacher in his speech,<sup>150</sup> which stretches from 38:1-41:34, supplemented by two brief utterings of Job in 40:3-5 and 42:1-6 that divide the divine speech

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<sup>146</sup> At Yahweh’s arrival, Job undoubtedly expects to be exonerated and the friends certainly expect Job to be condemned. See Hartley, 487.

<sup>147</sup> Walton, 398, observes that the author’s usage of the divine name here, as opposed to the alternatively utilized names of El Shaddai (the Almighty) or Elohim (God) in the poetic corpus, is interesting, but the purpose or implication behind it is uncertain. Smick, 894, proposes that the author’s intent in the poetic corpus is to preserve the vocabulary of early Gentiles, like Job. However, this seems less than indisputable, given Job’s usage of the divine name in 1:21.

<sup>148</sup> Hartley, 490; Walton, 398; Estes, 231. Walton assumes Yahweh’s anger is evident in the whirlwind, but this doesn’t seem to necessarily be the case. The other commentators and the biblical passages referenced allow for a positive motive to be present in the stormy theophany, and, in all likelihood, the author includes this detail for the sake of poetic irony (cf. Job 19:16-17; 38:1).

<sup>149</sup> This interpretation of the whirlwind is in direct opposition with Walton’s reading of the tone (398).

<sup>150</sup> Estes, 230.

into two sections, and these parts-of-the-whole will be discussed separately. The first section of Yahweh's speech (38:1-40:2) focuses on his design of the world.<sup>151</sup> Yahweh asks Job a series of leading rhetorical questions in order to guide him toward greater wisdom and continued, if more humbled, righteousness.

Yahweh begins by authoritatively<sup>152</sup> asking, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2, NASB). Estes helpfully translates this verse as, "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge,"<sup>153</sup> for the NASB's translation "darkens counsel" is somewhat obfuscated. The translation of the Hebrew *etsah* as "counsel" or "plans" can be understood as referencing Yahweh's designs. With no challenge to Job's integrity, Yahweh calls into question his servant's perception, havocked by calamity, of his master's designs for both the servant and the world; heaven asks, "Who is this who obscures my designs with words without knowledge?" Understanding Job's struggle to maintain his integrity while caught in the tension between his dogma and his experience, while also being attacked by the friends, Yahweh respectfully<sup>154</sup> addresses the man, taking him up on his earlier desire—"Then call, and I will answer" (13:22)—and so calls Job to prepare himself to answer what heaven has to say (38:3).<sup>155</sup>

The first round of Yahweh's rhetorical questioning (38:4-38) in the first divine speech section concerns macrocosmic operations.<sup>156</sup> "In the beginning God created the heavens and the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. See also Hartley, 489; Walton, 399-404.

<sup>152</sup> Hartley, 491.

<sup>153</sup> Estes, 231. See also Bartholomew & O'Dowd, 144.

<sup>154</sup> Hartley, 491.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>156</sup> Walton, 399.



earth” (Gen 1:1), and Job, having misperceived and questioned Yahweh’s governance of the cosmos, is asked to account for how creation was wrought in the first place. Job is tasked with displaying his supposed masterful knowledge to Yahweh of the creation and organization of the cosmos, but is powerless (vv. 34-38) to explain the nature of seven aspects of creation: earth (vv. 4-7), sea (vv. 8-11), sun (vv. 12-15), depths (vv. 16-18), light (vv. 19-21), weather (vv. 22-30), and stars (vv. 31-33).

The second round of Yahweh’s rhetorical questioning (38:39-39:30) concerns microcosmic operations,<sup>157</sup> the details of the earth’s natural life. Having implied the existence of room for improvement in Yahweh’s reigning treatment of the living, Job is now asked to explain the intricacies of life on the earth. He is tasked with demonstrating his supposedly complete knowledge thereof by accounting for the nature of ten beasts: lion (38:39-40), raven (v. 41), mountain goat (39:1a), wild deer (vv. 1b-4), wild donkey (vv. 5-8), wild ox (vv. 9-12), ostrich (vv. 13-18), horse (vv. 19-25), hawk (v. 26), and eagle (vv. 27-30).

Job is, of course, completely incapable of knowledgeably accounting for the totality of creation formation and life. Having made his point that Job is, therefore, in no position to question or correct heaven’s designs, Yahweh pauses to allow Job to answer his Lord (40:1-2). If the man would still offer Yahweh a corrective suggestion regarding his reign, then now is the time to do so.<sup>158</sup> This concludes the first divine speech section.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>158</sup> Hartley, 515.

### **Job 40:3-5**

Rather unlike a prince (31:37), Job is cowed and speechless before Yahweh's majesty and revelation—he cannot answer (40:4a; cf. 9:3, 14-15).<sup>159</sup> Refraining from speaking (40:4b),<sup>160</sup> the man neither adds to nor takes back anything he has said (40:5).<sup>161</sup> Job is beginning to realize that there are many aspects of Yahweh's creation and rule that are incomprehensible to him, and his experience lies within this enigmatic sphere.<sup>162</sup>

### **Job 40:6-41:34**

Unsatisfied with Job's lack of understanding that he must re-evaluate his perceptions about the interplay between heaven and himself in light of his innocence and suffering, Yahweh launches into his second speech; again he calls Job to prepare himself to answer what his Master has to say (40:7). Concerned with the inevitable conclusion to be reached if Job continues in his current line of thought (40:8), Yahweh challenges further the servant's assumptions that the Master ought to alter how he governs the world. Yahweh challenges Job; if he knows how to better rule over the world, then he should, by his own might (40:9), be able to reign according to his ideas.<sup>163</sup> Job is exhorted to rise up as a kingly paragon of perfect justice (40:10) that he might extend his righteous anger across the world (40:11a) in order to abase *every* proud man and *instantly* crush the wicked (40:11b-12), and bring them to the grave, their deserved fate (40:13).

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 517-518.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 518.

<sup>161</sup> Estes, 243.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Hartley, 520.

If Job does this, then Yahweh will acknowledge to the man his superiority in ruling and his lack of need for heaven (40:14).<sup>164</sup>

In an effort to persuade Job to recognize that, because he cannot understand what Yahweh is doing or why he is doing it, he could never improve upon his Master's reign,<sup>165</sup> Yahweh quizzes Job on two monstrosities: Behemoth and Leviathan.<sup>166</sup> If Job would deal justly with the proud and the wicked, who dominate the world, then he must also reckon with forces of even greater power that would oppose him, just as they must be constrained by Yahweh in his reign.

Behemoth has been variously identified as a god of death,<sup>167</sup> mythological monster, hippopotamus, elephant, and water buffalo.<sup>168</sup> Its description (40:15-24) connects it with creation and strength. Behemoth was created by Yahweh (40:15a, 19), eats the vegetation of the earth (40:15b, 20), and makes its home in the rivers (40:21-22); the creature revels in its strength (40:16), fertility (40:17),<sup>169</sup> and form (40:18), unthreatened (40:23) and unbeatable (40:24). It is likely that Behemoth is a representation of the natural forces<sup>170</sup> of the created earth that are unstoppable and beyond human control. Job cannot control Behemoth, the natural forces beyond his ken.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 521.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Fyall, 137 identifies Behemoth with Mot, the ancient Near Eastern god of death.

<sup>168</sup> Longman, 441.

<sup>169</sup> Hartley, 525 observes that 40:17 probably refers to Behemoth's penis and testicles.

<sup>170</sup> J. Daniel Hays, "Job," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook*, ed. J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011) 262.

Similarly Leviathan has been variously identified as the devil,<sup>171</sup> a mythological dragon-serpent, a whale, and a crocodile.<sup>172</sup> The lengthy description of it (41:1-34), along with consideration of accompanying relevant biblical texts (Job 3:8; Pss 74:14; 104:26; Isa 27:1; Amos 9:3), connect Leviathan with chaos and the sea.<sup>173</sup> The serpent thrashes and writhes in the sea, priding itself on its untamable might. It is likely that Leviathan is a representation of those chaotic forces that have threatened since the beginning to throw all of creation's order into disarray and darkness. Job cannot tame Leviathan, the destructive forces of chaos that oppose creative order. The description of Leviathan concludes Yahweh's second speech.

#### **Job 42:1-6**

In confessing Yahweh's omnipotence (42:2a), which he has done since the beginning of the book, and wisdom (42:2b), Job recognizes that everything on earth occurs under the providence of divine wisdom; nothing can thwart Yahweh's designs.<sup>174</sup> Job has come to accept the enigmatic nature of Yahweh's rule as marvelous and beyond mankind's comprehension (42:3). Rejoicing in the appearance of the One he has hitherto only heard of in worship (42:5), Job humbly changes his mind about pursuing a legal case against Yahweh (42:6b), retracts his demands (42:6a), and acknowledges Yahweh as wise, just, and worthy of trust.

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<sup>171</sup> Fyall, 157 identifies Leviathan with (the) Satan.

<sup>172</sup> Longman, 444.

<sup>173</sup> Hays, 262. See also Hartley, 530; Estes, 248-249.

<sup>174</sup> Hartley, 535-536.

## Conclusion

Indisputably established in the first two prosaic chapters of the book as the wise and righteous man *par excellence*, Job is often thought to have sullied his blamelessness sometime between the arrival of the three friends (Job 2:11-13) and Yahweh's stormy manifestation (Job 38:1). However, such an understanding of the character of Job needlessly simplifies what the author aesthetically renders mysterious, and thus diminishes the complicated beauty of the book. It cannot be denied that Job says some exceedingly harsh things about the character and actions of Yahweh, but that harshness is borne out of an enigmatic and calamitous environment that is equally harsh. Though he is a paragon of devotion to Yahweh, Job is suddenly and violently hurled into a pit filled with the terrible things intended to befall those whose lives are hatefully lived in willful opposition to the wisdom and ways of heaven.

Throughout the poetic corpus of the book, Job is primarily reacting to this drastic change in the dynamics of his relationship with Yahweh. The man pleads with his God, begging to be unmade (Job 3) so that he does not have to bear the weight of what he understandably—and not necessarily incorrectly—assumes is the heavy hand of heaven. Knowing that Sheol cannot shield him from the burden he has been consigned to bear throughout the agonizingly long days and dreadful nights of his all-too-swiftly-passing life, Job hopes for a mediator to take up his cause in order to obtain for him even a measure of relief. Frustrated beyond reason at his Master's silence in the face of such disaster, Job considers calling on Yahweh himself to answer for his actions toward his servant. Repeatedly does Job struggle to find some way to reconcile his convictions regarding the nature and character of Yahweh with the undeniable and overwhelming nature of his being stricken by that which is supposed to befall those who hate God. More than he craves relief from his loss, restoration from his wounds, and respite from the assaults of the friends, Job

longs for a relational reconciliation to occur between himself and Yahweh. At the most bitter of ends, having cried out impossibilities and groans beyond his understanding in an attempt to fit together conviction and experience so that he might at last find peace in his relationship with Yahweh, Job concludes that his only course of action is to engage in painful dialogue with his Master.

Unlike Elihu, who is ignored utterly, and unlike the friends, who are rebuked and charged with sinful speech, Yahweh has only words for Job, and these words are intended to introduce to his steadfast servant more correct ways of thinking about his experience so that he is not by logic forced to make the sinful error of compromising his convictions. Yahweh's words are not to be read as coming from a place of anger, but instead as issuing from a divine desire to benevolently prompt Job to reevaluate his recent sufferings in light of the undeniably difficult and tension-filled, but far from harmful, knowledge that, as the omniscient and omnipotent sovereign, Yahweh is able to justly act in ways that, from the perspective of mankind, appear incongruent with his character—Job is urged to embrace the reality of divine mystery instead of considering it necessary to dictate the dynamics of the relationship between heaven and earth. In so doing, Yahweh extends to Job the vindication he has so desperately craved, for though Job has much to learn, he has not sullied the blamelessness credited him in the introduction of the book. In examination of the setting of Job's actions along with the nature and intent of heaven's words, one finds that the righteous and stricken Job is exonerated.

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