

# OpenTheo

## Job: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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## **Transcript**

The Book of Job raises many questions for its readers. Beyond the many questions raised by its narrative and its poetry, there are questions of dating, setting, and authorship that are particularly difficult to answer. Its Hebrew style is an unusual one, and many of its terms aren't found elsewhere.

John Hartley observes many of the parallels between Job and other parts of the biblical literature, with parts of the Proverbs and certain Psalms, especially Psalms 8 and 107. There are connections with Lamentations, with Amos, with Jeremiah, and with several parts of Isaiah. The character of Job is also mentioned in Ezekiel 14.14. The relationship between Job and some of these other texts is strong enough to suggest dependence, but it's not clear in which direction.

Is the Book of Job drawing from the other scriptures, or is Job the text that the other scriptures are drawing upon? Dates for the book have also varied considerably, with many people seeing different parts of the book as dating to different periods. Nahum Sarna, for instance, sees behind the framing narrative of the epilogue and the prologue some deeper epic story that dates back to a pre-Israelite period. This, many scholars have suggested, was used as a framing device for a series of speeches, speeches that many scholars date to between the 7th and 4th centuries BC.

Following this approach, many scholars see tensions between the framing narratives of chapters 1 and 2 and chapter 42 in the prologue and the epilogue, and the speeches that they bookend. They argue, for instance, that the Job of the prologue and the epilogue is living in a rather different context from the Job that we see in the poetry that intervenes. This tension, however, is greatly exaggerated, and as we look a bit more closely, I believe that they can readily be reconciled.

The book has a fairly easy structure to discern. It begins with two chapters of the prologue, then it has Job's lament, there's a cycle of speeches that follow from chapters 4 to 27, there's a poem concerning wisdom in chapter 28, in chapters 29 to 31 Job delivers his final speech, followed by Elihu's speeches in chapters 32 to 37. God's

speeches and Job's response are found in chapter 38 to the beginning of chapter 42.

The book concludes with an epilogue in chapter 42. The subject of the book are the sufferings of Job, and debate about those sufferings, leading to the question of where wisdom is to be found. Its concern with wisdom and the fear of the Lord mean that its place among the poetic wisdom books is quite fitting.

The book opens by introducing us to the character of Job, who lives in the land of Uz. We are not entirely sure where the land of Uz was. The Septuagint identifies Job with the character of Jobab in chapter 36 of Genesis, one of the Edomite kings.

And while this particular identification may be questionable, considering Job as an Edomite is not unreasonable. While there are various places that have been called Uz, in Lamentations chapter 4 verse 21, Uz seems to be associated with Edom. Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz, but to you also the cup shall pass, you shall become drunk, and strip yourself bare.

In Genesis chapter 36 verse 28, one of the names of the Edomites is Uz. Furthermore, one of Job's friends is called Eliphaz the Temanite. Once again, in Genesis chapter 36 verse 11, one of the sons of Edom is called Eliphaz and he has a son called Teman.

All of these considerations suggest that Job is an Edomite, living to the south of the land of Israel, likely prior to the conquest. There is every reason to believe that Job was a real person. He is described here as blameless and upright.

The language of blamelessness is used elsewhere of characters such as Noah, Abraham and Jacob. It's language that is associated with the sacrificial system, in which animals had to be without blemish in order to be fitting sacrifices. He fears God and turns away from evil.

The fear of the Lord is a common theme within the wisdom literature and Job exemplifies this trait that is elsewhere called the beginning of wisdom. The book of Job is in many respects a book that is about wisdom, about the limited understanding of man and the mysterious ways of the Lord. From Job's righteous character, which is the thing of first importance, the narrator moves to discuss his family, his seven sons and three daughters.

There is a proportion here of seven to three, both significant numbers, which in turn add up to ten. The seven to three ratio is found elsewhere in scripture. We might think, for instance, of Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines.

From his family, we now move to his possessions. He has 7,000 sheep and 3,000 camels, once again a seven to three ratio, adding up this time to 10,000. While these aren't unrealistic numbers for a particularly wealthy man, it should be apparent that Job is not a normal individual.

He's a king or a chief among his people, a man of incredible wealth, indeed one who will be described in a moment as the greatest of all of the people of the East. In chapter 29 verse 25, Job speaks of himself as like a king or a chief among his people. Bearing Job's wealth and status in mind is important when we consider what happens next.

What happens to Job is not merely a personal crisis, it's a crisis for his entire people. Their chief has been struck in a devastating way and it seems that the Lord has singled him out for particular judgment. This might help us to understand why the three friends confront him as they do in the later chapters.

They are his royal counsellors and they want him to confess to whatever it is that he has done that has brought this national disaster about. In addition to his 7,000 sheep and 3,000 camels, he owns 500 yoke of oxen and 500 female donkeys. This time the numbers are equal and add up to 1,000.

His 10 children, his 10,000 sheep and camels, his 1,000 oxen and female donkeys give us a sense of the completeness and the perfection that he experiences. This is a blameless man, a blameless man with a perfect household and with glorious and complete possessions. He enjoys so much wealth that each one of his sons has his own house in which he can hold these massive feasts that last for perhaps a week.

The seven sons and their seven houses holding their seven feasts, perhaps for their seven days, accumulate sevens in addition to the tens that were accumulated earlier on. Once again the perfection and the glory of Job's house is being underlined. As a pious father, Job is concerned for the spiritual well-being of his children and concerned that they might have cursed God in their hearts, literally blessed God in their hearts.

He offers sacrifices for them early in the morning after every single feast that they have had. This presents Job both as a pious and a rich man but it also raises the theme of cursing God in the heart which will be a very important theme in what follows. We also see a set up for a contrast here.

Job is concerned that his children might have cursed God in their hearts yet the Lord, Job's father, puts him forward as someone who will not curse God in his heart when he is put to the test. The setting of all of this seems to be in a patriarchal era. We see later on that the Chaldeans and the Sabians form raiding parties.

The wealth of Job is measured in oxen, sheep, camels and donkeys. And then there are the possible associations with the descendants of Edom. From the portrayal of this perfect man, this new Adam as it were, within the garden of his perfect family and perfect kingdom and possessions, we are made privy to a heavenly scene, the gathering of the sons of God to present themselves before the Lord.

This should remind us of divine counsel scenes that we find elsewhere in scripture, for

instance in 1 Kings chapter 22 with Micaiah's description of the host of heaven before the Lord. The sons of God here are the angels as they seem to be in Genesis chapter 6, although it is possible that some human prophets might be among them. Among their number, however, the adversary, or Satan, is present.

While the New Testament speaks in places like Revelation chapter 12 of Satan and his angels being cast down from heaven, in this period Satan seems to have enjoyed heavenly access. In Zechariah chapter 3 verse 1 we have a description of Satan in the divine counsel. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

The Lord addresses Satan, who describes himself as one who has been roaming around on the earth, perhaps bringing to mind the epistles description of him as a roaring lion prowling around seeking whom he may devour. While Job was concerned that one of his children had done something wrong, cursing God in their hearts, the Lord puts Job forward to the front line, pushing him forward into the position of testing. He invites Satan to test and inspect Job, presenting him as a singly righteous man, a man of integrity and godly character.

Satan, however, is having none of it, insisting that Job is only righteous because it works out well for him. If Job were really put to the test, he would fail. The Lord has set a hedge around him.

The glorious paradise of Job is guarded all around with this great barrier to protect it. If the Lord would just tear down that barrier and allow Satan true access, Job would rapidly capitulate. Perhaps we should see in the story of Job some of the themes at the beginning of the book of Genesis.

Job is a new Adam in a new paradise. He is being tested by the Lord as a son. He is facing the attack of the serpent and the temptation of his wife.

Will he succeed where the first Adam failed? The Lord grants Satan access to Job and the rest of the chapter is a litany of disaster. In one day, four hammer blows descend upon Job and his family, related together by the same pattern. His oxen and donkeys are stolen and servants are killed by the edge of the sword by a foreign tribe.

Then the fire of God falls down and burns up the sheep and servants. And then camels are stolen and servants are killed by the edge of the sword and finally a great wind strikes the house in which his sons and daughters are feasting and they are killed. In each case we see a similar formula.

Only one servant survives to bring the terrible news. There is a chiasmic structure as well to observe, a book-ended structure. Toby Sumter observes that it begins with sons and daughters eating and drinking and ends with them eating and drinking and then being

killed.

Within those book-ends there are oxen and donkeys stolen and servants killed by the edge of the sword and then camels stolen and servants killed by the edge of the sword and then in the middle the fire of God falls down and burns up the sheep and the servants. Sumter argues that this particularly singles out the falling down of the fire of God. This is the one disaster in particular that is marked out as an action of God, whereas the first and third disasters could be attributed to human forces.

This particular disaster points towards God as the instigator of Job's crisis. Sumter notes the presence of several allusions to themes of sacrifice within this chapter. Job was introduced to us as a blameless man, like the sacrifices needed to be without blemish.

Job symbolically offered sacrifices for his children in the earlier part of the chapter. In the second disaster the fire of God comes from heaven as the fire of God might come upon the sacrifices, burning them up into the presence of God. This happens with the sheep that correspond with the sons.

The great divine wind then strikes the four corners of the house in which Job's sons are celebrating their feast. Four corners language is associated elsewhere in scripture with the tabernacle and the altar. All of this points in the direction of a sort of sacrifice taking place.

Job and his household are being rendered a sacrifice. By the disasters falling upon him and his household he is being offered to the Lord. Job's response to all of this is faithful.

His action is an expression of his mortality. He tears his robe, shaves his head and falls to the ground. And then he worships.

He acknowledges the fact that he came from his mother's womb with nothing and he will return there with nothing. Everything that he has ever received has been a blessing and a gift from the Lord, not something to which he was ever entitled. And as he loses it he gives thanks for what he once enjoyed.

Rather than cursing the name of the Lord, as Satan has said he would do, he blesses the name of the Lord. The theme of blessing or cursing the Lord holds together the entire chapter, as do the themes of sacrifice. A question to consider.

In verse 21 Job says, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. Where else in scripture can we fill out this association between the womb and the earth? Satan's first attempt to get Job to curse God in Job chapter 1 had failed utterly. Rather than cursing the Lord as Satan had hoped, Job had actually ended the chapter by blessing the Lord.

And so in Job chapter 2 he begins another assault. The passage opens with an episode

that is pointedly similar to that of chapter 1 verses 6-8. It repeats many of the same elements, almost word for word.

That passage read, Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, From where have you come? Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? Save for a few minor changes, this passage is repeated at the beginning of chapter 2. It is as if the text is underlining the fact that Satan is back to square one.

In response to Satan's confident pronouncement in the preceding chapter, the Lord had given him the right to take all of Job's possessions. However, now, as a sore loser, Satan comes back and complains that the terms weren't fair. The test of chapter 1 was not a true test.

For it to be a true test, Satan should be allowed to attack Job's own body. Many proposed interpretations have been given for Satan's statement, skin for skin. Some have suggested, for instance, that it refers to the willingness of Job to give up the skins of other people for his own skin, or perhaps the skin of his wealth and his possessions for his own body.

David Klein's suggests that the meaning of the expression is more prospective in its force. Satan is saying that, although you may attack a person's possessions, that is not the same thing as attacking their own body. If you attack their own person, they will attack your person in response.

If the Lord strikes Job, Job will strike back at him. This seems to be pretty much the import of verse 5. Even though Satan has lost the former contest, and has no right to claim that it was unfair, as he consented to its terms earlier, the Lord accepts the second contest. He removes his protection from Job, and allows Satan to attack Job's body.

He does so by afflicting Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. The exact character of this affliction is not entirely clear, although it might remind us of the sixth plague of boils upon the Egyptians. In Leviticus chapter 13, the same terminology as is used here is used in reference to something in association with leprosy.

Likewise, in Deuteronomy chapter 28 verse 35, the Lord will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. The affliction in question may be something that was particularly associated with the wrath of the Lord, singling out a particular person. Job has been struck by plagues, not just plagues on his property, but now plagues upon his



person.

It would seem that he has been singled out for judgment. Such a skin condition that might be regarded as a divine plague might also see him shunned by society. He sits out in the ashes and uses a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself.

Perhaps the implication is that he is cast out from ordinary human society. He is seated in the trash heap, along with discarded ashes and broken pieces of pottery. Of course, the ashes and the broken pottery also have an affinity with Job himself.

The human body is connected with dust and also with ashes, which is the sort of dust that is left over after fire has consumed. Likewise, if the human body can be compared to a piece of pottery or a vessel, a broken body can be compared to a broken piece of pottery. To compound Job's distress, his wife's voice joins with that of the serpent, tempting him to abandon his integrity and to curse God.

We might perhaps hear echoes of Adam and Eve here. Job, however, unlike Adam, resists his wife's temptation. Recognizing the sovereignty of a gracious God over all of the affairs of our lives, Job declares his willingness to receive from God what God gives.

God has given Job unmerited blessings, Job did not complain, and he is not going to complain beneath the heavy hand of God's providence. Once again, faced with the test, Job has not failed. News of Job's distress reaches his three friends, Bildad the Shuhite, Eliphaz the Temanite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

They come to visit Job, with the intention of showing him sympathy. Commentators differ over the meaning of verse 12. What does it mean that the friends do not recognize Job? Is the point that Job has become unrecognizable, or is the point that they do not acknowledge him? David Clines argues that the latter is the point.

They proceed to engage in seven days of mourning, as you would for an important figure, but they are largely acting as if Job were not there, as if he were already dead. The Job on the ash heap is, as it were, just the shell of the man that they used to know. They don't acknowledge him, and they don't speak to him.

It isn't entirely clear whether or not this is the intended meaning, but if it were, it might help to make more sense of the way that Job speaks of them later, as those who had betrayed him. As his three friends, these men may be the close counsellors of King Job. Yet in their mourning of him, far from acting as loyal counsellors and friends, they are acting as if he were no longer alive, confirming his expulsion.

The meaning of their action of sprinkling dust on their heads towards heaven is also unclear. Many commentators have seen in this something beyond just a mere act of mourning. Some, for instance, have seen a suggestive connection between this and Exodus chapter 9, verses 8-10, in connection with the sixth plague of boils.

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils, breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt. So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils, breaking out in sores on man and beast.

A question to consider. How can this chapter help us in thinking about the providence of God? There is a significant shift in genre and style between the prologue of Job and chapter 3. The characterisation of Job also seems to shift. The Job of the prologue responded to the great disasters that befell him with a determined faith and by blessing God.

The Job of chapter 3, by apparent contrast, breaks out in an extended curse of the day of his birth. Besides this, we might expect to sense the dark shadow of the events of chapters 1 and 2 hanging over the rest of the chapters of the book prior to the epilogue. Yet, despite the fact that the Job of the dialogues that follow is clearly experiencing extreme suffering and distress, the shadow that rests over the text seems to have a rather different shape from the events of the first two chapters that we might presume to be casting at.

The Job of the rest of the book doesn't seem simply to be bemoaning his physical distress or even his loss of his wealth and his family. Rather, Job's accusers and his social situation seem to loom much larger in the heart of the book than we might expect from an initial impression of the narrative of the prologue. What are we to make of this? Toby Sumter, exploring some thoughts by René Girard, observes that Job's statement at the end of chapter 3, I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, I have no rest, but trouble comes, doesn't present Job's crisis merely as the devastating events of the past, nor even as his current distress, but as something very immediate and expected to increase.

He argues that the part played by Job's friends within Job's crisis should be given more attention at the very outset. This might fit well with David Cline's argument that Job's friends, upon their arrival at the end of chapter 2, do not acknowledge Job, but act as if he were already dead. Job was the wealthiest and most powerful man of the East, he was a king among his people, but he has been brought very low and become like an outcast.

Perhaps his friends are swooping in like vultures, and Job's crisis, as Girard has claimed, has a lot to do with his attempt to resist their attempts to reduce him to a scapegoat, to cast him out for his supposed sins and usurp his position. Throughout the prologue there was the prominent question of whether Job was going to curse God. Now, after 7 days of his friends' silence with him, Job himself breaks the silence.

He makes a curse in verses 1-10, followed by a lament in verses 11-26. Norman Harbell notes the structure of the passage. There is a summary curse in verse 3, and the grounds for the curse given in verse 10.

Verses 4-5 contain 6 curses upon the day of his birth. Verses 6-9 contain 3 sets of 3 curses on the night of his birth. The passage is a highly artistic work of poetry, with much development of imagery, wordplay, ambiguity and assonance in the speech.

Harbell lists a number of these. The close similarities between Job 3-10 and Jeremiah 20-14-18 are widely recognised. The passage from Jeremiah reads, Like Jeremiah, Job curses the day of his birth.

The announcement of the birth of a boy wishes that his mother's womb had been blocked and speaks of the trouble for which he was born. Michael Fishbane and Harbell both note the way that Job employs themes of cosmic de-creation in this chapter. The creation began with the words, Allusions to Genesis chapters 1 and 2 pervade Job's statement, with references to the day and the light, night and darkness, days of the year, the sea monster Leviathan, and finally to Job's lack of rest in the concluding lament.

If the Job of the prologue might have appeared to be a stoic sufferer, able to withstand great hardship with remarkable equanimity, the Job of chapter 3 is quite different. He doesn't curse God, but he curses the next best thing, the day of his birth and perhaps also the night of his conception, and all associated with them. He summons the darkness of the formless void prior to the Lord's work of creation to swallow them up.

He wishes, as it were, that the events that gave rise to his existence could be expunged from history, utterly reversed. His curse invokes a sort of de-creation, a let there be darkness uttered to the light. The darkness here represents nonexistence, death and the underworld of the abyss.

The darkness here is not just the regular darkness of the night, but the primordial darkness, a great void, a black hole as it were, emptied of stars. Job summons all of these forces against the day of his birth. The sea monster Leviathan was regarded as a chaos creature in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

It too is summoned by Job against the day of his birth. Harwell suggests that the reference to the doors of the womb in verse 10 might have an element of ambiguity, referring both to the womb of his human mother and to the womb of the earth more generally. The lament of Job from verse 11 to verse 26 begins with the summary question of why Job did not die at birth, a question that is refracted into a series of further questions in the verses that follow, leading up to verses 24 to 26 which lay out the ground for his lament.

Job's great why questions in verses 12 to 23 are punctuated by presentations of the longed for state of death as a place of rest, as a release from trouble and suffering. The lament is in many respects a transposition of the curse into a different form. He is wishing that his existence had never come to be.

In many ways this is a wish that is more radical than merely a wish for death. He is not just wishing to conclude his existence, but that his entire existence be erased, that it had never even come to be in the first place. The evils of his life are such that death here and now would not be sufficient to erase them.

So much damage has already irreparably been done. Unraveling his entire existence is the only sufficient way to address the situation. He speaks of the grave as a place of rest.

Perhaps he is inverting Sabbath themes here as he continues to allude to the creation narrative. Such a way of speaking of death as a place to be more desired than the land of the living is startling indeed. Job is not unaware of the reality of death.

However, he now sees it as preferable to his current condition. Continued life is a situation of torment and bondage into which he wishes he had never been plunged. For a person in Job's situation, life is a doomed and terrible struggle to which the surrender of death would at least grant a measure of relief.

While Job is not cursing God, his bitter curse and lament forcefully questions the providence of God in bringing him into existence and, in verses 20-23, Job makes his questioning more general. Why does God bring any sufferer into existence when they are doomed to such misery? Job's concern here is not primarily the painfulness of suffering so much as it is its meaninglessness. Life is like a grim labyrinth with no clear path to follow.

In the Lord's conversation with Satan in chapter 1 verse 10, Satan had spoken of the Lord placing a hedge all around Job, protecting him from harm. In verse 23, however, Job speaks of the man whom God has hedged in. God is no longer his defender but is like a besieging force surrounding him, tightening the noose.

Job's worst apprehensions have befallen him. We might think back to Job's caution and concern in chapter 1, sacrificing for his children lest they had cursed God in their hearts. Job had his worries and apprehensions then, although what is happening to him now greatly exceeds any of those.

Job senses that there is even more trouble to come. A question to consider. How would you differentiate between the curse that Job does not make against God and the curse that he makes against the day of his birth in this chapter? In Job chapter 4 we arrive at the first speech of one of Job's friends.

There are almost 30 chapters devoted to the three friends' speeches and to Job's responses to them, with the Wisdom poem of chapter 28 and the speeches of Elihu seeming to be somewhat out of place. The cycle of speeches follows a patterned order. Eliphaz goes first, presumably because he is the oldest.

His speeches are the longest of the three friends, although Job's responses to the friends tend to be longer than theirs. In addition to being the longest speaking friend, he is also the most articulate. His argument tends to be that the righteous are not finally cut off even when they have sinned.

He warns about despising the discipline of God. Rather, Job must repent and turn to the Lord for restoration. His speeches become more forceful with time.

After Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhaitite comes next. His argument is from the justice of God. Surely God would not pervert justice.

If people are suffering, it must be because of sin. Blameless people do not suffer. We are also completely dwarfed by God's majesty.

Compared to Eliphaz's speeches, Bildad's are quite short. Zophar the Nehemiothite's speeches are about the same length as Bildad's. Zophar is probably the most antagonistic to Job.

He argues that Job is mocking God and must have sinned greatly. The wicked, if they do not repent, will be utterly destroyed. He seeks to interpret Job's life for him.

Each speech is responded to by Job. Job defends his innocence and desires a mediator. He wrestles with despair, with abandonment, suffering and accusation.

God is his only hope and he turns to God in confidence. With words like those of chapter 13 verse 15, though he slay me, I will hope in him. He displays the conflicted feelings of the sufferer throughout.

Eliphaz the Temanite's approach to Job is diplomatic. His speech will recall Job to his past behaviour and knowledge. Though unsure of how he will be heard, he feels duty-bound to speak.

He reminds Job of the fact that he has often been in the position of the counsellor to others. In those situations, Job encouraged and upheld people, and now when he finds himself in difficulty, he doesn't seem to be giving himself the advice that he needs. He summarises his reading of the situation in verse 6. Job's words, perhaps to Eliphaz's mind, were not the right approach in the situation.

He also recalls Job to the moral principle that the innocent don't perish and the upright are not cut off. Doubtless he would hedge this statement with a number of qualifications. His point, presumably, is that Job's situation is only temporary.

He will not finally be cut off if he is a righteous person. That is where he ought to find his confidence. None of Eliphaz's position really answers Job's concern, however.

The reader of the Book of Job, unlike Eliphaz, knows from the prologue that Job is indeed

an upright man. He is a man who fears the Lord. While he may not finally perish, the Lord has nonetheless brought a situation upon him that is so bad that Job is wishing he had never been born.

Eliphaz argues for a strong relationship between sowing and reaping. This is something that we see on several occasions in scripture. Ploughing and sowing trouble and iniquity will lead to a harvest of the same kind.

The Lord can bring sudden disaster even upon the strong, here compared to powerful lions. In verses 12-16, Eliphaz describes an uncanny experience he had one night, providing the background for an oracle that he will use to support his point. This is arguably the only description of its kind in the scripture.

It is an account of a mysterious and strange experience of a spirit at night. Eliphaz's encounter was elusive and fleeting, vague in its details. There was a sense of terror he experienced.

He felt a spirit gliding past his face. He felt its presence but he could not see its appearance. He then heard a voice, earlier described as something that came to him stealthily and as a whisper.

The oracle received by Eliphaz presents human righteousness in the framework of the creator-creature distinction. God's glorious, spotless holiness so exceeds mankind in its sinfulness and frailty that humanity cannot but appear polluted by contrast with it. If even the heavenly beings are exposed in their faults and their finitude by such holiness, what hope has man? Man was formed from the earth.

He dwells in a house of clay. His foundation is in the dust from which he was first formed. While Eliphaz's points may be largely true, they do speak past Job's plight.

Job is not claiming to have a righteousness that compares with God's own righteousness. Rather he is experiencing bitter distress and he wants to be vindicated in his righteousness. A righteousness that the text has already assured us that he actually possesses and that recognised by God.

Job has been completely devastated by the Lord's judgments that have fallen upon him and to claim as Eliphaz does that no man can be perfectly righteous before God is in many respects to cut off his hope. Eliphaz's question, can mortal man be in the right before God, seems to presume for his mind, as David Kline observes, a negative answer. However, as we look through the rest of the book, it will seem that the Lord actually does hold Job to be righteous before him, not in the more radical sense that Eliphaz might be thinking about here, but in a very real sense nonetheless.

Using that radical sense of God's holiness eclipsing all human righteousness to deny the proper sense in which a man can be righteous before the Lord is not good counsel. A

question to consider, what is a better way to speak about the Lord's surpassing righteousness without denying the possibility of a covenant standing that people can enjoy before him as righteous without being gloriously holy or perfectly sinless? In chapter 5 we find the second part of Eliphaz's first speech. In the book of Job there are three cycles of speeches by Job's friends.

In each cycle Eliphaz begins. Eliphaz is presumably the oldest, his speeches are the longest, they're also the most articulate and eloquent. Bildad comes second and then Zophar comes last.

There are three cycles and in the third we have Eliphaz, Bildad and then Zophar does not complete the series. As we proceed through the sequence each of the speeches is responded to by Job, whose responses are generally longer than the speeches of his friends. In the preceding chapter, while recognizing that Job was essentially a righteous man, Eliphaz had contrasted human righteousness in all its limitations with the transcendent holiness of God.

Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth. Unlike the wicked, the righteous will not be finally cut off.

However, on account of the sin inherently characteristic of human beings, no man has any standing to question the justice of his situation. If Job is going to complain about his situation, who is he going to complain to that will answer him? Eliphaz has already stated that the angels themselves are charged by God with faults. Is Job expecting that they will intercede for him? Anger in such a situation will not do Job any good, it will just eat him up.

Eliphaz, to illustrate the principle that he arrives at in verse 7, describes what he has witnessed in seeing a fool flourish. The fool seemed to flourish for a time, and then Eliphaz cursed his dwelling. The relation of Eliphaz's curse to the fate of the fool is not entirely clear.

Is Eliphaz's curse the reason why the fool's house is brought down, or is it introducing the statement of verses 4 and 5 which states the actual curse that Eliphaz made? Or perhaps the point is that he is announcing a curse that the fool is already under. I think that latter option may be nearer to the truth. On account of his wickedness, the fool is under the curse of God, and so when a curse is made against him, it lands, as it were.

The fool was suddenly devastated, and the consequences of his downfall are experienced by his children. They lack safety, they are crushed in the gate, and others completely devour their property. The reference to being crushed in the gate probably refers to some sort of oppression, as we see in Proverbs 22.

Eliphaz goes on to make his point. Trouble and affliction do not just arise from nature. Rather, man is the source of his own trouble.

He begets trouble just as naturally as the sparks fly upward. Eliphaz's point here is probably not that Job is the fool. It would be particularly insensitive to speak about the fool's children being far from safety, being crushed in the gate, and other things like that, comparing Job to that fool, and suggesting that Job had lost his children for a similar reason.

Eliphaz's point is probably building more upon what he said in the preceding chapter. Job, while generally a righteous man, has obviously failed in some regard, viewed from the perspective of God's perfect righteousness. Rather than complain, he should recognise and acknowledge the fault within himself.

Job has no grounds to petition God to vindicate him. Rather, his response, as Eliphaz argues in verses 8-16, should be to throw himself upon the Lord as the one who reverses fortunes. Perhaps God will have mercy upon him and deal with him in his distress.

Eliphaz gives a litany of different things that are instances of God's transforming and reversing power. God is the one who breaks the drought, bringing the rains that render the earth fruitful again. He can take the lowly and oppressed and bring them high, and those who mourn can be delivered.

Oppressors, confident in their powers, can be frustrated in their plans. Those who imagine themselves to be in control of their fate and their purposes can find themselves thwarted. The Lord, who sovereignly determines destinies and reverses fortunes, is the one upon whom Job must now cast himself.

Armed with the conceptually reassuring simplicities of his school teaching, Eliphaz now moves to wrapping up his speech, addressing Job more directly. What Job is experiencing is the discipline of the Lord, and he needs to learn from this. Suffering under the Lord's heavy hand, he needs to grow, he needs to understand where he has failed, and receive the Lord's rebuke.

All of this is familiar teaching from what we find elsewhere in the book of Proverbs, for instance, in teaching also taken up in Hebrews chapter 12. The Lord rebukes and disciplines those that he loves, and so we should receive the chastisement of the Lord's hand so that we may grow thereby. The problem is that Eliphaz's teaching, no matter how well intentioned it may be, is highly inapplicable to Job's situation.

Eliphaz expatiates on his point, accumulating proverbs that will make it in different forms, concluding his didactic pronouncement with a statement that drives its simplistic dogmas home. Behold this we have searched out, it is true, hear, and know it for your good. One of the things that Eliphaz might illustrate at this point is the way that faced



with other people's suffering and difficulty, our concern can often be to protect our own theologies and our certainties.

Rather than taking the opportunity to grow in wisdom, Eliphaz is more concerned to defend a brittle dogma. A question to consider, where are some passages elsewhere in scripture that seem to be making similar points to those that Eliphaz makes here? How would we distinguish between the proper application of those principles and Eliphaz's misapplication of them at this point? There are three cycles of dialogues in the book of Job. They start with Eliphaz go to Bildad and then end with Zophar.

Each one of the friend's speeches is punctuated by a response from Job, typically longer than the speech of the friend. The first speech is by Eliphaz the Temanite and that ends at the end of chapter 5. Job's response begins here in chapter 6. He begins his response in a way that probably harkens back to his curse and lament in chapter 3. Comparing his vexational grief to all of the sand of the sea, he tries to explain why he has spoken as he has. Is it at all surprising that a person who has experienced such intense suffering and anguish should speak in such a distressed manner? Surely this is exactly what we would expect from someone in such a position.

If only Job's anguish had an objective measurement, it would be amply evident to everyone else too that his response was proportionate. In verse 4 he speaks to the fact that he has been struck by the arrows of the Lord. God's poisoned arrows have struck him and their poison is going through his system.

He is also besieged by the terrors of the Lord. The way that Job describes his suffering, it seems to be focused more upon the present time, not just the events in the past. His sense of the disloyalty of his friends and of the cruel injustice of the implicit accusation of Eliphaz's speech hurts him most painfully, as we shall soon see.

Job compares his response to the way that a donkey will bray when he is denied what is fitting to him. When the donkey has grass he doesn't bray in protest, nor does the ox low when he receives his expected food. Job has been served a plate of suffering that is utterly unfitting to him and quite inedible.

Is he not permitted to bray in such circumstances? Contrary to the claims of Eliphaz, this is not something that is happening to Job as a result of Job's own sinfulness. Job has every right to protest. In verse 8 Job finally makes his own request.

Rather than prolonging his meaningless suffering, he wishes that the Lord would simply cut him off. Why wound him so grievously, yet hold his hand back from the finishing blow? Does the Lord expect that Job can hold out in this situation? It's not that he's afraid of the pain. Rather he fears that his grip upon his integrity will loosen.

His wife has tempted him to curse God and die. He wants to die in order that he would

not curse God. He does not want to find himself tested beyond his limits, and he feels that he has already reached those limits.

What reserves of strength is the Lord expecting him to draw upon at this point? Is he as unyielding as stone or bronze that he should be able to endure such hardship? Every ounce of his strength and resolve seems to have been wrung out of him, and with terror he feels himself approaching the point where his righteousness might also forsake him. In verse 14 onwards he takes an accusatory posture towards his friends. The exact sense of verse 14 is difficult to ascertain.

What exactly is the relationship that Job is drawing between the fear of the Almighty and kindness shown towards a friend? It's clear enough that he is accusing his friends of disloyalty, and it seems likely that he's associating such loyalty quite closely with the fear of the Almighty. If they truly feared God, they would not treat their friend in such a treacherous manner. Job goes on to develop an extended metaphor.

He compares his friends to a wadi in the desert. Such a wadi would bear the torrents of the melt waters as the snows on the mountains melt it, but then, having borne those torrents, they would dry up, leaving only dry channels in the summer heat. He imagines a travelling caravan of nomads or traders, turning aside to go to the place where they expected to find water, only to find a dry course where they had hoped to find the waters of the wadi.

This, of course, could prove fatal, as they might not be able to get to the next site of water before dying of thirst. Job's friends are very similar to this. They're fair-weather friends.

When he has a desperate need for their aid, they offer no relief. It isn't that Job has made some unreasonable demand of them. He hasn't asked for a substantial loan, or for military aid, or for deliverance from some oppressor.

Eliphaz, while acknowledging that Job is generally a righteous man, had suggested that Job is suffering because of some fault on his part. As a sinful human being, dealing with the entirely holy God, there are plenty of grounds for God to inflict such suffering upon Job. It must be justified.

Yet Job protests. He's prepared to listen if they'll only tell him what exactly it is that he has done wrong. A true rebuke would be devastating, but they've offered nothing of the kind.

They should pay attention to and reckon with his words, rather than simply dismissing them as hot air. They are so heartless that they are like those who would cast lots over an orphan to sell them into slavery. They're treating him and his distress in a very similar manner.

They've come in like vultures. Satan is the great adversary and accuser, but they are proving his willing helpers. They've failed properly to acknowledge him to this point.

They've ignored him. They've spent seven days not talking to him. Now, when they have broken their silence, all they have to offer are hard words.

They won't actually deal with him as a friend. Job wants them to look him in the eye, to deal with him candidly and forthrightly. This really matters to him.

His vindication is at stake. If they are going to claim that he is unjust, make their case. Deal with his arguments.

They should not delude themselves in thinking that generalities taken from some schoolbook will suffice to answer his position. Job insists that he, the sufferer, has some understanding of the nature of his suffering. Cannot his palate discern the cause of calamity? Why shouldn't they listen to him and deal with his perspective fairly? A question to consider.

How does Job's position in verses 8-13 differ from that of a suicidal person? In Job chapter 7, Job concludes his first response to one of the speeches of his friends, to the speech of Eliphaz the Temanite in chapters 4-5. However, whereas most of chapter 6 was addressed to Eliphaz and the friends, this chapter is mostly addressed to the Lord. Job's suffering has become so all-consuming that it gives him a perspective upon humanity as a whole.

He presents humanity's situation as akin to that of a slave doing hard labour, or a hired hand waiting in vain for his wages. Like such figures, the days are agonisingly long for Job. The slave longs for the shadow, for relief from his labour, and the hired hand waits for his wages at the end of the day, and Job describes his months of emptiness.

However, whereas these figures may find some relief at the end of their labours, Job's toils of the day are succeeded by even more toilsome nights. He tosses and turns and gets no rest. He longs for the day to come and the night to end, even though his days are so extremely bitter.

His suffering is Sisyphean. It is futile and meaningless, a cycle that repeats day after day, night after night, and there is no relief to be had. His flesh is clothed with worms and dirt, as if he were already anticipating his burial.

His wounds start to scab over, and then his foul boils break open again. In verses 6-10 he expresses the fleetingness of his life. His days move like a swift weaver's shuttle through the fabric, and the thread is removed.

His life has the brevity of a breath that is soon expired. While the Lord watches him, he will soon vanish away. He has nothing left to look forward to in this life.

His life is as insubstantial and transitory as a cloud. It will soon pass away and leave nothing behind it. We might here recall the image of the Vapor at the beginning of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Considering the fragility and brevity of human life, it is a source of great anguish to Job that the Lord seems to be so set upon inflicting misery upon him, in the brief span of life remaining to him. Within the cosmogonic myths of the ancient Near East, the sea and the sea monster were both personified forces that were pacified and tamed in the process of creation. While Job might not be alluding to such creation myths, he here uses imagery that we find elsewhere in the scripture.

The Lord tames the might of the sea, keeping it within its bounds. The Leviathan, the great sea monster, is his pet and under his control. Job had spoken of rousing this monster back in chapter 3. If Job were like the sea, or like the Leviathan, it would make sense for the Lord to pay so much attention to him, to breaking him down and mastering him.

But Job is nothing of the kind. He is a short-lived human being of little consequence. And yet the Lord is giving him no respite.

He longs for the relief of sleep, but the Lord torments him with troubling visions and dreams. Toby Sumter suggests that Job is addressing Eliphaz at this point. Eliphaz has related the dream that he had in chapter 4 and the night vision that he described was supposed to terrify Job.

I don't think that is actually Job's meaning here. Rather, the wider argument suggests that Job is addressing the Lord at this point. Harried and troubled by the Lord in every waking and sleeping moment, Job wishes he could be strangled or to die, rather than to continue such an existence.

Such an existence has become loathsome to him. More than anything else, he just wants the Lord to leave him alone. The Lord's unceasing torment of him is utterly intolerable, and seems so disproportionate to a creature of such small consequence.

In verse 17, we have what might be an ironic allusion to Psalm 8 verses 3-6. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the Son of Man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the work of your hands.

You have put all things under his feet. The psalmist marvels at the grace and the condescension of the Lord to take notice of such a small creature. For the psalmist, the Lord's attention to mankind is a wonderful thing, an expression of the most incredible grace.

For Job, however, the Lord's paying attention to mankind is a terrible thing. The Lord's visiting of mankind in the psalm is expressed in his caring for mankind. For Job, it's a constant testing.

The Lord simply won't let him out of his sight. He's exposing him to the harshest trial, and more than anything else, Job just wants the Lord to ignore him. Why should the Lord even take notice of such a puny creature? The Lord won't even look away from him for long enough for him to swallow his spit.

David Klines argues that Job's point in verse 20 is not that the sin of humankind is so small that it should be paid no attention by a holy God, but rather that any sin committed by the righteous Job, a man teetering on the brink of the grave, cannot be of such extreme significance that it merits singling him out from all other human beings for such horrific treatment. Job at this point is, as it were, calling out to God, Stop, stop, I'm already dead. Whatever sin it is that he might be guilty of, can the Lord not just forgive it and allow Job to die in peace? This is the one hope remaining to him.

A question to consider. Reading this passage alongside Psalm 8, how can it help us to reflect upon the significance that the Lord gives to humankind? Job chapter 8 is the first of the speeches of Bildad the Shuhite. His is the second in the first cycle of the speeches of Job's friends, after Eliphaz the Temanite.

His speech is much shorter than Eliphaz's, and picks up on certain elements of Job's response to Eliphaz. It begins with a sharp and dismissive statement, How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Bildad's how long opening might look back in part to Job's statement of chapter 7 verse 19, How long will you not look away from me, nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit? For Bildad, the justice of God's rule should not be challenged or questioned. The righteous moral governance of God is axiomatic.

For Bildad, things are to be understood in terms of reward or retribution. In a particularly insensitive statement, in verse 4, he says that Job's children had clearly sinned against the Lord, and as a result, they were delivered over to destruction. All of this follows from Bildad's understanding of God's just moral governance.

All of this is so obvious to him, that he may not even be registering the inferences that he is making. Norman Harville observes that his use of the language of sinning and dispatching in verse 4 is ironic, given the background of chapter 1 verse 5, where the same two verbs are related to Job's pious action concerning his children. While we might perhaps infer it from his statement, Bildad does not directly accuse Job in the way that he accused Job's children of sin.

Rather, he presents Job with the possibility of restoration to his rightful habitation. He must plead with God for mercy and be pure and upright, and if he is, he has good

grounds for hope for a bountiful restoration. While Bildad is quite wrong in his assessment of the situation, verse 7 is actually fulfilled in chapter 42 verse 12, and the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning, and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys.

To support his case, Eliphaz had referred to a mysterious vision that he had received at night. Bildad turns to the wisdom of the ancients. In verses 8 to 10, he talks about the primordial wisdom of antiquity.

Bildad, Job and their contemporaries are people of short lives, yet the wisdom of the ancients has survived from time immemorial. It is to this tried and tested wisdom of bygone ages that Job should turn. Verse 9, talking about the brevity of their lives, might remind us of Ecclesiastes chapter 6 verse 12.

For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? Hubble raises the possibility that Bildad might not only have in mind the duration of time for which the wisdom of the ancients had survived, but also the exceptionally long lives of the ancients, and consequently the exceptional length of time they had to test and develop their thinking. In the verses that remain in the chapter, he presents wisdom drawn from these ancients, in particular developing the metaphor of a plant. The papyrus or the reeds that cannot flourish without the marsh or the water might be a reference to the way that people cannot flourish without wisdom or God's grace to drink from.

Such a metaphor resembles what we find in Psalm 1 verses 3 to 4. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

And in Jeremiah chapter 17 verses 5 to 8. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. The nature of the metaphor that Bildad is exploring here is not entirely clear, and commentators differ in their interpretation of it. Hubble, for instance, sees this as a metaphor of two contrasting plants.

The first plant is the withering plant of verse 12, and the second plant is the lush plant of verse 16. In this interpretation he is drawing upon the work of Robert Gordas. Gerald Janssen follows a similar approach, whereas David Clines, Robert Alden and Trempe Longman all see either only one plant, or two images of the wicked within different plants.

Those who read it as a contrast between the righteous and the wicked see, for instance, a juxtaposition between the fragility of the spider's house in verse 14 and the strength of the house of stones in verse 17. This is related to the contrast between the habitation of the righteous in verse 6 and the tent of the wicked in verse 22. The godless quickly withers, but in the reading advanced by Gordas and others, the lush plant thrives.

However, in verse 18, it seems that the lush plant is eradicated. It is destroyed from its place, and the place seemingly forgets him. However, there is a reversal in verse 19.

The lush plant that seemed to have perished comes up again. Hubble translates the relevant verses from verse 16 to 19 as follows. Another plant stays fresh, even in the sun.

Its shoots reach beyond its garden. Over a rock pile its roots wind. A house of stone it spies.

If its place should swallow it, and deny, saying, I did not see you, such is the joy of its way that from the dust it shoots up elsewhere. By contrast with this reading, David Klines reads the beginning of verse 19 as that is the dissolution of its life. What springs up is not the plant itself thriving elsewhere, but other plants taking its place.

It has been eradicated, forgotten, and now where it once grew, other plants are growing. Good arguments can be advanced for both of these readings. Perhaps one of the strengths of the reading presented by Hubble and Gordas is that it ties well with the conclusion of the chapter.

Although Job seems to have suffered a terrible setback, he is in the position of the lush plant. If he is a righteous and blameless man, language that was used of him back in chapter 1, he will not be rejected. His misfortune will be reversed, and any who mock him will end up being put to shame.

A question to consider. Both Job and his friends make arguments that are based upon the brevity of man's life. What are these different arguments, and how should they be assessed? In Job chapter 9, Job expresses his powerlessness and the futility of trying to make a case with God.

This is Job's response to the first speech of Bildad, the second of his friends to speak to him in the first cycle of speeches. As David Klines notes, here we see a shift beyond Job's preoccupation with his suffering to the question of his vindication. Job's concern is not merely for an end to his suffering, but that he be vindicated as a righteous man and a man in good standing with the Lord.

His opening statement, Truly I know that it is so, probably refers back to Bildad's insistent claims that God does not pervert justice. But Job isn't claiming that God is unjust, or even that he is simply arbitrary. His claim seems to be that God is more

indifferent and distant and cold.

God is aloof and in his power unapproachable, and there is no way of making a case with God so as to be heard. Job has never denied the justice of God, nor has he been claiming against Eliphaz that man can stand before God's perfect holiness without being seen to be thoroughly corrupted by sin, even in his best deeds. Job's concern is not with these things, but with being vindicated before God and his neighbours.

The point, as Klines observes, is not of winning a case against God, but of prevailing upon God to declare him to be in right standing with him. Again, Job is not focused upon ending his suffering, but upon public vindication. He wants God, through action on Job's behalf, publicly to demonstrate Job to be a man in good standing with him.

And there seems to be no mechanism by which this could be achieved. How could one even hope to go about it? No attempt could enjoy any success. One could not enter into a successful legal dispute with the Lord.

Anyone who attempted to do so would be utterly outmatched, and would be struck dumb by God's answers. In verses 5-10, Job makes a lengthy expression of God's glory and his power. Eliphaz had made a comparable series of statements in 5-9-16.

That there is a relationship between these two statements of God's glory is suggested by a comparison between verse 9 of chapter 5, who does great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number, and verse 10 of this chapter, who does great things beyond searching out, and marvellous things beyond number. However, when we look closer at the statements, we can see that although they both express the glory of God, they have a very different import. The statement of Eliphaz highlights the glory of God, the deliverer.

God is the one who reverses fortunes. He's the one who acts on behalf of his people with his might. On the other hand, Job's statement is a statement of the wonders and the majesty and the mystery of God, as the one who is inapproachable, aloof, distant, and who simply cannot be prevailed upon or reasoned with.

God as seen here is so great and powerful and transcendent that man is not even like the smallest insect to him. Just as an insect's concerns and sense of justice could not prevail upon a human being, so God in his greatness is utterly above Job's concerns. Note well, the statement here is not that God is unjust, or even that God is arbitrary, but that he is so great that no human being can really deal with him.

This is the God who shakes the very earth, who determines the position of the sun, who puts the stars in their places, who stretches out the heavens, who controls the sea, who made the great constellations. We have another description of the Lord's power over the constellations in chapter 38, verses 31 and 32. Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,



or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Maserath in their season, or can you guide the bear with its children? Job's vision of God here is terrifying, a God who is great and indifferent to mankind, who can inflict suffering without sympathy, and disaster without recourse.

When God acts, no one can appeal, protest, or question it. His power is so great that he is the master of the monsters of chaos, Rahab, for instance, in verse 13. Rahab is also mentioned in Psalm 89, verses 9-10.

You rule the raging of the sea, when its waves rise, you still them. You crushed Rahab like a carcass, you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. And then in Isaiah chapter 51, verse 9. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.

Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? In verses 14 following, Job expresses just how sorely he is outmatched by God. There is no way that he can make a case with such a God.

There's no law court to which he could summon him, and Job's strength is clearly as nothing compared to the strength of the Lord. Even if, in the extreme hypothetical case, he was able to make a case with the Lord, the Lord's majesty was so over all him, that he suspects he would end up arguing against himself. Job knows, as the reader also knows, that he is blameless.

But yet he also loathes his life. All this affliction has been brought upon him. He seems cast off by God, and he is harshly accused by his friends.

The fact that all of these things have befallen him, and yet he is still blameless, leads him to the conclusion, it seems unavoidable, that God destroys both the blameless and the wicked alike. He is indifferent to the fate of the righteous. As further evidence for this disheartening claim, he gives the example of oppression.

When oppression overwhelms a land, from whom does it come? Who permits it? If it isn't God, then who is it? In verses 25 and 26, Job describes the briefness and the swiftness of his life. His days, which are racing by, are days of unrelenting suffering. They're swift as a runner, swift as a skiff of reed, a papyrus boat on the river, and swifter than an eagle swooping down on its prey.

In these images of ever-increasing speed, Job is, as it were, fast-forwarding through many scenes of his life, of non-stop and unmitigated suffering. He wonders to himself, would it be best if he just tried to put a brave face upon things, to try as much as possible just to go on with his life and not become preoccupied with his sufferings? And yet then he fears that the Lord will bring further suffering upon him, because he is persuaded that as the Lord is not vindicating him, he will continue to deal with him as one who is not innocent. Even if he went through the most elaborate external procedure

of demonstrated and protested innocence, washing himself with snow and cleansing his hands with lye, the Lord would nonetheless plunge him into a filthy pit that marked him out as guilty, and so much so that even his own clothes would now abhor him, not just his friends and family.

He sums up the issue in the concluding verses. The person concerning whom he is presenting his case is so great and powerful as to terrify him. So intimidated by this God, Job cannot deal directly with him.

If there were an arbiter, the arbiter could insist that God not terrorise Job, and they could perhaps come to terms. But there is no such possibility when dealing with the God of all creation. Job's situation seems utterly hopeless.

A question to consider. If we were in the position of counselling Job, what scriptural truths would we address to his complaints here? In Job chapter 10, Job concludes the response to Bildad the Shuhite's first speech to him. However, by the point of chapter 10, he is almost entirely addressing God.

He asks God to cease holding him guilty. As he clearly has been holding him guilty in his judgements of him to this point, he appeals to God as if God were a man to tell him why he has a case against him. What issue does God have with Job? He puzzles over the motives of God.

Does God simply have no care for his creations? Perhaps God handles mankind like a petulant child destroys his playthings. Does God derive some pleasure or satisfaction from oppression? Is God just limited in his vision, like a human being might be, perhaps not perceiving the truth of the situation? Is God merely a mortal of short lifespan, who is in some hurry to pursue and punish Job's sin, lest Job outlive him? To ask such questions is instantly to rule them out. But if such explanations be ruled out, what is Job to make of God's motivations and his suffering? The Lord seems determined to find Job guilty, but Job is not guilty, and so Job seems doomed to be in the hands of a God who is in a futile quest to find some grievous fault in him when there is none.

In Psalm 139 verses 13-16, the psalmist describes his formation in the womb. Here in verses 8-12, Job describes his formation by God in the womb. He speaks of how as a human being he was formed from the clay.

With the image of being poured out like milk and curdled like cheese, Job seems to have in mind the earliest formation of the child in the womb, the insemination of the womb, and the early growth of the embryo. Following that is his clothed with skin and flesh, knit together with bones and sinews. Prior to the advent of modern imaging technology, this vision of the human person being formed in the womb is a wonderful one, describing the miraculous, marvelous and mysterious origins of the human body.

To his initial formation of Job's body, God added his gift of life and the steadfast love that preserved Job and his existence. Yet this all takes an ugly form. These great wonders of God done in the formation and preservation of Job seem to have been undertaken for some sadistic purpose.

Job has been created merely in order that he might be destroyed. God has undertaken so much care in fashioning Job from the dust, merely to return him to the dust. Job's words here are understandably bitter.

Even though they are not his last words or the full expression of his spirit and its different contrary feelings, they are nonetheless deeply and painfully felt. Is it merely the case that all of the grace that he has received from the Lord's hand is but a mask for a hostile intention? Is God merely like the accuser, looking for some grounds upon which to persecute Job? His watch over Job is not the watch of preservation, but a watch designed to find fault and to excuse hostile treatment. However, given the settled nature of God's hostile intent towards him, Job feels that even if he did assert his innocence, the Lord would bring shame upon him nonetheless.

The Lord is like a lion seeking to devour Job. He has already worked his wonders against Job with the great mighty wind and more particularly with the fire of God that came down from heaven. His boils might also be related to a striking with leprosy, a signal affliction that on several occasions in scripture is seen as something that comes as a mark of divine judgment.

The disasters that befell Job could not merely be attributed to chance. Besides the fact that the odds would be astronomical, they had the fingerprints of God all over them. It is unmistakable.

God has clearly set himself as Job's enemy. This is a settled disposition of hostility on God's part and Job feels utterly powerless to change it. Job concludes his speech picking up some of the themes of his initial curse and lament from chapter 3. He asks God why he brought him out of the womb.

Why not simply allow him to die in there? As he's argued before, he's a mortal with a short lifespan. Why should the Lord be so concerned with punishing him when he will soon pass away in death? If the Lord would simply leave him alone, he might enjoy just a bit of relief. Faced with the prospect of continuing to be a creature in the hands of a callous God, Job longs for the state of de-creation or un-creation, for a return to that primordial state that preceded the original word of God in creation.

Enveloped in that darkness and dissolved into that chaos, Job might finally enjoy some relief in oblivion. A question to consider. What are some examples of places in scripture where God comes as an enemy to the righteous? In Job chapter 11 we arrive at the third of the speeches of Job's friends, the final one in the first cycle.

Eliphaz had appealed to a vision in his speech. Bildad had appealed to tradition. Now Zophar, the Nehemiathite, appeals to the mysteries of the divine wisdom.

On the surface of things, this might seem promising. Indeed, in many respects, one might characterize the Lord's own response to Job as based upon such a principle. However, under closer examination, Zophar's approach, appealing to the divine wisdom, largely boils down to the fact that God presumably has reasons for punishing Job that are not understood simply because, unlike God, we do not have all of the information.

If our knowledge of things were as full as God's, why God was punishing Job would be entirely obvious. For Zophar, it doesn't seem to be in question at all that God is in fact punishing Job. That is entirely taken for granted.

He begins his speech by challenging and rebuking Job, disputing the account that he gives of the situation. After he has finished doing this, he turns in verse 13 to counsel Job about what he ought to do instead. Zophar's approach to Job is far more aggressive than either of the other friends.

Eliphaz had appealed to the surpassing righteousness of God and had recognized that Job, for the most part, was a blameless man. Bildad had claimed that Job's sons were guilty, but had still pulled his punches in his treatment of Job himself. Zophar is a lot more aggressive.

Eliphaz had begun his speech in chapter 4 verse 2, If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? Bildad had begun in chapter 8 verse 2, How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Like the other friends, Zophar adopts the typical language of a disputation. However, he is noticeably more confrontational with Job than the other two, especially than Eliphaz. Zophar seems to be aggravated that Job has not been silenced by this point.

The fact that Job is still expressing his opinion and has not closed his mouth in response to the speech of the other two friends angers Zophar, who sees it as his duty to shame Job, effectively to shut him up. The principle of verse 2 might be similar to that expressed in Proverbs chapter 10 verse 19, Zophar characterizes Job's position in verse 4, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God's eyes. The characterization of Job as one who sees himself to be clean in God's eyes might be drawing upon Job's statements in places like chapter 9 verses 20-21.

While this part of Zophar's characterization of Job may seem to be justified, the other part, my doctrine is pure, might be rather unfair. Job is not acting as a teacher in a school. He is speaking about his own suffering and giving voice to his anguish, not delivering some abstract disquisition on the subject.

Zophar expresses his wish in verses 5 and following that God would disabuse Job of his

ignorance. If God actually revealed the truth of the matter to Job, Job would in fact perceive the mercy of God. God is not punishing him as he deserves.

While Zophar talks about the mysteries of God's wisdom, his fundamental system of thought is entirely one of sin and retribution. He does not seem to be able to conceive the possibility that God might have some other purpose in Job's suffering, entirely unrelated to sin and punishment, as the reader in fact knows that he does. Zophar is here likely picking up on some of the themes that Job himself brought out in chapter 9 verses 11-12 and chapter 10 verses 13-14.

Who will say to him, What are you doing? Yet these things you hid in your heart. I know that this was your purpose. If I sin, you watch me, and do not acquit me of my iniquity.

God is not immortal. He can see human hearts. He can discern the true intents and character that they have.

If he is determined to make a case against Job, who is Job to stop him? The Lord in his wisdom knows guilty and worthless people, and he will bring them to judgment. In chapter 6 verse 5, to explain his protest at his condition, Job had said, Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass? Were the ox low over his fodder? Implicitly comparing himself to a wild donkey in that situation. In verse 12, Zophar uses a proverb that refers to a wild donkey.

But a stupid man will get understanding when a wild donkey's calf is born a man. The exact translation and meaning of this proverb is debated, although the ESV's translation that I've just read is most likely correct. The wild donkey giving birth to a man is clearly impossible.

And by implication, so is a stupid man gaining wisdom and understanding. It is likely that this is not a characterization of Job himself, as Zophar goes on to hold out hope for Job if he will only repent. He needs to seek the Lord, put away sin from himself, and then he will be able to lift up his face in innocence, look to the Lord, and receive blessing.

This of course contrasts with Job's protest of the preceding chapter. In verses 15-16, If I am guilty, woe to me! If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace, and look on my affliction. And were my head lifted up, you would hunt me like a lion, and again work wonders against me.

As Norman Harbell notes, within these verses, from verse 13-20, Zophar picks up a number of allusions and idioms from Job's own speeches, carefully integrating these into his counterpoint to Job's perspective. He offers a number of images of restored fortunes, floodwaters that have passed away, the darkness that has given way to the dawn, the person who can sleep and enjoy rest and security, and restoration to social standing so that others seek his favour. However, if Job rejects the counsel of Zophar, and continues

in the way that he has been going, his fate will be that of the wicked described in verse 20, Job's hope for death is much the same as theirs.

It should be noted, however, that despite the strength of his challenge to Job, Zophar still expresses the thought of verse 20 in the third person, whereas verses 13-19 are in the second person. He presents Job's repentance as the most natural and expected course of action. A question to consider, the mystery of God's providence is a recurring and prominent theme in the book of Job.

What are some of the ways that this theme has directly been engaged with in the text to this point? Job chapter 12 is the start of the conclusion of the first cycle of discourse, Job's speech following Zophar the Nehemothite's address. Within it Job is speaking not merely to Zophar, but to all of his friends. It is one of the longest of Job's speeches, second only to his final speech.

Much as the general tone adopted by his friends at the start of their speeches to him, Job begins his speech here in a somewhat contemptuous and dismissive tone. No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you. The friends of Job have put themselves forward as authorities on wisdom, indeed almost as if they had a corner on it, leaving the spectator wondering whether if they die, wisdom will die out with them.

Job insists that they do not have a monopoly on wisdom. He has wisdom too. He is not inferior to them.

He implies that he knows a few things that they might not. The opening section of Job's speech in verses 2-4 forms a bookend or *inclusio* with chapter 13 verses 1-5. David Clines observes the repetition of the words I am not inferior to you from verse 3 in chapter 13 verse 2. Norman Harville observes the way that the theme of wisdom recurs at the end.

Job expresses his situation in verse 4. He is a laughing stock to his friends. They may not literally be ridiculing him, but in their speeches to him they are clearly dismissive of his plight. Here Job expresses something of what his friends do not fully realise.

He knows for himself that he is one who has called upon the Lord, he is a just and a blameless man, and yet nonetheless he finds himself in this position. They may have tidy systems of guilt and retribution, but Job, from his own experience, knows that something has to give. Verses 5 and 6 are difficult to understand, and a number of commentators puzzle about how they are to be fitted within their context.

Verse 5 might refer to the posture adopted by the friends of Job. They do not look with pity, but with contempt upon someone who has experienced misfortune, in this case Job. They of course see it as a sign that Job has done something wrong.

In their position they are proud and self-righteous, ready to dispense advice, but unable

to enter into true compassion with someone in Job's position. Just as Job is someone who is righteous yet has suffered severe misfortune, Job expresses the other side of the situation in verse 6. Bandits and marauders, whose actions call out for God's judgement, enjoy peace no matter how much they provoke God. One might imagine Job thinking back to the events of chapter 1, and the Sabaeans and Chaldean raiders who had killed so many of his servants, and also taken his oxen, donkeys and camels.

Is Job really the sinner to be judged in this situation, and not them? Yet they seem to have gotten away with their crimes, and indeed profited by their injustice. While Job, for his part, a blameless and righteous man, languishes in ignominy. Where is the justice in that? The meaning of the end of verse 6 is difficult to understand.

What does it mean that the robbers bring their God in their hand? John Hartley mentions a number of different possibilities. It might be a reference, for instance, to their idolatry. They have idols that can be held in their hands.

Alternatively, it might be a reference to their swords being their gods. Or finally, it might be a claim that they are as powerful as God. Job's friends had appealed to a number of different authorities, and Job draws their attention to nature itself.

He brings forward the beasts, the birds of the heaven, the bushes of the earth, the fish of the sea, all as witnesses for his cause. They know about the sovereign hand of the Lord in all the affairs of creation. And Job's friends might learn a thing or two from them.

As Proverbs 29, verse 13 puts it, Perhaps Job's intent is to suggest that by this sovereign preservation of all creatures in life, any simplistic scheme of retribution is unsettled. Even while they are performing their acts of robbery, the Lord is sustaining the robber in his existence. And years after he has committed his crime, he may continue to do so.

Verse 9 is noteworthy in that it contains the only reference to the name of the Lord in the whole of the speeches of the book of Job. Virtually all other references are to God. The friends had brought forward different authorities.

The authority of visions, like Eliphaz. The authority of the ancients' wisdom, as in the case of Bildad. And then the authority of deep wisdom, in the case of Zophar.

Job raises a challenge to these. The understanding person can discern and test wisdom. He does not merely have to accept it on the basis of some authority.

Like the palate tastes food, he can taste what is true wisdom and what is false. Verse 12 might be a question. Is wisdom indeed with the ages? Is understanding really something that comes with longevity? In verse 13, Job appeals to a deeper source of wisdom.

God himself is the one who possesses wisdom and might. Verses 13-25 are a sort of doxological hymn. However, Norman Harbell suggests it involves an inversion of the

themes of Proverbs 8, verses 14-16.

Picking up words like counsel, efficiency, understanding, power, kings, the great and judges. Those verses read, I have counsel and sound wisdom. I have insight.

I have strength. By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just. By me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.

Job here describes God in similar terms. But the actions of God's wisdom described here are not so much those actions of upholding and creating the order, as that of throwing the order into disarray and disorder. Harbell notes the presence of three sections here that can be distinguished by their literary features.

First, the way that God destroys the established order in verses 13-16. The way that he deprives leaders of their efficiency in verses 17-21. And the way that he disorients nations and leaders in verses 22-25.

God has wisdom and might, but what does he do? He shuts a man in. He tears down. He withholds the waters in drought, or sends them out in deluge.

Yes, he has strength and sound wisdom, but he is the one who upholds both the deceiver and the deceived. He is the God of all wisdom, but he frustrates counsel. He leads counsellors away naked.

He makes fools of judges. He frustrates the rule of kings, divests priests, and overthrows those who have strength. He brings princes to shame, and weakens the strong.

He is the God who said let there be light, but he is the master of the darkness, the one that can throw people into blindness and lead them in disarray and disorientation. In his reference to the deep and the darkness, Job might be picking up on some of the themes of Zophar's speech. In chapter 11, verses 7-8 for instance.

Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven. What can you do? Deeper than Sheol. What can you know? A question to consider.

Where else in scripture do we have portraits of God as the unsearchable and inscrutable Almighty, who brings disaster mysteriously? Job chapter 13 continues the speech of Job that concludes the first cycles of dialogues. It marks a decisive turn in Job's position. Job had formerly lamented the impossibility of effectively making a case with God.

In chapter 9 verses 2 and 3 he had said, Truly I know that it is so, but how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. And in verses 14-20 of that chapter, How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him. I must



appeal for mercy to my accuser.

If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice. For he crushes me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness.

If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty. If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me. Though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.

However, in this chapter Job turns to advance just such a legal case with God. He is prepared to risk everything in such an endeavor. The opening five verses of this chapter, with chapter 12 verses 2-4, bookend Job's opening challenge to his friends, and the ironic doxology on the inscrutable and dread wisdom of God at the end of the preceding chapter.

Job appeals to first-hand wisdom, which trumps the wisdom that his friends have to offer. His statement in verse 2, What you know I also know, I am not inferior to you, picks up the words of chapter 12 verse 3. But I have understanding as well as you, I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these? Norman Harbell reads verse 4 of the preceding chapter.

I am the one marked by his friends as the one who summons God for an answer. Yes, marked as the guiltless righteous one. While Job had earlier appealed against God's judgment, now he does so more formally and directly.

He calls out to a higher court than that of the friends, wanting to argue his case with God himself, wanting to arraign the Almighty. He presents a sharp and scathing dismissal of his friends. They have covered up the truth like whitewash.

They have offered no remedy or solve for his distress. He wishes that the friends would remain silent. If they would only do so, they would be more wise than they were in speaking out in a situation they did not understand.

Proverbs chapter 17 verse 28 speaks of such situations. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise. When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

By speaking out, Job's friends had only displayed their ignorance, their inability to understand the true nature of his situation. The friends had presumed to speak on God's behalf. They seek to justify God and to condemn Job.

In taking God's side of the matter, they presume that they cannot be gainsaid by anyone. However, Job attacks that assumption. Although they are trying to speak on God's behalf, they are doing so in a way that is unrighteous.

With lies, they are showing partiality. What will become of them when God shows up to inspect the case and to test their words? The words of the friends are worthless. And when the Lord searches them out, they will be exposed as such.

They will be rebuked by him and his majesty will terrify them. Though they may claim an ancient pedigree, Job describes their maxims as proverbs of ashes and their arguments on God's behalf as defences of clay. In summoning the Lord for a hearing, Job is taking his life in his own hands.

Yet he is prepared to take the risk. God may indeed slay him, but what does he have to lose? He isn't holding out any great hope, but this will be the course that he will take. Rather than suffering the dread and inscrutable providences of a God veiled in darkness, Job would deal with God face to face.

The beginning of verse 15 has been famously translated as Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. However, it is more likely to be properly read as a statement that the Lord may indeed kill him and that he isn't holding out much hope. The one thread that Job holds onto for his assurance is his own innocence.

It is this that leads him to seek a showdown with God. A guilty man would not seek God's face in such a manner. While his own case is a strong one, Job still has misgivings.

He had earlier expressed in chapter 9 the way that the Lord could just overwhelm him with his majesty. At the end of chapter 9 in verses 33-35 he had said This fear of divine intimidation makes it very difficult for Job to approach the Lord face to face. He asked the Lord in verses 20 and 21 that he would restrain his dread and his terror so that Job could actually deal with him directly.

In such an encounter it could go either way. The Lord could present his case against Job and Job could answer or Job could present his concerns to the Lord and the Lord could answer him. In verse 23 we see that Job presumes that the Lord will address him with the Lord playing the part of the plaintiff.

Rather than inflicting the Kafka-esque judgement that Job had experienced Job wants God to come out into the open to present his charge against Job formally and explicitly. He desires God to express why he has been judging him in the way that he has. Why is God so battering with his judgements a mere mortal? Is he judging Job for the inadvertent sins of his youth? God is treating Job like an oppressor would treat his adversary not giving him a fair trial but inflicting all sorts of punishments upon him.

Scholars differ about where to situate verse 28. Should it be read with the verse that follows at the beginning of chapter 14 However it might also be read in parallel with verse 25 Will you frighten a driven leaf and pursue dry chaff? Faced with the cruel and heavy hand of the Lord Job is asking God why he is concentrating such anger upon a

mean and small and feeble creature. A question to consider.

Some scholars have heard an allusion to verse 16 of this chapter in Philippians chapter 1 verses 18 to 20. Yes and I will rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body whether by life or by death. How might Paul be working with the background of the book of Job with this statement in its context? Job chapter 14 concludes the first cycle of discourses. In the preceding chapter Job had declared his intent of calling God to deal with him and his case face to face.

In this chapter Job continues to speak of his situation and a small note of hope emerges midway through. Over the course of the chapter Job uses a number of pieces of nature imagery and they move from the weakest to the strongest as Norman Harville observes from flowers and shadows to trees to lakes and rivers to mountains. Man is a weak and a mortal creature.

The chapter opens with Job exploring this point. Man's days are few and they have little to offer but difficulty and trouble. Job's words at this point might remind us of places like Psalm 90 verses 5 to 6 and 9 to 10.

For all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy or even by reason of strength eighty, yet their span is but toil and trouble.

They are soon gone and we fly away, though man may bloom beautifully like a flower. His glory is but fragile and short-lasting and it soon passes away. He is insubstantial and fleeting like a shadow, leaving no mark behind him.

Harville argues that verse 3 refers to the opening of God's eyes upon Job's situation, to God's response to Job's request that he come into judgment with him. John Hartley, by contrast, argues that this needs to be read against the mismatch between God and his creature. Job is asking why the great and transcendent creator would fix his gaze in such a devastating way upon one of his weak and frail creatures.

In chapter 4, in the first of the speeches of the friends, Eliphaz had argued that, next to God, no human being or mortal could be pure. The meaning of verse 4 is difficult to determine, but this thought may lie in the background of it. As a mere mortal, Job cannot hope to survive if he is judged according to the holiness of a transcendent God.

Against the utter brilliance of God's glory, the smallest imperfection in Job would be exposed in the most glaring and unforgiving of ways. God has set limits for the life of man, a span for his days, like the limits set upon the sea. Job wishes that, within these

limits, the Lord would spare him as his frail servant from the consuming power of his gaze.

No creature can withstand it. If man must live a life of toil, then at the least he desires that the Lord let him alone while he does so. Back in chapter 8, Bildad the Shuhite had presented his analogy of the two plants.

In verses 16-19 of that chapter, While many commentators have read this as an extension of Bildad's image of a single destroyed plant, Robert Gordas and others following him argue that there are two plants being referred to here, and that the second plant is one that is destroyed and then rises up again. Job explores a similar image in verses 7 and following of this chapter. His life is like dried up water, leaving behind a dead and desert place.

There is no seeming hope of his being revived. At this point in the chapter, and in Job's speech, there is as it were a break in the storm clouds. For a moment a shard of the sunlight of hope comes through.

It comes in the form of a thought about death and resurrection. Job has just given the example of the tree that dies and can rise again, and now he goes on to imagine what it would be like if he could do the same. For the duration of the time of God's burning wrath and anger, Job wishes that he could be hidden in Sheol, that he might as it were take refuge in the grave.

He would be concealed, and when the fierce storm of God's anger passed, the Lord would have set a time for hearing Job's case, would remember him, and he would come forth. If there were such a hope, Job would be prepared to live out the rest of his life, no matter how difficult the period of service might be. He would lie in his grave waiting for the summons, and the Lord would call and his creature would answer him.

While he had once treated him harshly, the Lord would long for his creation, and as Job answered his creator's call, he would come forth and the Lord would have forgotten his sin. The Lord would now watch over him, but not for judgment, for blessing. His transgressions, his faults, and his impurities would all be covered over, and the Lord would smile upon Job.

And yet this bright parting of the clouds only lasts for a short while. Soon Job falls into shadow again. Mountains and rocks are symbols of strength and power and endurance, of those things that are toughest and most resilient.

And even if man's hope were like those things, they would be worn away by the battering might of the Lord that erodes all before it. God ultimately prevails, even over all the hopes of man. Man is sent away.

He ends up in a shield where he is cut off from the land of the living. He does not know

the fate of those that have come after him. He is trapped in bitter pain and mourning, with no hope to anticipate.

This contrasts with Job's earlier description of the realm of the dead, in chapter 3, verses 17 to 19, where he longed to be released into it. The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master. A question to consider, what are some of the earliest passages evidencing a hope of resurrection in the scripture? Job chapter 15 begins the second cycle of speeches.

Once again Eliphaz, who is likely the oldest of the friends, opens this new cycle of dialogues. Bildad will come next, and then Zophar. Eliphaz's speech is once again the longest of the speeches of the friends within this particular cycle.

The speech can be divided into two halves. The first half, in verses 2 to 16, is a rebuke of Job, and the second, in verses 17 to 35, is a portrayal of the wicked man. Job is directly addressed in the first half, but Eliphaz's more powerful statements, perhaps, are found in the insinuations of the second, which portray the wicked man in the third person.

But, as Norman Harvel observes, Eliphaz is carefully picking up on the language of Job's earlier speeches in his characterisation of the wicked man. By so doing, he's presenting Job with a picture in which he might recognise elements of his own personality, things that might cause him to reconsider his approach. Eliphaz here adopts a much more confrontational tone than he did in his earlier speech of chapters 4 and 5. He began that speech as follows.

If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient.

It touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? Eliphaz had been much more gentle and exhortational in his original speech, but now his tone has markedly changed. Perhaps the change of tone is a sign that Eliphaz feels wounded by the way that Job has responded to his earlier counsel.

Eliphaz speaks as if he is genuinely dismayed by Job's response. Job is supposed to be a wise man, yet he is speaking empty, hollow words, coming out with mere hot air. And in the process, he's actually threatening true religion.

You are doing away with the fear of the Lord, and hindering meditation before God, as he says in verse 4. Job's speech seems to arise not from the deep meditation of a godly heart, but from sin and vexation. His own words are evidence enough against him that he is not in the right. One of the questions that is at stake in the discourse is the true

source of wisdom.

In his first speech, Eliphaz had put forward a vision that he had received. Bildad had emphasized the wisdom of the ancients and the tradition. And Zophar had talked about the deeper wisdom of God.

Job had acted as if he could gainsay them all. Eliphaz now attacks Job's approach to wisdom. Job is acting as if he was the first man who was born.

Such a man, unlike all subsequent men, was not born of a woman, but was directly created by God himself, and as a result, has some privileged knowledge. The first man has some knowledge of the primordial order. He was there before the mountains were brought forth.

We might think here of the description of wisdom herself in Proverbs 8, verse 25. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth. The first man might have claimed access to the divine counsel, hearing the wisdom of God directly from the source.

Such a man might have been able to claim a privileged monopoly upon certain knowledge. But Job is clearly not that man. Yet, Eliphaz suggests, he acts as if he were.

In chapter 13, verses 1 to 2, Job had said, Behold, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it. What you know, I also know. I am not inferior to you.

The strong implication of Job's statement was that he knew more than his friends. He was able to challenge and dismiss their opinions. Eliphaz rebukes Job as exhibiting a sort of youthful hubris.

There are other wise men around, Eliphaz and perhaps others of the friends, who are older than Job's father. Job's attitude in dismissing the knowledge of such men just seems arrogant. In his original response to Job, Eliphaz had tried to deal quite gently with him.

Although in his ignorance his words were ill-tailored for Job's situation, it may seem that he was nonetheless well-intentioned and kindly disposed to Job. He had tried to present Job with what he calls the comforts of God, by means of a word that deals gently. If Job wasn't receptive to that, Eliphaz fears that he might be closed off to reason more generally.

Eliphaz was confirmed in this impression by Job's spirited and passionate response. The accusatory tone in Job's response to God troubles him. It seems quite unfitting.

In Eliphaz's first speech in chapter 4, in verses 17-19, he had presented the content of the vision that he had received in the night. Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his

angels he charges with error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth.

In concluding the first half of his second speech to Job, Eliphaz returns to these points. Before the infinitely holy God, how can Job imagine himself to be pure? Man is, as the prophet Isaiah described himself, a person of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips. A human being drinks injustice like water.

Injustice and sin and iniquity is native to him. No such man could ever presume to be righteous or pure before God. Clearly God has found some fault in Job, and rather than appealing against the Lord's judgment, Job clearly needs to humble himself beneath the Lord's hand of discipline.

The second half of Eliphaz's second speech is a presentation of the figure of the wicked, with a series of images in succession. Eliphaz begins in verses 17 and 19 by stating the grounds upon which he feels legitimated in presenting his wisdom. Eliphaz's earlier wisdom was drawn from a vision, but he argues here that it is consistent with the wisdom of the ancients.

He is not departing from the tradition, he is teaching consistently with it. This is what wise men have passed down, consistent with the teaching of their fathers, a tradition that has a pristine source in a time when the land was free from the influence of foreign thought. As noted earlier, throughout the second half of his speech, Eliphaz is picking up on elements of Job's own speeches, mirroring Job's own self-descriptions back to him in the figure of the wicked.

So for instance, in chapter 3 verse 25 Job has said, Eliphaz begins his portrayal of the wicked in verses 20-24 with a man who dreads and fears his doom. He will by no means escape from it. Long before the reality comes upon him, he is terrorized by the anticipations of it.

From this, Eliphaz moves to another portrayal in verses 25-27. Here is a man who sets himself up against God, who in his arrogance boldly defies the Almighty. Like a warrior, he charges at God with his shield before him.

Yet for all his pride and boasting, he is grossly overweight and ill-suited for the fight. Job may talk a proud talk on his behalf, yet it is clear that he is utterly unprepared for the confrontation. In verses 28-31, the portrait shifts to one of desolation and emptiness.

This wicked man is doomed to live in desolate places and wildernesses. He gains no real wealth and leaves no legacy. He is fated to futility, his work will be consumed, and his life will vanish like breath from his mouth.

The fruitlessness of the wicked becomes even clearer in verses 32-34. This is a man cut off before his time. Well before the proper time for harvest, before he has actually been

able to bring forth fruit, he is cut off.

Doomed to barrenness and destruction like all of the wicked. Eliphaz began his speech by talking about Job bringing forth hot air from his belly, as if giving birth to his foolish words. In concluding, he returns to another theme of conception and birth.

The wicked man is one who conceives, as if within a womb, deceit. Job, Eliphaz is insinuating, is a man whose heart is not right, and all of his other problems are arising from that. A question to consider.

Can you think of any parts of Job's statements to this point that Eliphaz might be alluding to in the second part of his speech? Job chapter 16 is Job's first response of the second cycle of speeches. Eliphaz has just accused Job of windy speech. Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge and fill his belly with the east wind? Job here responds in kind.

Shall windy words have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer? His speech begins with a complaint against his friends. They are miserable comforters. They are failing to do what true friends should do.

If they were in his position, Job suggests, he would be able to give them proper counsel and comfort. We might read this statement as sarcastic, Job saying that he could give as good as he is getting. But it is more likely that he is saying that he would be able to give true comfort, unlike what they are offering to him.

With their misapplications of traditional wisdom, they are merely making his position worse. It might be better for Job if they were not there at all, than to have friends who merely put salt in his wounds. In verses 6-17, Job presents another complaint about his situation, presenting the Lord as his adversary and antagonist.

In a cycle of images, Job compares the Lord to a savage beast who is mauling him. In verse 9, to one giving him over to scavengers. In verses 10-11, as a violent fighter attacking him.

In the beginning of verse 12, as a commander setting him as a target for his archers. In verses 12-13, and as a great warrior breaching Job's defences, like the defences of a city might be broken down. Job is experiencing God as his brutal nemesis, who will give him no quarter nor relief.

He seems entirely bent upon bringing about Job's doom, and nothing that Job does can assuage him. Whether he speaks or is silent, he gets no relief. The Lord hasn't just attacked him himself, the Lord has made Job abhorrent to all around him.

The Lord is accompanied by the many scavengers that he has given Job to, to Job's friends and perhaps others of his society. Job's body has shrivelled up and it testifies



against him. His gaunt and haggard appearance testifies that he is a man judged and marked out by God, prejudicing all against him.

Where once God had, as we see in chapter 1, set up a hedge of protection around Job, now he has given him over to the wicked. They can prey upon him with impunity. The crowd has turned against Job.

Job used to be the leader of the people. He used to be a king among his people, one of the greatest of the men of the East, and now he finds that his society is accusing him. He is the scapegoat.

A signal judgement has come upon the people. There has been a destruction of the royal household, the royal flocks and herds have been wiped out, and the king has been stricken with a divine plague. Now the king's advisors are with him, trying to persuade him to accept his guilt and to repent, that he might by some means be restored, but he is refusing to listen.

In this situation all of the indicators point towards Job's guilt and he is not acknowledging it, and yet Job knows for himself that he is innocent. And yet he knows that God has brought this upon him, giving everyone the signs that he is in the wrong when he is not. The violence that God is inflicting upon Job here is gratuitous and cruel.

It is vindictive and excessive. Blow comes upon blow, and there is no indication of any mercy. He is torn, he is broken apart, he is seized by the neck and dashed to pieces.

He is set up as a target to be shot at. In chapter 6 verse 4 Job described the Lord as an archer firing against him. God seems to be playing the part of the accuser to Job, and God has established lots of little accusers in the friends to accompany him.

It doesn't seem enough for God to bring one breach upon him. He has breached him in so many places. In his speech in the preceding chapter Eliphaz has spoken about the wicked man as like an obese warrior, recklessly running towards God to attack him.

Job's response seems to be suggesting that the contrary is the case. God is the one who is running at him like a warrior. Job is utterly broken, he is in mourning.

He knows he is innocent, that he has done nothing wrong, and yet blow upon blow falls upon him from God's hand. In his earlier speech Job has spoken about his wish that he might deal directly with the Lord and that his case might be addressed in such a fashion. He had even spoken about his wish that he might be covered up in Sheol for a time until the anger of the Lord had passed by, and then he might be summoned and restored to life and he might find some vindication.

Now he presents another possible hope. He calls upon the earth not to cover up his blood, that his cry, his appeal for justice would not be laid to rest. We might think here of

the story of Cain and Abel, where Abel's blood called from the ground against Cain his brother.

From addressing the earth he looks to the heaven, where he believes that there is one who will plead his case, someone who will go between him and God, who will be an advocate for him, appealing for justice to be done in his case. Verse 20 could be translated along these lines. John Hartley translates verses 20 and 21 as follows.

Behold my interpreter is my friend, to guard my eyes drip tears, and he argues for a man with God, as between a man and his fellow. David Clines translates the verses as follows. It is my cry that is my spokesman, sleeplessly I wait for God's reply.

It will argue a mortal's case before God, as a man argues for his friend. There are clearly differences between the commentators in how to understand this. Some see it as a reference to a third party that is going to intercede on Job's behalf.

Norman Harville takes this approach, seeing the mediator as an imagined third party, perhaps like the angel of the Lord. In Zechariah chapter 3 verse 1 we have an example of this. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

In chapters 1 and 2 Satan had been the heavenly accuser. Job is now looking for a heavenly advocate to speak on his behalf. Hartley argues that the advocate must be God himself.

He writes, the interpreter is one who advocates a party's case, explaining the situation to the court and defending him against any charges. Who could that party be save God himself in the light of the last verse? That is, as Job's interpreter, he will argue the merits of his case with God just as between a man and his fellow, i.e. just as human beings do. Since Job's earthly friends have failed him, God will take their place by defending his accused friend, even before himself.

No wonder these great thoughts cause Job's eyes to flow with tears. Kleins argues that Job's own cry is going to be that that speaks before God. To my mind the positions of Kleins or Harvel are both more likely than that of Hartley.

I would lean in favour of seeing this as a third party, perhaps an angelic figure of some kind, the angel of the Lord being the perfect candidate. Of course, from a broader Old Testament and New Testament theology, we can see that the angel of the Lord is identified with God himself. So Hartley's position may be theologically accurate, even if it is not the most exegetically convincing reading.

Job's statement here ends with a note of urgency. Job will soon pass away, so his cry needs to be heard as soon as possible. A question to consider, how might reflecting upon this chapter help us better to understand what it means for Christ to be our advocate, as

we are told that he is as our High Priest in the New Testament? Job chapter 17 concludes Job's first speech in the second cycle of dialogues.

It is a very complicated passage to understand. Looking through the commentators, it becomes clear that they take greatly varying approaches to almost all of the verses. There is no clear consensus in how to understand Job's speech here.

Although human life is short, and Job's life also, there is no indication that Job's death is immediately imminent. However, at this point, Job might as well be dead. His continued existence is a form of living death.

His life only goes on under the Lord's great condemnation and judgment. He describes his spiritual breath as being broken. His existence continues, but as it were, he is no longer living.

He is surrounded by people who mock him, which is clearly a cause of great grief to him. If he is mocked by the wicked, the sting of God's apparent moral governance of the world being turned upside down will only become more intense for him. If he is mocked by the righteous, he will feel even more alone in his condition, being rejected and ostracized by people who should be his companions, who should recognize him as one of them.

No one seems to be prepared to take his side of the matter, to put up security for him. Once again, Job recognizes God's part in this situation. He has closed their hearts to understanding.

The fact that they don't see is a result of God's acting upon them. The second half of verse 4 may be Job calling upon the Lord, not to let those who are standing against him as his accusers triumph. Verse 5 seems to describe the friends as traitors, as those who have abandoned the true role of a friend.

In chapter 6, verses 14-16, for instance, Job had earlier described the friends as like traitors. He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty. My brothers are treacherous as a torrent bed, as torrential streams that pass away, which are dark with ice, and where the snow hides itself.

The meaning of the second half of verse 5 isn't clear. It might be an indication that the treachery of such persons ends up coming back upon them and their families. The Lord, once again, is behind all of this.

God, who promises on various occasions to make the name of righteous persons a blessing, has made the name of Job a byword among his society. A man once respected and honoured, and enjoying status among them, finds himself spat at and shamed. With all of his trouble he is wasting away, his eye is dim from his anguish.

Verses 8-9 should probably be read as Job's somewhat ironic reference to the people who are accusing him. The people in question are probably upright and innocent, but they mistakenly regard Job as the godless. Ironically, Job's suffering is causing the righteous to become even more committed to their way.

Job is a cautionary tale about ungodliness, a warning about what might happen if people reject the way of truth. Verse 10 is a difficult one to understand. Perhaps Job is telling his friends to repent, and to re-engage with a gentler approach, as he's found no wisdom among them.

Alternatively, it could be read as a taunt. Norman Harbell argues that verses 11-16 are a cry that, together with chapters 16-18 to 17-1, bookends his second major complaint of verses 2-10. Harbell sees this bookending as having a chiasmic, or there-and-back-again structure.

The inmost element in both cases, in verse 1 and verse 11, is a three-line staccato cry of despair. Verse 12 corresponds with chapter 16 verse 22, the portrait of verses 13-14, with the portrait of verses 20-21 of chapter 16. The matter of Job's hope is the subject of chapter 16 verse 19, and chapter 17 verse 15.

The earth of chapter 16 verse 18 corresponds with the dust and shield of verse 16. As in verse 1, verse 11 describes the devastation of Job's existence. All of the things that would have given his life meaning have been destroyed, or emptied out.

Verse 12 is probably a reference to some of the plans that Job had. David Clines proposes the following reading of verses 11 and 12. My days have passed, broken are my plans, the desires of my heart, which had turned night into day, brought light nearer than darkness.

In chapter 14 verses 13-17, Job had wished that he would be hidden in Sheol until the Lord's anger passed. O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be passed, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me. If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come.

You would call, and I would answer you, you would long for the work of your hands, for then you would number my steps, you would not keep watch over my sin. My transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity. Verses 13-16 likely refer back to this hope, to his imagined course of going down to the grave, sheltering there until the appropriate time.

Where he would be raised again, and the Lord would vindicate him, and he would be restored in his relationship with God. Yet if Job goes down to the pit and identifies with the grave, calling the grave his father, and treating the worm that consumes his rotting

flesh as if it were his kin. What then becomes of his hope? Could Job's hope survive the grave? A question to consider.

Verses 8-9 probably describe righteous people who are looking at Job's situation, taking him for one of the ungodly, and treating him as a cautionary example. They may be righteous, but they lack wisdom. How might we describe the relationship between righteousness and wisdom in scripture? In what ways is it possible for a righteous man, nonetheless, to be lacking in wisdom? In Eliphaz's first speech in the second cycle of dialogues in chapter 15 verses 20-30, he had presented a portrait of the wicked.

The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Dreadful sounds are in his ears, in prosperity the destroyer will come upon him. He does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is marked for the sword.

He wanders abroad for bread, saying, where is it? He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand. Distress and anguish terrify him. They prevail against him like a king ready for battle, because he has stretched out his hand against God, and defies the Almighty, running stubbornly against him with a thickly basked shield.

Because he has covered his face with his fat, and gathered fat upon his waist, and has lived in desolate cities, in houses that none should inhabit, which were ready to become heaps of ruins. He will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the earth. He will not depart from darkness, the flame will dry up his chutes, and by the breath of his mouth he will depart.

In the next speech by one of the friends, by Bildad in chapter 18, there is another portrait of the wicked presented. However, there is a difference between the way that Bildad presents the wicked, and the way that Eliphaz does. For Eliphaz, the portrait of the wicked was designed to be cautionary for Job.

In the case of Bildad, it is more directly condemnatory. To Bildad's mind, Job clearly belongs in the category of the wicked, and there is not much of a promise laid out for his repentance and restoration. His speech serves more as an indictment.

Bildad's speech in this chapter, as with a number of Job's speeches and several of the friends' speeches, begins with a dismissive statement directed towards an interlocutor, in this case Job. Bildad's question, why are we counted as cattle, presumably referring to him and the friends, might be a reference back to chapter 12, verse 7, and Job's statement there. But ask the beasts, and they will teach you, the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you.

Job had been scathingly dismissive of the friends' counsel, but yet he had turned their attention to the animals. In Job's protest to this point, he has seemingly been challenging the law's moral governance of the universe. Bildad asks in verse 4 whether he expects

that the whole world should be thrown into upheaval, the whole cosmic order reordered for his sake.

Norman Harbell suggests that the rock at the end of verse 4 might be a reference to the cosmic mountain. While this is a possibility, for Bildad, it is clearly the case that if Job is going to follow through with his protest, the whole of the cosmic order is thrown into uncertainty. Confidence in the Lord's righteous moral governance of the world is just as important as the stability of the ground beneath your feet.

Throw the Lord's moral governance into question, and all is cast into turmoil. In the preceding chapter in Job's speech, in verses 11-12, he had said, in David Klein's reading, My days have passed, broken are my plans, the desires of my heart, which had turned night into day, brought light nearer than darkness. In verses 5 and 6, Bildad picks up the imagery of light and darkness of the lamp of the wicked.

The wicked man is deprived of what light he has, plunged into a realm of darkness. Klein's observes a series of key metaphors that played throughout the rest of the chapter. The lamp in verses 5-7, the trap in verses 8-10, the disease in verses 11-13, dryness in verses 15-17, and annihilation in verses 18-20.

The wicked man is a person who is caught in his own traps. In his development and exploration of this metaphor, Bildad might be playing with the way that he has characterized Job's words back in verse 2. Bildad literally speaks of Job trying to snare with words, something that Norman Harbell notices, relating it to the imagery of the trap later on in the chapter. Job will be trapped on account of his own words.

From the wicked falling into traps, being caught in snares, and being surrounded by terrors on all sides, Bildad moves to presenting him as one who is sapped of his strength, consumed, and torn from his habitation. In verses 12-14, the habitation of the wicked is destroyed in the verses that follow. With the trapping of the wicked, his wasting away, and the destruction of his habitation, the reputation, name, progeny, and posterity of the wicked are entirely wiped out upon the face of the earth.

His memory is extinguished, one of the most terrible fates that could befall someone in the ancient world. Bildad had already insensitively referred to Job's children back in chapter 8 verse 4, where he had suggested that the children had sinned against God, and that they had been wiped out for this reason. Here the suggestion seems to shift to Job being the one responsible for the destruction of his children.

Job's children were wiped out in order to obliterate his name from the earth. Bildad sums up his message in verse 21, Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous, such is the place of him who knows not God. The wicked is a person condemned to dryness, darkness, disease, distress, and finally annihilation.

A question to consider, where else in the book of Job, and elsewhere in the Old Testament, do we find extended portraits of the wicked? Job chapter 19 is Job's second speech within the second cycle of dialogues. He begins by reproaching his friends for their part in his distress. By their accusations they have exacerbated Job's position.

To the heavy blows that Job had received from the Lord, they added their false accusations. Supposing he had done something wrong, the fault was between him and God. And yet the friends are so eager to prosecute Job's fault, presenting themselves also as the appropriate arbiters of his case.

To their eyes, the evidence against Job is damning. What has befallen his family and household, and his own physical condition, all testify against him, that he is clearly in the wrong. This is a man struck by the Lord.

Job presents his protest in verses 6-12. He is a man cornered, besieged, trapped by God. By his brutal actions against him, God has clearly presented Job as standing in the wrong.

Job can call out in his distress and in his sense of injustice, but there is no one to answer him. His appeal won't be heard. The Lord has hemmed him in, walling up his way.

Like an overthrown king, he has been stripped of his glory and crown. Like a defeated city whose fortifications have been broken down, the walls of Job's life have been breached. What hope he may have had has been uprooted like a tree.

God is not just silent towards Job. All of his actions speak volumes. God is treating Job as an enemy, not just as someone who is ignored.

God's actions against Job are completely disproportionate. He is surrounded by siege works and as it were, encircled by an army. But yet, in verse 12, he presents himself as no more than a tent.

This is most extreme overkill. Throughout Job's complaints, it is important to notice that his concern is vindication and divine action on his behalf. He is not merely looking for a relief of his suffering.

The greater part of his distress is not just his physical pain and his loss of his household and his children. It is the fact that he clearly stands under divine condemnation. A blameless and an upright man who fears God and eschews evil is cast off and cast out by the Lord, presented as wicked and to be rejected.

Besides the Lord's rejection, the Lord has brought about his rejection by all the other people of his society. Job's kin and his former acquaintances are now estranged from him. They avoid him.

They ignore him, as the friends when they first visited seemed to have ignored Job, refusing to acknowledge him. People who once would have looked to him as a generous host or a kind master now treat him as a stranger. His servant no longer recognizes his authority and needs to be pleaded with for mercy.

His breath or perhaps his spirit is strange even to his own wife. We can think back to chapter 2 verse 9. Then his wife said to him, Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. He is abhorrent to the children of his mother or perhaps even his own children.

Although given the events of chapter 1, this more likely refers to his siblings. Even young children, who would be the lowest within the social structure and would be without many of the social prejudices that adults had, despise him. When he rises up, he looks in their direction and he sees them talking about him.

The people who were once nearest and dearest to him have now risen against him. They regard him as an outcast, a stranger, even an enemy. It did not suffice that the Lord attacked him with his bitter blows.

In addition to all of this, he conscripted all of these people who were closest to Job, the people that Job looked to and depended upon, to join his cause against Job. This is bitter for Job indeed. Job's own body seems to have turned against him.

And Job wonders at his friends. Why they pursue him. Isn't it enough for God to pursue him? Why do they also seem to need their pound of flesh? Back in chapter 9 verse 33, Job had spoken of his wish that there were someone to go between, him and God, a mediator, an arbiter, someone to present his case perhaps.

There is no arbiter between us who might lay his hand on us both. In chapter 16 verses 19 to 21, Job had again wished for a witness. In Norman Harville's translation, In verses 23 and 24, Job wishes that his case could be written down in the most indelible way.

Inscribed with an iron pen on rock, so that it would endure forever. So that Job would not just vanish from the earth. The injustice that he has suffered, forgotten.

He wants it to be written in a book. Indeed, we are reading such a book. A book that records Job's situation.

Verses 25 to 26 are some of the most famous verses in the book. But also some of the most difficult. A great deal of ink has been spilled on the question of what exactly is meant by these verses.

Who is the Redeemer for instance? Claiming that the Redeemer is God seems strange, given the fact that Job is making his case against God at this point. The Redeemer is more likely some third party, perhaps comparable to the accuser Satan that we see in



the first two chapters. Looking at passages such as Zechariah chapter 3, it seems to me that the figure is most likely going to be the angel of the Lord.

Job probably envisages a member of the divine council who will speak on his behalf. And while he has previously hoped for such justice to occur before he dies, here it seems that he expects to die before such a thing happens. However, the Redeemer lives.

The Redeemer is a figure in the Old Testament who would continue the life of the family when it was put into threat or jeopardy. He would restore property to the family. He would avenge the blood of one slain in the family.

He would marry the surviving widow of a brother that had died in order to continue his name. Job is hoping for such a figure to act on his behalf, a heavenly figure who will intercede for him, who will continue his name when it seems to be wiped out. This figure will, as it were, stand over Job's grave.

After Job has rotted away, he will present his case. And then Job, the greatest surprise of all, will see God in his flesh. This does not seem to be a mere spiritual vision or a mere imagination or dream.

This is Job being raised up. His case will be heard. Justice will be done.

And he will see God face to face. With his own eyes he will see God. This is not a general hope of resurrection.

This is a particular hope of resurrection that applies to Job's specific situation. Job is seeking justice and he believes that some sort of post-mortem justice will occur. The profound faith exhibited here should stand out to us.

This is a hope of resurrection founded upon confidence in the moral governance of the universe, that justice will ultimately be done, even if this requires dead bodies to be raised. A question to consider. How could Job be read as a type of Christ? And how does Job's hope anticipate Christ's redemption? Job chapter 20 is Zophar the Naamathite's second speech, the final speech of the second cycle of discourses.

This is also Zophar's final speech in the book. Zophar is not a Naam speaker in the third and final cycle. Like the other friends, Zophar gives an extended discourse on the character and fate of the wicked.

While he does not speak directly concerning Job's situation, it is clear that he is directing his comments to Job and he wants Job, as someone who in his mind fits the category of the wicked, to draw the logical conclusions. Zophar is clearly troubled by Job's position. Zophar treats Job, not as a friend in need of comfort and support, but as someone teaching a rival doctrine.

To counter the false teaching of Job, Zophar doesn't so much engage with him or seek to persuade him, as he more forcefully expresses the retributionist dogma back at him. This, Zophar insists, is teaching that has been around from the very beginning, from the first man, from Adam himself. Job should know this.

This teaching is fundamental to understanding the moral structure of the universe. Anyone challenging this is rejecting something absolutely fundamental. The wicked, for a time, may seem to prosper, but they will finally get their comeuppance.

Their downfall is fated and it is only a matter of time until it will happen. It may seem for a period that they are getting away with their sins, that they are prospering. They will rise up even to the heavens, but from this great height they will be brought down and they will perish forever, in the most dishonorable way, being compared to dung.

They will leave no trace behind them. They will be wiped clean from the face of the earth. From the disgust and dishonor of bodily waste, Zophar turns to the image of a dream.

A dream is forgotten in the morning. It is insubstantial. The dream vanishes and soon after, it is memory with it.

The image of downfall here is clearly intended to speak to Job's situation. Job was once the richest and greatest man of the East and Zophar is suggesting that these great heights of prosperity were only reached through oppression and wickedness and now Job is being reduced to his proper estate. Once the great honored man, Job is now being treated as what he really is, the excrement of the society.

The children of the wicked man will be reduced to begging from the poor. All the wealth that the wicked man took, presumably by oppression, has now been stripped from him. While his body is still young, he suffers an untimely death.

He is brought down to the grave in the prime of his life. From verse 12, Zophar develops the image of the wicked man as one who savours evil, as one who devours, as one who consumes, and finally as one from whose distended belly God will disgorge all that he has devoured through his oppression. The evil that they are delighting in and consuming is ultimately poison.

It actually serves as a nemetic. Everything that these unrighteous men have devoured will end up being vomited back out. Norman Harville remarks upon some of the poetic features of the poetry here.

At several points in his speech, Zophar uses the same term twice, but with a different shade of meaning or connotations. He writes, perhaps the poison of that serpent of old himself, the devil. This poison kills him, preventing him from enjoying all the things that he would enjoy.

And the cause for his demise is his oppression of the poor. Eliphaz will make a similar claim in chapter 22, verses 5-9. This, of course, is an unmerited charge against Job.

Indeed, it is exceptionally unjust. In chapter 29, verses 11-17, Job describes his former conduct as one who was the deliverer of the poor. In Zophar's understanding, God is the one who brings about the downfall of this wicked man.

In verse 15, God is the one who casts the riches out of the belly of the man who has devoured them in his unrighteousness. In verse 23, God sends a rain to the person who is the devourer, and fills his stomach to the full, but with his fury and anger in judgment. In chapter 6, verse 4, Job had said, In verses 24 and 25 of this chapter, the wicked man is pierced by the arrows of God.

All that he has laid up for himself is doomed to oblivion. He will be devoured by the fire of God. This is an especially cruel thing for Zophar to say, knowing that Job had lost his sheep and the servants with them to such a fire.

In chapter 16, verses 18-19, Job had appealed both to the heavens and the earth to bear witness on his behalf. In verse 27, Zophar claims that both the heavens and the earth will speak in Job's case, but as witnesses for the prosecution. In Deuteronomy, the heavens and the earth were witnesses of the covenant, who would testify against the people if they had been unfaithful.

Zophar believes that something similar will happen to Job as one of the wicked. All of this occurs in the day of God's wrath. Zophar likely sees a very neat correspondence with this dogmatic proclamation about what befalls the wicked, and what had actually happened to Job.

In one day, all of these things had come upon him. The great wind, the fire of God, and various peoples of the earth had all simultaneously risen against him. This, in Zophar's retributionist theology, is the natural and appropriate portion of the wicked.

Job chapter 21 is the final speech in the second cycle of speeches. Within it, Job responds to all of his friends. To this point in this cycle of discourses, Job and the friends have both been speaking largely past each other.

The friends have been presenting their portraits of the fate of the wicked, and Job has been declaring his case before God and lamenting his situation. Now, however, he deals with them quite directly, and he is responding to their presentation of the wicked, maintaining that their retributionist account does not actually hold true in reality. To this point, the friends, whose duty it was to provide comfort to Job, had done nothing of the kind.

They had merely exacerbated his suffering. Job, likely sarcastically, makes one request of them, that they be silent and listen to his words. Granting him that one thing would be

more comfort than they had provided to that point.

After they had heard him out, they could return to their mocking. Job is likely referring particularly to Zophar there. Job's main complaint, his chief case, is against the Lord.

His issue isn't with man. Rather than presumptuously taking up the case of the Lord for him, the friends should hold their peace, listen to Job, and take account of his situation. Each of the friends, in this second cycle of speeches, had presented a portrait of the wicked and their fate.

Within this speech, Job will challenge their accounts head on. Eliphaz had said, in chapter 15, verses 29-30, He will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the earth. He will not depart from darkness.

The flame will dry up his chutes, and by the breath of his mouth he will depart. In chapter 18, verses 16-19, Bildad had said, His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above. His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the street.

He is thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world. He has no posterity or progeny among his people, and no survivor where he used to live. Finally, in chapter 20, verse 11, Zophar has spoken about the premature demise of the wicked person.

His bones are full of his youthful vigour, but it will lie down with him in the dust. All of these bold and dogmatic claims, however, Job argues, fail the empirical test. Job would have them pay attention to their own society.

There are a great many people who, though wicked, enjoy considerable power and wealth. Far from dying prematurely, they are living to old age and seeing their posterity after them. They know peace and security in their situation, and their flocks and herds flourish.

Their houses are places of joy, ease and happiness, of song, mirth and dancing. When they die, it is not violently and prematurely, but in old age and in peace. All of this directly contradicts statements like those of Zophar in chapter 20, verses 10 and 26-28.

His children will seek the favour of the poor, and his hands will give back his wealth. Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures. A fire not fanned will devour him.

What is left in his tent will be consumed. The heavens will reveal his iniquity, and the earth will rise up against him. The possessions of his house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God's wrath.

And yet these are people who openly incite God's wrath, who dismiss his counsel, and do so, seemingly, with impunity. However good the retributionist doctrine might seem in theory, it does not seem to hold in practice. Bildad in chapter 18, verses 5-6, had

confidently declared, Indeed the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of his fire does not shine.

The light is dark in his tent, and his lamp above him is put out. To which Job responds doubtfully, how often does that actually happen? Poetic justice may be wonderful, but it seldom seems to appear. Job alludes to statements like those of Psalm 1, verses 4-6, The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Job anticipates the response at this point.

The retributionist can come back to him and say, Ah, but the judgment will come upon their children. Yet a judgment that is not inflicted upon the wrongdoers themselves does not seem to be satisfactory. While the proposal that there might be a lengthy delay in the Lord's visiting of his judgment upon the wicked might be designed to uphold his justice, it raises as many problems as it settles.

While the piety of the retributionist doctrine may be well-intentioned, it is in fact presumptuous. It arrogates to itself the task of vindicating God's justice and explaining the basis of God's judgment, and yet it is readily undermined by experience. The disparities of life, especially when considered in the light of the levelling effect of death, do not seem to sustain the retributionist teaching.

Job sees in all of the speeches of his friend a deeper, more sinister intention. Perhaps we get a sense of this in verse 28, For you say, Where is the house of the prince? Where is the tent in which the wicked lived? Their scheme and plan, perhaps, is to discredit Job as the chief of the men of the east. Job occupies the position of a king, and when we consider what has befallen him, it should be clear that it is a disaster for the entire people.

And as such, it doesn't just single Job out as guilty as an individual, it discredits him as a leader of his people. Or at least that's how the friends seem to see things, and perhaps their speeches are designed to get Job to submit to their claims. If he did so, it would likely be to their great strengthening.

They would likely take to themselves much of the power and authority that Job himself had lost. The claims to which Job is responding here are perhaps ones like those of Bildad in chapter 18, verses 14-21. He is torn from the tent in which he trusted, and is brought to the king of terrors.

In his tent dwells that which is none of his. Sulfur is scattered over his habitation. His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above.

His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the street. He is thrust from

light into darkness, and driven out of the world. He has no posterity or progeny among his people, and no survivor where he used to live.

They of the west are appalled at his day, and horror seizes them of the east. Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous. Such is the place of him who knows not God.

And yet, Job insists, talk to some of the people who have travelled around a lot. They can recount many stories of evil princes and rulers, who have nonetheless retained their power, wealth and authority. Again, the retributionist doctrine fails the empirical test.

And while you can claim that death is the great leveller, such evil men can be brought to their tombs in honour. They die in peace at an old age, they are followed by a large crowd of mourners, and whole societies lament their passing. Many such cases like these show that the words of the friends are empty.

They have nothing of substance to give. Such words afford no comfort at all. A question to consider.

Verse 22 speaks of a situation where people, eager for the justice and the honour of God, can end up presenting themselves as wiser than God, teaching things that clearly go against God's reality or his word, in order theologically to airbrush some troubling details out. What are some of the ways that we might fall into the same trap as the friends do in this regard? Job chapter 22 is the start of the third and final cycle of dialogues. Once again, it is Eliphaz who opens it.

Eliphaz had opened his first speech to Job in chapter 4 quite gently. His fundamental message had been that mortal man could not be pure in the sight of a holy God. In the face of God's transcendent holiness, all of man's faults would be seen, and man therefore had no standing to claim to be in the right before God.

Eliphaz's third speech divides into three sections, verses 2-11, verses 12-20 and verses 21-30. This time, in contrast to his first speech, Eliphaz takes a very aggressive approach. He will accuse Job of most serious sin.

Verses 2-11 present a list of charges, matters in which Eliphaz suggests that Job has sinned. Verses 12-20 present Job as having taken the way of the wicked, having aligned himself with the wicked. And the rest of the chapter presents a call to repent, which could be read in different ways.

Perhaps Eliphaz thinks that Job might be receptive, or perhaps the call to repentance is designed to highlight Job's impenitence by contrast. The opening verse of Eliphaz's speech raises some questions for translation. John Hartley translates it as follows.

Hartley understands Eliphaz to be arguing by this that the wise man has no purchase upon or demand upon God, and in consequence no basis upon which to claim

reconciliation with him. Norman Harbell translates it as Can a hero endanger El, or a sage endanger the Ancient One? Understood this way, Eliphaz would be saying that Job can't force God's hand. God is the transcendent ruler of the world.

His justice is beyond question, and there is no way that Job can reign him. David Clines presents a third possible translation. Can a human be profitable to God? Can even a sage benefit him? This would be making a similar point, but from a different perspective.

God can't be put in anyone's debt. God doesn't need anyone. He neither gains nor loses from the conduct of someone such as Job.

The SV is an example of yet another reading of the second half of the verse. Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself. Again, the fundamental point of the verse is similar, but the second half of the verse would be designed to show the true purpose of wisdom.

The person is not wise because God needs them to be wise, or because that wisdom brings any benefit to God himself. No, the person is wise for their own sake and benefit. Verses 3 and 4 develop the point of verse 2. God is impartial.

He is also transcendent. He does not have a vested interest in this situation. He is neither threatened by it, nor is he benefited by it.

The implicit logic of Eliphaz's argument seems to be that since God does not have such an interest, he is not benefited by Job's actions, and he is not threatened by them. What has befallen Job clearly has not risen out of some private purpose on God's part, as if God, to get something out of one of his creatures, had to shake him down. Nor, of course, is God unjust, and so the only logical conclusion is that Job is suffering as a result of his sins.

There is an irony in Eliphaz's argument here, of course, as the opening chapters of Job indicate that God does in fact have a vested interest in Job's righteousness. Eliphaz, who had started his first case against Job hesitantly, now breaks forth into the most scathing condemnation of Job of all. Job, he insists, is guilty of immense sin.

In particular, Eliphaz accuses Job of a series of acts of injustice. Job, we must remember, was the greatest of the men of the East. He was a king or chief among his people, responsible for administering justice.

To Eliphaz's mind, there can only be one explanation for what has happened to Job. He must have been guilty of the most egregious oppression. These charges, of course, are nothing but falsehood.

Job, in chapter 29, describes the way that he had been the one who had delivered people who were oppressed. And in chapter 31, he gives a list of different sins that he might have committed, sins for which he might have been deserving of such judgment, and

denies that he is guilty of any one of them. Eliphaz had described the doom of the wicked in chapter 15, verses 20-21.

The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Dreadful sounds are in his ears. In prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.

Job, he argues, is such a wicked person, and as a result, this is why he experiences all these snares and terrors around him. This is why he has been engulfed and overwhelmed with his troubles. He accuses Job, in the second part of his speech, of a sort of practical atheism.

God is the most high God. He is above all things. He is in the heavens.

And he is ignorant of affairs on earth. They are not occurring within his sight. Veiled in the darkness he cannot see and he cannot judge.

He is distant and detached. Presuming Job to hold this theology, Eliphaz accuses him of going with the path of the wicked, a well-worn evil path that has been there since the beginning. Such men thought themselves immune to God's justice, even as God was mercifully allowing them to prosper for a time.

Yet such men, in their misplaced confidence, are snatched away before their time, as in a flash flood they are swept away. When this happens, the righteous rejoice over them, seeing the Lord's justice in action. The reference to the fire in verse 20 might again be intended to allude back to the fire of God that fell upon Job's servants and his sheep back in chapter 1. Eliphaz concludes his speech by presenting Job with the way of repentance and what will follow if he agrees with God, submitting himself under the Lord's punishment.

He might hope for some sort of restoration. Judgment received in such a manner would be instructive and for Job's bettering. To return to the Lord he needs to eschew the injustice that he has been engaged in.

He has clearly been gathering gold by wickedness and oppression, and so he needs to return the gold to its source, back to the dust and the bed of the river. Releasing his grip on this gold and turning to the Lord as his true wealth will be the way that he can be restored. Gold has obviously taken over Job's heart, and he must release his grip on it, if it is going to release its grip on him, and then he can finally be restored.

Verses 26-29 are a portrait of the man who has been restored in fellowship with God. He delights in the Lord, he has fellowship with the Lord in prayer, his path will be established, and he will agree with the Lord in his judgments. In his righteousness in this situation, Job will even be able to deliver others who are not righteous.

Through his intercession for them, they may be delivered too. Of course, the irony here



is that at the end of the book Job will have to intercede for Eliphaz and the other friends. A question to consider, while the reader of Job knows that Eliphaz is wrong, it might be worth reflecting upon how he is wrong.

In what ways does Eliphaz here express a false view of God? What is he missing? Job chapter 23 is Job's first speech in the third and final cycle of speeches. However, even though he is speaking after Eliphaz the Temanite, he isn't responding to his friend at this point. Eliphaz had been grossly unjust in his characterizations of Job.

He had accused Job of great wrong and oppression, and given the feelings on both sides, there is little point in responding to him. Exactly what is being referred to by today in verse 2 is not entirely clear. Perhaps Job's conversations with his friends are proceeding over a number of different days, perhaps three days, one for each cycle.

John Hartley suggests rather that we should read this as even now. Job, perhaps referring in part back to the previous speech, is insisting that he is going to go on with his complaint. He has not been swayed from that course.

Job's woes continue, and his complaint remains bitter. Job's complaint is the case that he wants to bring before God. The problem for Job, however, is that he does not know where God is to be found.

If he cannot find where God is, how can he have an audience with him? Job imagines what he would do if he did in fact find God and have an audience with him. He would lay his case out before the Lord. He would present all his different arguments.

The Lord would then address Job and his situation in a way that he could understand and accept. Job is confident that he would be acquitted in such a scenario, but he is also confident that the process itself, in which he would present his case and his arguments to the Lord, and the Lord would listen and respond, would itself bring some satisfaction and prove cathartic. He raises the question in verse 6 whether God would just overwhelm him with his might.

Yet, answering his own question, he believes that he would not. Rather, the Lord would be just and would listen to his case and then respond in a manner marked by his justice. Yet, attractive as this imagined scenario is for Job, there is no way to realise it.

He still cannot locate God. Verses 8-9 describe the problem with trying to localise God. God cannot be pinned down anywhere.

God's ways are inscrutable and he himself is transcendent. He acts everywhere, but he is contained nowhere. Arrestingly, in verse 10, Job speaks of his confidence that the Lord, once he has tried him, proven his quality, he will be shown to be gold.

In earlier speeches, Job has expressed his uncertainty that he would be able to take any

more. He felt as if he were being pushed to his limit and beyond. But here there is a note of strength and perseverance that we have not really heard from Job to this point.

At least not in quite such a pronounced form. The trying in question is not the same thing as refining. The point is not that God is refining Job to make him a purer form of gold.

Rather, God is testing Job to manifest what quality he is. To this point, of all the explanations given by Job and the friends, this is the nearest to the actual truth. God, or perhaps more properly Satan, who has been given permission by God, is testing Job to see whether his quality is really what God has suggested.

Job believes that he will be proven through such testing. Because, as he says in verses 10-12, he has been faithful in his steps and the Lord knows this. He has not departed from God's commandments.

He is treasured and delighted in God's word and he has walked in his way. Norman Harville observes of the language of way in these verses. The term way carries several connotations here and is rich in associations.

The way for Job includes the way of God to which Job has adhered unswervingly. That way is apparently the righteous way of life Job elaborates in his extended confession in chapter 31 verses 4 following, where he maintains that his feet have not deviated from the way of integrity. But the way with Job recalls Job's complaint that God prevents mortals from finding their way.

That is, their direction or destiny in life. Way, however, is also associated with the quest motif. Mortals do not know the way to wisdom or God, but God knows the way of humans in all senses of that word.

From this note of confidence, Job returns to speaking about the problem that he will face in presenting this case. The beginning of verse 13 declares that God is one, which has been read in a number of different ways. Maybe God is in one mind, meaning that he is unchangeable and fixed in his opinion.

Maybe it means that he is unique or another such statement about his deity. Job might be referring to the way that the incomparable God, above all earthly and created things, cannot be swayed by a mere mortal man's opinion. If God has set his mind on a matter, in this case bringing suffering and punishment upon Job, then how could a mere mortal expect to sway him? Surely God's purpose would just be followed through to its conclusion.

On the one hand, we have an expression of Job's faith and confidence in God's justice. On the other hand, his knowledge of the greatness and majesty and uniqueness of God causes him to waver. How could Job hope to change what seems to be God's settled and

determined negative purpose towards him? He expresses further trepidation in the concluding verses of the chapter.

He is terrified by God's presence. He wants to come face to face to deal with God, but yet he knows that God's presence is terrifying and could overwhelm him. He has earlier spoken of feeling terrorized by God and has always struggled with the lurking fear that should he come into the presence of God, God would just overwhelm him with his majesty and greatness.

Yet despite all of this apprehension and the darkness that engulfs him, Job is determined nonetheless to go through with his appeal. He wants to seek the Lord's face, to have dealings directly with God. A question to consider, what are some of the distinctive hallmarks of faith that we can see in Job's response at this point? Job chapter 24 presents the reader with a number of difficulties.

Francis Anderson summarizes the problems. First, there are lots of knotty textual difficulties. Secondly, there is the apparent incoherence of the speech as it stands.

Thirdly, parts of the speech seem to be out of keeping with what Job has argued elsewhere and with his position more generally. The anomalous elements of this chapter have led some scholars to consider them in light of anomalous features of the third cycle of speeches more generally. There is, for instance, no final speech of Zophar the Nehemothite, who spoke last in the preceding two cycles.

Bildad's speech is also very short. Job's concluding speech, by contrast, is exceedingly long. Cyril Rodd, for instance, argues that this is evidence that the text is unfinished or otherwise at odds with the author's intention.

Gerald Janssen, remarking upon this possibility, observes, Perhaps there is something to be said for leaving an ancient work partly in ruins, and for allowing each reader to reconstruct the outlines of the original edifice with the use of one's own imagination, informed as it may become through careful study of what still remains intact. Some have speculated that material from one or both of the speeches of Bildad or a missing speech of Zophar has ended up here. David Clines holds the latter position and moves verses 18-24 to follow chapter 27, verse 17.

Others have argued that there might be a mixture of material from disparate sources here, and no real unity. While highlighting these questions, Anderson presents a reading of the passage that, without ironing over its difficulties, invites the reader to read it as it stands. However, other commentators have taken different approaches.

As already noted, Clines reads verses 18-24 as not belonging to the speech, but being wrongly transposed into it from elsewhere. He mentions Duhem and Forer as holding the position that the chapter is in fact a series of independent poems. Others have

suggested that the chapter may be a poem written by the author of the book, punctuating the text and drawing together some of its themes.

John Hartley largely maintains the text as it stands, and reads the whole thing as the words of Job, while making some minor changes like transposing verse 9, which is placed in parentheses in the ESV translation, to before verse 4. Norman Harvel argues for the literary unity of the chapter, but believes that it should likely be seen as the words of Zophar, observing what he believes are parallels with the themes of Zophar's statements in chapter 20, and that the coherence of the passage may better be understood if we appreciate that Zophar is making a few concessions along the way. He argues that if we look at some of the features of the opening verses of the chapter and compare those with the closing ones, we will see enough parallels and connections to substantiate a literary unity to the whole. Other commentators raise even further possibilities, once again not without their problems.

Some have read verses 18-24 as extended quotations by Job of his friends or accusers. Anderson suggests that most of the final verses might even be read as an imprecation or curse, reading it as an imprecatory appeal for God's justice in such a situation, rather than a declaration of the way that things usually work, would definitely be more in keeping with what we have seen of Job's position to this point. Janssen argues that there is in fact a quotation, but it is only verses 18-20, with the verses that follow being Job's response.

He remarks more generally upon the problems that we can find in these concluding chapters of the third cycle. There is another possibility which, though it is not here adopted, may be mentioned simply to enlarge the reader's sense of the options. It may be that the author has deliberately dissolved the otherwise orderly sequence of statements and counter-statements into a confused tangle of incoherent voices, a formal way of paralleling the argument of Job that the hedge against chaos has given way, and that disorder and evil in the world make clear understandings impossible.

Such a device would admirably prepare the way for the sceptical statement in chapter 28, before Job recovers himself with the integrative verbal actions of chapters 29-31. Of the positions on offer, I am more inclined to go with Andersen and Janssen in reading the whole chapter as a unity and as the words of Job. With Janssen, I lean towards taking verses 18-20 as Job's quotation of his friends, with the verses that follow being Job's own response.

Harbell argues that verses 1-17 are Zophar's presentation of the problem that he is going to address in the verses that follow. Along the way, he is making some concessions to Job's position, recognising some validity in what he is seeing. I would argue rather that we would be better off reading these as the words of Job throughout.

Job is again presenting the problem of divine justice, but broadening it. The friends have

been talking about the fate of the wicked, and he is broadening the question somewhat, to relate to the problem of the Lord's justice not being forthcoming, not just in his own case, but in numerous cases of oppression more generally. Verses 2-4 describe actions of the oppressors, moving landmarks to take property that is not their own, sheep stealing, oppressing widows and orphans by requiring the animals by which they would make their living as a pledge.

Thrusting the poor off the road may be a way of speaking about squeezing them out of the economy. The result of this oppression is described in the verses that follow, in verses 5-11. The oppressed poor can barely scavenge enough to survive.

They suffer from exposure to the elements. They are hungry and thirsty. While the wicked are prospering, the poor that they are oppressing have to glean what scant remnants they can from the fields and vineyards of the wicked.

Where is God in all of this? The oppressed, the dying, the wounded are crying out, and yet no one seems to listen to them. God does not seem to remember them in their plight. The Lord had forbidden these specific forms of oppression within the law, but he doesn't seem to be acting to enforce the justice that he prescribes.

Verses 13-17 describe the oppressors themselves. They are in this portrayal figures associated with darkness. The murderer, the thief and the adulterer are all figures who operate by night.

They may break the three greatest commandments of the second table of the law, yet God does not seem to act against them. The darkness being referred to here doesn't merely relate to literal darkness. It seems to also relate to the darkness that exists in the absence of divine justice.

Where God's actions in bringing the wicked to account are not seen, there is darkness. And this darkness, Job argues, is a cover for the wicked. They take refuge in this darkness, while the righteous long for it to be broken with the advent of the days of the Lord.

The difficult closing section of the chapter, verses 18-24 particularly, are, I believe, best read as Jansen reads them. Verses 18-20 is a quote of the position of the friends. Jansen remarks that Job has already quoted his friends in places like chapter 21, verses 19 and possibly verse 22.

The statement concerns the certainty of the judgment that will befall the wicked. The grave will seize them just as naturally as drought and heat melt up the snow waters. They will be consumed in their graves and forgotten by the land of the living.

Yet Job, hearkening back to the portrayal of the wicked oppressor within this chapter, points out that they can do all these forms of oppression, and yet their lives are

prolonged. They seem to be given security by God. Yes, their life is short, but when they die, they die just like anyone else.

Despite all of their oppression, they do not seem to be singled out in any particular way. Far from being cut down by the Lord, they leave just like the righteous. Job concludes by challenging the friends to oppose the position.

If he is indeed wrong in his claims, he wants them to prove it. What is he missing or misrepresenting? A question to consider. In this chapter, Job's consideration of his condition opens up to a broader consideration of the condition of the righteous and the wicked more generally.

Where else have we seen this happening to this point? And how do Job's particular struggles give us a vantage point upon the problem of evil and the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked more generally? Chapters 25 and 26 of the Book of Job raise many questions for commentators. At this point, we are concluding the speeches of the third cycle, indeed of all the cycles, and there are anomalies at this point. Bildad has a very, very short speech.

Job has a long speech. There is no speech for Zophar. When this is coupled with all of the other textual questions, and the way in which Job's voice at certain points seems to be out of keeping with his character and his broader position, for instance in verses 5 to 14 of chapter 26, where Job gives a doxology that seems to go against the grain of some of his argument, it contrasts, for instance, with the doxology of chapter 12 verses 13 to 25, some have argued, which explores the shadow side of God's greatness.

Many commentators honestly wrestling with some of these problems have tried to resolve them by attributing different sections of the text to different speakers, by suggesting that the text has gotten confused somewhere in the transmission, or that certain verses have been transposed. Such approaches should not be dismissed as possibilities, yet ideally we won't resort to such extreme hypotheses if less radical ones are at hand. Norman Harbell argues that chapters 25 and chapters 26 verses 5 to 14 are all Bildad, with chapter 26 verses 5 to 14 elaborating chapter 25 verse 2. David Clines argues that all of chapters 25 and 26 are Bildad.

Chapter 26 verse 1, in his understanding, was a later addition or transposition. Verses 2 to 4 then of chapter 26 are Bildad's words to Job. However, even though the majority of commentators and a large number of translations reorder or reattribute material from chapters 24 to 27 in particular, there are a large number of dissenting voices.

Francis Anderson, Robert Feil, Gerald Janssen and Toby Sumter all make the point that the arguments of the Friends are exhausted. At this point, they're sputtering or petering out. Bildad's speech is so short because he has very little to say that has not already been said.

In fact, as Janssen argues, it may be because Job directly interrupts him, because Job recognises all too well that Bildad has nothing more to add. The attentive reader, for instance, will notice that Bildad is largely repeating an argument that we had in the very opening speech of the dialogues by Eliphaz. Chapter 4 verses 17 to 19.

Eliphaz had made another similar argument in chapter 15 verses 14 to 16. They will just be repeating the same arguments. The cycle runs out of steam halfway because the arguments are broken down.

In his brief speech, Bildad emphasises the sovereignty of God. He's the one who has dominion in the highest heavens. He rules over his armies, the stars and the angels.

Anderson makes the point that Bildad seems to have retreated from his stronger arguments earlier on. Rather than talking about the scrutability of God's judgments upon the wicked, there is a greater sense of the incomprehensibility of God in this speech. Verses 3 to 6 alternate between the heavens and humanity.

The armies and the light in the heavens in verse 3, then man and one born of woman in verse 4. In verse 5, the moon and the stars. And in verse 6, man being compared to a maggot and a worm. The argument here is similar to that of Eliphaz earlier on, as we've noted.

Eliphaz's claims concerned God's transcendent glory and holiness, against which mankind would always seem sinful. No man could ever make a realistic claim to be in the right relative to God. Even the moon and the stars are pale in relation to God's glory.

Man is a small creature of the earth. He is akin of the maggot and the worm who will finally eat him up. He's a creature born of earth who will return to the earth.

It shouldn't be hard to hear an echo of Psalm 8 here. In verses 3 to 4 of Psalm 8, we read... While the psalmist goes on to talk about the marvellous way in which the Lord does in fact care for his creatures, and the dignity and the glory that he has given to mankind, Bildad's point seems to move in the other direction, if anything to downplay this. The psalmist wonders that such a transcendent God would have a meaningful relationship with human beings.

Bildad, so emphasising the transcendence and the holiness of God, calls into question the notion that he ever could. We need to consider what lies at the heart of Job's claim. Job is claiming that a man can be in the right with God.

This is not just an abstract claim of justice, nor should this be seen just as a matter of desiring self-righteousness. Job is calling for vindication, for a divine declaration that he is in the right. But this is not just to serve his own pride.

Near the heart of Job's insistence is the idea that a man can truly relate to God. A man

can be in right standing with God. A man can meaningfully interact with God.

Whereas the distant deity of Bildad cannot offer such a relationship. It is not that Job's confidence in this never wavers. For instance in chapter 9 verses 2 to 4... If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times.

He is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has hardened himself against him and succeeded? However Job still stubbornly pursues such vindication that he would be declared to be in the right with God. As Jansen notes, Psalm 8 was also in the background of Job's statement in chapter 7 verses 17 to 18... Jansen writes... The resolution of the Book of Job will suggest that Job's reinterpretation of Psalm 8 was right, but in a different sense than he realised.

Whereas Bildad's own reinterpretation is simply wrong. In chapter 26 Job answers Bildad dismissively and sarcastically. It is quite possible that Job interrupts Bildad and Bildad's speech is so short because Job prevents him from finishing it.

Harbell and various other commentators have argued that verses 5 to 14 of this chapter are actually the words of Bildad and that Job's response should be read after them. However if verses 2 to 4 are a response to a speech of Bildad that concludes with verses 5 to 14... It would jar somewhat to go from such a doxology to a dismissive and caustic statement on Job's part. Job, we would naturally assume, would not disagree with anything in the doxology.

It is the inferences that his friends draw from such doxologies that is the issue with him. Jansen raises the intriguing possibility that Job interrupted Bildad's final speech and then finished Bildad's speech more adequately for him. He argues that in chapter 27 Job also gives voice to the argument that Zophar would have done.

He already knows what the friends are going to say so he pre-empt's their arguments. However in both cases he gives the argument in a way that turns them to his own purposes. Verses 5 to 14 are a remarkable portrayal of God's sovereignty, power and wisdom in creation.

Robert Farl observes... Job describes the universality of God's dominion, his power over the elements of the creation. He laid the foundations, he stretched out the canopy over it. He controls by his power the great might of the seas, shattering Rahab, the great sea monster, of various cosmogonic myths of the ancient Near East.

Despite these great and marvellous acts of creation Job insists that these are but a small intimation of who God is. How small a whisper do we hear of him? It is noteworthy that the word whisper here is one that is only found on one other occasion in scripture and it's also in the book of Job. Fittingly in this final speech of the dialogues it refers back to the first of all of the speeches of the dialogues, Eliphaz's speech, where he had spoken



about the vision that he had received in the night and the whisper that he heard there.

The transcendent majesty of God is distant and mysterious and the friends have only the smallest hints of it. But next to this whisper there is the thunder of God's power, the thunder of God's power that has shaken the entirety of Job's world. Who can understand that? Janssen notes that the only other place where we see this word for power used is in chapter 12 verse 13.

With God a wisdom and might he has counsel and understanding. In that context the statement introduced Job's doxology which explored the shadow side of God's majesty, the fact that we cannot discern or read God's purposes in his acts. By his power he works beyond human understanding.

Chapter 27 begins with a resumptive expression and Job again took up his discourse and said, For this reason it might be best to read chapter 26 as a self-contained speech and this would be a good response to many of those who argue that Job's speech here is too long, seeing it as going from chapter 26 to 31, whereas what we actually see are a number of distinct speeches of Job and quite possibly punctuated by a speech by the author in chapter 28. This is concluding and then also summing up the case of Job. Considered this way we should not be that surprised at the form that the text takes.

A question to consider, where else in scripture do we find other poetic descriptions of God's great creation deeds? From chapter 24 questions of the proper ordering of the material of the book of Job have vexed commentators. This continues to be an issue in chapter 27 where many commentators believe that the material in our Bibles is wrongly ordered. In taking this position commentators are responding to several difficulties in the text itself.

The final cycle of speeches is anomalous. Only two of the friends speak, Eliphaz and Bildad. Each previous cycle involved a final speech by Zophar, but that's missing here.

Bildad's speech is also incredibly short. By contrast Job speaks for most of the next few chapters and all of the way from chapter 26 to 31, if we don't believe that chapter 28 and its poem concerning wisdom comes from a different hand. By itself this is not an overwhelming problem to account for.

As several commentators have observed, the arguments of the friends have clearly reached an impasse. They were reheating stale old arguments on the one hand and becoming more forcefully condemnatory of Job on the other. And it's very clear by this point there's little to be gained by continuing.

What potential the conversation ever had seems to have been exhausted by this point. Indeed, as Gerald Janssen argues, Job chapter 26 may be Job interrupting Bildad before his speech can build up any momentum. The point that Job's speech is excessively long

is also relatively easily answered.

First, Job's speeches have always been significantly longer than his friends. Second, if chapter 28 is a different speaker, then chapters 26 and 27 are not a long speech at all, and chapters 29 to 31 would be a final statement summing matters up. Third, chapter 27 begins with an introductory statement, suggesting that it is a distinct speech from that of chapter 26.

The tougher issue to address is the presence of material in chapters 24, 26 and 27 that seems to represent not Job's position but that of his friends, more particularly chapter 24 verses 18 to 24, chapter 26 verses 6 to 14 and chapter 27 verses 7 to 23. In this chapter, verses 13 to 23 present an especially keen problem for the interpreter as their portrayal of the wicked is something that we have come to expect from the mouths of the friends, but definitely not from Job. On the surface of it, some might even wonder whether Job has given in to the friends' interpretation of matters.

While he attributes chapter 26 verses 6 to 14 to Job, John Hartley relocates chapter 27 verses 13 to 23 after 25 verses 1 to 6 and reads it as the words of Bildad drawing upon Zophar. Norman Harvel's position, one of the most popular approaches, treats the first 12 verses as Job's and the rest of the chapter as Zophar, the missing speech. Janssen suggests that chapter 27 verses 13 to 23 are Job's anticipatory parody of Zophar.

Perhaps the pause before the speech was Job waiting for Zophar to take his turn, but Zophar said nothing and now Job gives his speech for him. David Clines forms a third speech for Zophar by joining in order chapter 27 verses 7 to 10, verses 13 to 17, chapter 24 verses 18 to 24 and chapter 27 verses 18 to 23, leaving verses 1 to 6 and 11 to 12 of this chapter as Job's own speech. Marvin Pope cuts off the speech of Job at verse 7 and attributes verses 8 to 23 to Zophar.

Harold Rowley only attributes the first six verses to Job. Other commentators seem to be just perplexed and uncertain about what to make of the anomalous elements. C.S. Rudd, for instance, seems to fall into this camp.

There are plenty of commentators, though, who still read the entirety of chapter 27 as the words of Job, even without stretching the idea of Job's voice to the extent that Janssen does. They don't believe it's necessary to see Job as engaging in a parody at this point. Toby Sumter, reading the book in terms of the theories of René Girard, stresses the importance of the political background of what's taking place in the book.

Job is the king of his people and what the Friends are doing in their discourses with him is trying to discredit him and undermine his rule. They are claiming that God has decisively ruled against him and as a result he should be divested of authority. This should help us to recognise that even for the Friends this was never a detached discussion of God, evil and suffering.

It was an attempt to gain political power. The issue of the book isn't just a narrow question of suffering, why do bad things happen to good people, nor is it even just about personal vindication and being in right relationship with God, which is clearly a concern for Job. There is more going on here.

Job's desire for vindication is not just a private thing. It's a desire for public vindication, for restoration to his societal and political standing, for deliverance from people like his Friends who are playing the satanic role of the accuser. Sumter writes, This is only out of place if Job is in exactly the same spot as he began.

Yet Job has emerged into the light and while the dust has not yet settled, the momentum of the battle has turned and Job can affirm without impunity that the wicked will be blown away by the storm because that is even now happening. While I am not completely persuaded of this reading, I think it is a promising approach to the text and may have some insights to give us. Job begins chapter 27 with an extended oath.

His Friends have been trying to persuade him to give in and to admit that he has done something wrong, to confess, to acknowledge his crime. Eliphaz gave a listening of different sins that he thought that Job must be guilty of back in his first speech of the third cycle. As in a show trial in a totalitarian society, the verdict has already been determined.

The important thing being sought is the accused person's submission to the accusations and acknowledgement of his guilt. This is really what the Friends are looking for. The strength of Job's refusal at this point needs to be seen in light of that.

I believe that Reni, Gerard and Sumter are correct in seeing that the Friends are not just looking for Job's admission of his guilt to support some theories that they have about God's justice. They are looking for something more. They have a political end in view.

All of this gives Job's refusal to give in a greater force. From his oath to maintain his innocence, Job moves to an imprecatory statement, a curse concerning the people who are opposing him. As he has been doing throughout the book, Job is calling for God to act decisively in history, to establish justice, bringing wicked accusers to shame and upholding the righteous against their adversaries.

There is no reason to believe that Job has abandoned any belief in justice. He is greatly dismayed that it is not being done in his situation and he also points out a great many other situations where it is absent. But his very stubbornness in appealing to God consistently suggests that there is more going on here.

He refuses to let go of a belief in divine justice. Even when all of the appearances are otherwise, he will appeal to it. In verses 11-23, as we have seen, the reader is faced with the great many questions, while verses 11-12 are more generally acknowledged to be

Job's words.

How they relate to what follows is unclear. The you that is being addressed is plural, so it would be strange to put these words in the mouths of the friends towards Job. Robert Alden writes, He argues in a manner similar to Janzen, that Job is summarising the arguments of the friends in the final verses.

It certainly seems to pick up on earlier themes in their portraits of the wicked, particularly in the second cycle of speeches. Job refers to meaningless talk or vain talk in verse 12. Alden argues that this is referring to what he summarises in verses 13-23.

Perhaps another consideration when we approach verses 13-23 is that it matters who speaks particular words. In the mouth of Zophar, these would mean very different things than they mean in the mouth of Job. Perhaps the reader is being challenged to reflect upon this.

This is a point made in Proverbs 26, verses 7 and 9. Job, if these are his words, has not abandoned a sense of justice. He calls upon God to act with justice, not just in his own situation, but against his adversaries. Here, again if these are his words, he expresses a confidence in the way that God will bring justice to pass in history, the way that the wicked will be brought to nothing.

However, this hope is not just a mechanical hope. It is connected with prayer for divine vindication and action. It is an expression of faith, not just of sight.

It does not deny the existence of anomalies, nor does it try to pretend that the acts of God are completely scrutable, as the Friends have often tried to do. When we hear these words coming from the mouth of Job, we know that they come with all these other qualifications. We know that they are balanced, that they come with this sense of faith, not sight.

Such statements, we should recall, are found at many points in Scripture, particularly in the Psalms and the Book of Proverbs. The statements given by the Friends are often seemingly biblical ones, but yet the way that they are using them is profoundly foolish. Perhaps by forcing the reader to hear similar words from the mouth of Job himself, we are being taught to think a bit more carefully about the way that wisdom in speech relates to speaker, context and words, and those things can't be separated from each other.

Job presents a number of images here of the wicked being cut off, or brought to nothing. The primary focus is on inheritance and legacy. The legacy of the wicked is cut off.

His children and descendants are brought to nothing. His wealth falls into other hands. People do not mourn him.

His house proves as fragile as a moth's chrysalis. He piles up riches, but they'll soon be required of him. He's suddenly removed, and there's nothing left.

And God in his power mocks at him. A question to consider. Can you think of other ways and places in which the Scripture teaches us how to use wise words wisely? Job chapter 28 is a remarkably beautiful poem, but it represents a great shift in the tone of the book.

From the fierce passion of Job's defence and the speeches of the friends, we come to a rich poetic meditation upon wisdom. A number of commentators have spoken of it as an interlude between the cycle of the dialogues with the three friends and the sections that follow. The rest of Job's speech, the speech of Elihu, the arrival and the speeches of God, and then the epilogue.

There was another interlude back in chapter 3, in Job's cursing of the day of his birth. But this poem doesn't just represent a shift in the tone. It also seems to be a shift in the subject matter.

There is no mention of Job's defence here. Rather, it is a meditation upon wisdom more generally. There's no address to an audience.

There's no clear expression of the feelings of the speaker. As David Clines puts it, it is completely externalised. Speaker and audience are not identified.

The refrain is an important part of it and helps us to understand what the poem is about. In verse 12 and 20 we find statements of the type, But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? It moves towards the final verse, which is, as Clines calls it, the nodal verse. It's the revelation that answers the great question of the chapter.

And he said to man, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding. The general scholarly opinion holds that this poem is not the words of Job. Many attribute it to the voice of the narrator of the book.

It's the sort of calm eye of the storm. It encourages the reader, temporarily, to stand back and reflect upon the deeper themes of the book. What is this all about? When you step back from the immediacy of the drama, what is the message of the book of Job? Clines makes the case that the speech here is from Elihu.

It's the conclusion, he argues, to Elihu's fourth speech. He raises the possibility that the order of the strips of the scroll of the book of Job were accidentally disordered in the process of transmission. Elihu makes the most use of the language of wisdom, and so this makes most sense coming from his mouth.

I'm unpersuaded. However, Clines does highlight some important questions. The obvious one is, what is the poem doing here, and what purpose is it serving? One could call it an

interlude, but why would we have such an interlude at this particular juncture? Also, what is this question of where wisdom is to be found doing in the book of Job more generally? What does it have to do with the material that surrounds it, with the interests of Job, his friends and Elihu? What does it have to do with the broader message of the text? Why would Job, for instance, be asking this question at this particular juncture? Gerald Janssen, Robert Alden, Toby Sumter, and a number of other commentators argue that these are the words of Job.

I'm not completely persuaded. Even though these words aren't marked off from the rest of Job's speeches by a formal introductory statement, it seems clear that they stand apart from what surrounds them. While some commentators see this as an independent poem that has somehow found its way into the book of Job, this chapter is not detached from its surroundings.

Robert Feil argues that chapter 28, and indeed the entirety of chapters 26-31, function something like the voice of a chorus in a play. They collect and comment upon the themes that are surfacing to this point. Feil points out that this chapter identifies the question behind all of the other questions of the book, and it also serves as a metaphor for the whole book.

He argues that the structure of the chapter is as follows. Verses 1-11, the mining for precious stones and metals is a metaphor for the quest of wisdom. Verses 12-22, the inaccessibility of wisdom.

Verses 23-28, wisdom and creation. The mine, he argues, can be seen as an image of Job's suffering to this point. It isn't detached from the preceding and the following chapters.

In particular, it anticipates much of the creation imagery of God's speech that will come later. For instance, in chapter 38 verses 16-20. Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this, where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, that you may take it to its territory, and that you may discern the path to its home? Reading through this chapter, we might also think of the way that it connects to some of the images that Job has used of his own suffering.

He is often referred to images of Sheol and the underworld. This might fit well with the imagery of mining in the depths of the earth. We might also think of the way that he has described himself as gold to be tested.

In chapter 23 verse 10. But he knows the way that I take. When he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.

In verse 1 of chapter 28. This suggests to the reader, I believe, a pregnant analogy between Job and his sufferings and the mining in the depths of the earth. Job is experiencing something of the depths of human experience.

He is descending into the gloom of human suffering, seeking if he can mine there for wisdom. The poem concerning wisdom does not tell us at the outset what its theme is. Rather, the speaker gives a description of the processes by which men seek for items of immense value, like silver, gold, and precious stones.

Discovery of these items requires a descent into the depths, away from human habitation, into the darkness, the silence, and solitude. It is a place of danger and peril, a place where only the bravest will venture. The quest for these precious stones and metals sets man apart from the animals.

The birds and the beasts do not enter these subterranean vaults. The lengthy description of the processes of mining and seeking out precious stones and jewels might make the reader wonder what the point of all of this is. What is this analogy about? In verse 12 it is revealed to us.

Wisdom, it appears, is inaccessible. It cannot be found in the land of the living. Question concerning its location, the vast deep, and the great sea, both deny that it is in them.

If it can't be located by mining, nor can it be purchased with the great treasures that man possesses, a valuation cannot be placed upon it. There is nothing of like worth that could be exchanged for it. All of these are similar images to those we find in the book of Proverbs, in chapter 2, verses 3 to 5 of Proverbs.

Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. Chapter 3, verses 13 to 15. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Chapter 16, verse 16. How much better to get wisdom than gold? To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

Verse 20 repeats the key theme question. From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? Once again, it cannot be found by the living. Previously we were told that it is not found in the land of the living.

And here we are told in verse 21 that it is hidden from the eyes of all living. The deep and the sea were interrogated concerning its location back in verse 14, and now it is abandoned and death, the deeper depths. They have heard a rumour, but they have nothing more than that to give.

So where is wisdom to be found? Verses 23 to 28 give us the answer. God is the one who knows the way to wisdom. This might seem strange to us.

God is the one who has wisdom. God is the source of wisdom. Why would it speak about God knowing the way to it and knowing its place? Jansons suggests that the answer is found in part in the fact that wisdom is found in act.

And God's act of creation is the place where wisdom is to be found. In verses 24 to 27 this act of creation is recounted in various of its aspects. The focus is upon God's power and his ordering of the creation.

The creation itself is the product of divine wisdom. But it does not contain the wisdom by which it was created. The wisdom is found in the creative act, not the creation in and of itself.

So what then should a human response to wisdom be? Verse 28 has an expression that should be familiar from many other passages in the wisdom material. We find this in Psalm 111 verse 10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

All who practice it have a good understanding. In Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7. Just as in Psalm 111 or in the book of Proverbs. The statement here concerning the fear of the Lord is absolutely fundamental.

It expresses the core truth that should probably be seen to be at the very heart of the message of the book of Job. A further indication of this fact can be seen in the way that it is filled out in the expression. To turn away from evil is understanding.

This return to the theme of the fear of the Lord. Defining wisdom as fearing the Lord and turning away from evil. Should cause the reader to prick up their ears.

These are charged expressions. They appear in the opening verse of the book. The name was Job.

And that man was blameless and upright. One who feared God and turned away from evil. In this final climactic statement.

At the end of the reflective quest of the poem. We arrive at a statement that takes us back to the very beginning of the book. Janzen writes of this.

Is here presented as renewed and refreshed through the searching reflection in which Job and the reader have been engaged since chapter 3. Not all explorations issue in the discovery of totally new terrain. Sometimes exploration issues in the discovery, as though for the first time, of terrain in which one has always lived. In such cases this terrain may be occupied by conventional minds and by those newly awakened.

The question then, and it is not easily answered, becomes. In what sense do they inhabit



the same terrain? And in what sense are they worlds apart? In terms of chapter 28 verse 28. One may ask whether this conclusion at this point in Job's search is crushingly banal or fresh with chastened profundity.

It may depend on how one comes to the conclusion and how one entertains it. Reading this verse as a reaffirmation in part of the statement of the opening verse of the book may also help us to see Job as having passed through the test and survived it. Arriving at the deeper wisdom of seeing that true wisdom is found in fear of the creator.

Of the one who in the act of wisdom formed all things. A question to consider. Do you think that it is possible to argue that the question, from where then does wisdom come and where is the place of understanding, is the thematic question of the book of Job? If you do, how would you go about arguing it? How might the prominence of the question in this chapter and poem help us to read the rest of the book? In Job chapter 29 Job recollects his former condition and estate.

When he was honoured among the people. When he enjoyed rule and authority among them. When he was blessed with prosperity, the Lord's favour and surrounded with the joyful life of his household.

This chapter should not be abstracted from everything else that surrounds it. For instance it looks back to chapter 27 and Job's oath maintaining his righteousness. It looks back to chapter 28 at the end of which we were told wisdom for man is turning away from evil and fear in God.

In this chapter in the actions of Job during the period of his prosperity we see that he was such a person. In this portrayal Job is also presenting himself to God, declaring himself innocent of the great wrongs that would have brought such disaster upon him. It relates to the chapter that immediately follows by contrast.

Seen against the backdrop of his former condition Job's present lamentable estate is set forth in sharpest relief. Finally it relates to Job's oath of innocence in chapter 31 with which he concludes his speeches. Job's denial that he is guilty of a series of particular crimes that could be imputed to him corresponds with his positive description of his former actions within this chapter.

Job is not just soliloquising at this point. This relates to his formal complaint. He is asserting his innocence.

The chapter is an important one for other reasons. It gives us a portrait of what righteousness looks like. Francis Anderson writes An important but negative matter.

In Job's conscience sins are not just wrong things people do, disobeying known laws of God or society. To omit, to do good to any fellow human being of whatever rank or class would be a grievous offence to God. Anderson's point is an important one.

Job's portrayal of himself here is of a man who is working righteousness and establishing justice within his society. Not just someone who is being righteous for his own sake. Job's righteousness is creative and restorative.

Not just the pale righteousness of avoidance of sins. In such righteousness Job is reflecting something of God's own character of righteousness. God is the one who judges and brings justice to his people.

Something that is integral to a vision of righteous rule more generally. The idealised just man is a man of strength and substance. A man with the might and authority to frustrate the actions of the oppressors.

And with the means to raise up the poor. He is a just warrior and a gracious comforter. A man who has power but a man who uses that power for the sake of those who have none.

Gerald Janssen remarks upon the similarities between Job's self-portrayal and the description of the ideal king in places like Psalm 72. In Psalm 72 verse 1 to 7 May the mountains bear prosperity for the people and the hills in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy and crush the oppressor.

May they fear you while the sun endures and as long as the moon throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish and peace abound till the moon be no more.

And then in verses 11 to 15 May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him. For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life and precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live. May gold of Sheba be given to him.

May prayer be made for him continually and blessings invoked for him all the day. As in the case of the righteous Davidic king of Psalm 72, in Job's portrayal here his wealth is not envied by other people nor is his prosperity resented. Rather they are seen as a blessing for the whole people because he is using his might and his strength for the sake of the up-building of everyone.

Through his strength and authority he can act on behalf of the poor, he can achieve and enact justice for the oppressed. Looking back on his former estate from his present condition is a painful experience for Job though. As he looks back he perceives how much he has lost.

Things that were once a source of comfort to him, the fact that God watched over him for instance, are now attended with a sense of menace. In chapter 10 verse 14, if I sin you watch me and do not acquit me of my iniquity. Much as in the enumeration of Job's blessings and riches in Job chapter 1, the favour of God was held above everything else.

The way that he related to God was the most important thing. Here again we see that it is the friendship of God that really marked out these former days. He enjoyed the friendship of God and consequently enjoyed all these other benefits.

Now it seems that has been lost completely. He describes in hyperbolic language the blessings that he enjoyed of the earth. We might think of the way that the land of promise was described as a land flowing with milk and honey.

Here his steps are washed with butter, connected with the milk. The rock pours out streams of oil. Perhaps this is the olive press.

Perhaps we might also, as Norman Harbell suggests, hear something of an allusion to God as the rock in this particular expression. Job, now cruelly accused by his friends, looks back on the status that he once enjoyed in the society. Although Job was not yet old, Eliphaz, back in chapter 15 verse 10, said, Both the grey-haired and the aged are among us, older than your father.

He nonetheless enjoyed an honour and a status above his years. When he went to the gate of the city, the place of judgment, he was honoured above all others and by all others. The assertive young men stood back before him.

The wise sages stood up from their seats. The rulers closed their mouths and the men of substance within the society were hushed. Everyone respected Job and wanted to hear what he had to say.

Eliphaz, back in chapter 22 verses 6 to 9, made some serious allegations against Job. For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry.

The man with power possessed the land, and the favoured man lived in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. Job here gives the most contrary testimony.

Far from being guilty of the things that Eliphaz has accused him of, he was an exemplar of virtuous rule. And given the public nature of the acts that he is describing, none of this should be hard to substantiate. If Job were in fact lying, it could easily be exposed.

In his character as a righteous ruler, Job reflects the character that God himself is supposed to have, and which has been called into question by his experience. He

delivered the poor who cried for help. Will God deliver him when he is a poor man crying for help? Job acted on behalf of those in sorest distress.

His righteousness was proactive, it took the initiative. It repaired those things that were broken, and lifted up those people who were downcast. Job describes himself as putting on righteousness and it clothing him, his justice being like a robe and a turban.

This is language that might remind us of the way that God's justice is spoken of in places like Isaiah 59, verse 17. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

Job's justice, his enacting of justice, and the effectual outworking of his justice in his society, is as obvious as the clothes that he is wearing. This virtue and action is something that he becomes so identified with that it is like the clothes on his back. He was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

His strength was the strength of those who had no strength of their own. The father was an especially important character. It was not just the emotional relationship that he had with his family, it was the fact that through his might the family was protected, provided for, and justice was enacted for them.

Scripture is particularly concerned for the characters of the widow and the fatherless, those who lack a strong and faithful man to act on their behalf. God himself is a father to those who are fatherless. Those who lack anyone to act on their behalf find that God makes their cause his own.

Job was not a lazy judge either. He sought out causes, they didn't just have to come to him. He diligently applied himself to the activity.

He used his strength to bring down oppressors. He broke the teeth of the unrighteous and delivered their prey from their mouths. In this situation Job had a confidence that the Lord was blessing and smiling upon him.

He was acting as a representative of God, in God's name, and in a way that reflected God's own character. He believed that he would die in his nest, his days would be multiplied. Some have argued that the word translated as sand in the ESV should be translated as phoenix, it being a reference to the myth of that particular bird that could be restored to new life and renewed to its youth.

His roots would spread out to the waters, he would be like a blessed tree. We've had a number of images of trees within the book of Job. Job has already wondered whether, like a tree, he might be revived to new life after what seems like his final end.

In this former period of his life his glory was fresh with him. He was surrounded, as it

were, with a halo of honour and blessing. His bow, his physical strength, was ever new in his hand.

He returns in the concluding verses of the chapter to the former status of honour and power that he enjoyed in the society. In matters of dispute and debate, he was the final word. His words were longed for as those which would settle a matter and give insight and wisdom.

His benevolence was something that caused the whole society to rejoice in him. Indeed, he was the one that set the course of the society. He sat as a chief.

He was the king among the troops. He was the one with the authority and the rule and the might. But he was also the one who comforts mourners.

He was not lifted up in his heart above the people. He was their brother, the one who acted as their great kinsman-redeemer. All of this, however, is far in the past.

Job's condition now seems completely otherwise. Who will act as a redeemer for him? Is God a righteous judge and king, comforter of the oppressed and the weak and the needy, in the way that Job once was? A question to consider. Where else in scripture do we have such portrayals of righteous kings and rulers and ideal visions of the inaction of justice within the ancient world? What might we learn from such portrayals about justice in our own situations? After having described his former estate in Job chapter 29, in Job chapter 30, Job discusses the profound contrast between that and his current condition.

The contrast is accented through the repetition of the word now in verses 1, 9 and 16. Job wants his hearers to recognize the difference between what he once was and what he now is. In the preceding chapter, he described the way that he was honored by all members of society, the way that he acted on behalf of those who were weak and poor and needed aid.

He begins this chapter with a portrait of a group of people who weren't even members of society. The people in question are foolish and disreputable. They are unreliable, unable to hold down gainful employment, and are scavengers at the edge of society.

They are accounted as thieves and ne'er-do-wells, and so society rejects them. The last chapter ended with Job's honor among the greatest of society, and this chapter begins with Job's dishonor and his shame among the least of the society, among those who aren't even fit to be members of society. He has become a byword to them.

They make up songs to ridicule him. They, people that society has rejected, give him a wide berth. They spit to dishonor him when they see him.

They regard Job as having been judged by God, so they feel no compunctions about scorning him. Verse 12 might refer to the rabble. Alternatively, it might refer to lepers.

The very ones who are removed from society for being unclean on account of their disease regard him as even more unclean. As God has broken Job down, it is as if a great company of scoundrels and outcasts come in his wake to join the spoiling of this once great man. All the honor, reputation, and standing that Job once enjoyed in his society is taken away as if by a storm, and coupled with this utter change in fortunes in his outer estate, Job's own bodily condition is most painful and lamentable.

He experiences no rest or relief. His agonies are unrelenting. Verse 18 is a difficult one to translate.

It likely refers to an action of God that is violent towards Job. Norman Harville reads it. With great strength he ties me up with my garment, and strangles me with the neck of my tunic.

Robert Alden reads it. In his great power God becomes like clothing to me. He binds me like the neck of my garment.

David Klein suggests that we render it. With great force he grips my garment. He clasps me tight like the neck of my tunic.

Marvin Pope's reading is fairly similar. With violence he grafts my garment, seizes me by the coat collar. God has cast Job into the mire and reduced him to dust and ashes.

The expression dust and ashes is surprisingly rare on the pages of scripture. It only occurs on three occasions. Here, in Genesis chapter 18 verse 27, Abraham answered and said, Behold I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

And then finally in Job chapter 42 verse 6, Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. It's noteworthy that these are the last words of Job in the whole book. Job looks to the Lord, but the Lord does not seem to respond.

He does not seem to show any concern or care for him, but only cruelty. Not only does he ignore Job's pleas for help and his sorry estate, he compounds his afflictions. He torments Job.

It's as if the Lord wants to inflict upon Job the very cruelest death. Verse 24 is another very difficult one to understand, and the great range of translations of this verse should give us some indication why. David Clines translates it, Harbell's reading is similar.

John Hartley, however, reads it. Pope reads it. However, the ESV reads it.

A number of commentators have termed this the most difficult verse in the whole book, which, considering we're talking about the book of Job, is really saying something. In his moment of distress, who was standing up for him? Who was taking up his cause? He wept with those who wept. He showed a great regard for the needy.

There are various passages in scripture that seem to suggest that the person who is faithful in these situations, who takes concern for the poor, will be blessed with God's concern for him. But in Job's situation, that does not seem to happen. The Lord disregards him, and what's worse, when he's hoping for relief and goodness, God sends him darkness and evil.

Job speaks of going about darkened, and in verse 28, that his skin turns black and falls from him. He's suffering from a terrible skin condition. Elsewhere, we learn that he had foul breath.

His body is repulsive. He's barely recognisable to the people who know him. He's become disfigured.

He experiences continual pain. He's malnourished and wasting away, covered with sores that seem to heal up, but then open up again and ooze out their pus. He's abhorrent and physically disgusting to all who once knew him.

He is related to ostriches and jackals, creatures that haunted the desolate and deserted ruins. Neither God nor man listens to his cry, and the tone or music of his life, that was once so filled with joy, as we see in the preceding chapter, is now turned to mourning and a dirge. A question to consider.

Not all forms of suffering are at all alike. Can you think about the different species of suffering that Job is experiencing? What are some of the distinct sorrows that accompany each one? Job chapter 31 concludes Job's speeches in this book. This is the last chapter of Job's lengthy concluding speech, in which he sums up his case and once again asserts his innocence.

This is Job's second oath, after that of chapter 27, verses 1 to 6. And Job again took up his discourse and said, As God lives, who has taken away my right? And the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter? As long as my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right. Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.

I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go. My heart does not reproach me for any of my days. The oath of this chapter comes after Job's recollection of his former estate in chapter 29, against which the misery of his current condition was seen in chapter 30.

The chapter has an implicit courtroom setting. Job has suffered tremendous misfortunes, which seem to single him out as a guilty man judged by God. Again, Job, once a ruler and leader of his people, now appears to be divinely condemned, leaving him stripped of authority and standing in his society.

Job has been calling for a divine hearing of his case, looking for vindication, which will

absolve him of the guilt that now wrongly seems to cling to him. This chapter is a formal declaration, a self-malediction or self-imprecation, cursing himself if he is not telling the truth about his innocence in the matters of which he has been accused. This is more than just a denial of guilt.

It's a formal proclamation calling for God to act if he is guilty in any of these matters. We should recall the way that Eliphaz the Temanite had made serious yet false allegations concerning Job in chapter 22, verses 5-9. Gerald Janssen mentions Robert Gordas' observation that there are 14 sins that Job claims to be innocent of.

The 2 x 7 list might be an indication of comprehensiveness. He also notes that, as the Hebrew verb for swearing or taking an oath is related to the number 7, there might be a significance in the number here. Against this point, we should probably note that there isn't agreement in the numbering of the sins.

Once again, as in the vision of Job as the righteous leader in chapter 29, there is a clear accent upon justice as a social matter in Job's list. This is what righteousness looks like, not just a personal righteousness, but public responsibility and duty. Job throughout is calling for God to bring judgement upon him if he is guilty of any of the sins that he lists.

As he is currently suffering at God's hands, he is effectively declaring that his suffering has been justly inflicted upon him if he is guilty in any of the matters he mentions. Once again, many scholars and translations, dissatisfied with the ordering of this chapter, have reordered elements of it. However, as is generally the case elsewhere in Job, the justification for such ordering is relatively weak textually.

The chapter begins with the sin of lust. Job not only declares that he hasn't looked upon a virgin to lust after her, but that he had positively made a covenant with his eyes not to do so. We might here think of Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, verses 27-29.

In both of these cases we see that beyond the commandment not to commit adultery, there is a duty to starve lust in our hearts, not to feed it by granting our eyes free reign to roam around, or lustfully gazing upon another, committing adultery with them in our hearts. Had Job acted in such a manner, he leaves his hearers in no doubt that judgement would have been deserving, and disaster might even have been appointed to him. Verses 5-8 move to falsehood, deceit and dishonesty.

Job insists that he is a man of truth, and requests that God weigh him in a just balance, so that the matter of his integrity would be left in no doubt. Adultery in verses 9-12 is the next sin. Had Job been guilty of this, he says that he himself should be cuckolded as a just judgement.

He euphemistically speaks of men bowing down over his wife, like a prostitute. Several



commentators also see a euphemistic reference to sexual intercourse in the grinding mentioned in the first half of verse 10. The male upper millstone grinds upon the lower female millstone as an image of sexual relations.

Klines argues against this. He claims that it is more likely that it refers to the wife being reduced to a slave, and the most menial of tasks, although this might well have implied or connoted that she would have been sexually abused. Injustice and oppression are the subject of verses 13-15.

God is the patron of the weak and the oppressed, and those who abuse them are subject to God's curse and judgement. Deuteronomy 27 verse 19. Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, and all the people shall say Amen.

The righteous man is supposed to be characterised by generosity, charity and magnanimity. In verses 16-23, Job exculpates himself of miserliness and indifference towards the poor, from the sins not of commission so much as in verses 13-15, but sins of omission. The righteous man needs to act when he sees that justice is not being performed.

Greed, avarice, arrogance and the pride of life are the subject of verses 24-26. Job enjoyed immense wealth, but his confidence was not in his wealth. He looked to the Lord for his security.

Idolatry is next in verse 26 and following. Job has not worshipped the heavenly bodies or other idols. He has been faithful to God throughout.

He has not rejoiced in other people's ruin or downfall. He is not afflicted by schadenfreude. He does not rejoice in the destruction of others, but wishes people to be built up.

The ancient Near Eastern man was expected to be a good host, characterised by liberality and hospitality, and Job, again, has been faithful in this matter. No one can justly accuse him of not having performed his duties in this respect. Hypocrisy is the subject of verses 33-34.

Job's righteousness has always been the real thing. It's not just a facade he puts on for social face. David Clines argues that verses 35-37 are out of order and should be placed at the end of the chapter.

Janssen, as we shall see, argues against this transposition. To render all of this even more formal, Job proclaims his desire for a witness, likely at this point God himself, and places, as it were, his signature or sign beneath his verbal statement. He fervently wishes that he had the indictment of God, the judgement and sentence against him that account for all of the disaster that has befallen him.

So confident is he that no such document exists, that he declares that if he were given it, far from hiding it away, he would wear it openly and proudly. In chapter 19 verse 9 he had declared, He has stripped from me my glory, and taken the crown from my head. Now, in a surprising return of that image, he wants to wear the Lord's indictment against him around his head, as a new crown.

He has lost his honour, but he would wear the document of indictment as a badge of honour. He would give a thorough accounting of all of his deeds, and approach God with confidence, like a prince. In the concluding verses of Job's speech, Janssen hears an allusion to the story of Eden in Genesis chapter 2 to 3, to Adam's relationship to the land, presenting the intriguing possibility that Job is gathering together all of his former self-implications and denials and exculpations in terms of the paradigmatic curse of Genesis chapter 3 verses 17 to 19, And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. This, Janssen suggests, would help to explain why the chapter fittingly ends with these words, rather than with verses 35 to 37, as Gordis, Clines and others suggest that it should. Furthermore, in the statement that ends the chapter, the words of Job are ended or completed, Janssen also notes a possible allusion back to the description of Job's character as that of a complete or blameless man, as he was first introduced to us in chapter 1 verse 1, the words are related.

A question to consider, on a number of occasions in the Psalms and here in the book of Job, individuals appeal to the Lord insisting upon their righteousness and claiming that they are not guilty of sin. How are such declarations possible for fallen human beings to make? Can we make such declarations? In Job chapter 32 the character of Elihu appears out of nowhere and then disappears once he has finished speaking at the end of chapter 37. Some commentators argue for this reason that he was a later addition to the book.

His material is weaker, they claim, and if his speech has dropped out, we would have no idea that he was there at all. He is mentioned in neither the prologue nor the epilogue, nor in the speeches of any of the other speaking characters. Indeed, many have argued that his material is a later addition to the book.

The voice of some later writer is intruding into the text to reassert some sort of orthodoxy. Troubled by the arguments of Job and the failure of the arguments of the friends, they want to insert a different position. David Clines, although he significantly reorders the material of Elihu's speeches, placing them earlier in the text before Job's

concluding speeches, argues against this assessment.

He disputes the claim that the material belonging to Elihu is of a lower literary quality. He questions that the supposed intrusion of Elihu's material dissipates the dramatic tension of the text. Indeed, it could well be argued that it increases it.

He also notes that if Elihu was added at a later point in the history of the text, the person who added him could also have added him within the prologue and the epilogue, so his absence from those parts doesn't really weigh strongly one way or another. Francis Anderson also argues that such arguments are not compelling. He writes, they misunderstand the role of Elihu as a protagonist rather than as an adjudicator.

He is the first of two who record their impressions of what has been said in chapters 3 to 31. Elihu gives the human estimate. Yahweh gives the divine appraisal.

There is no need for the Lord to comment also on Elihu's summing up. His silence on this point is no more a problem than the absence of any final showdown with the Satan at the end. Beyond his place in the structure of the book as a whole, the character of Elihu is one that has divided commentators.

Most commentators see him as a pompous character, an opinionated young man who has overinflated views of his own importance. John Hartley follows others in referring to him as comic relief to break the tension. Gerald Janssen argues that his position is undermined by virtue of style, framing and content.

His voice is subverted because God speaks over his head and gives a different assessment of the situation. He is ignored in the epilogue. He repeats many of the Friends' claims.

He is verbose and his speeches have a lower literary quality. His account of Job's situation can also be falsified. Some, however, do have more favourable readings of the character of Elihu.

Clines observes the way that, of all the people who speak, he is the one who is most sympathetic and generous towards Job. He really does acknowledge some legitimacy to Job's positions. Eric Robinson makes a far stronger argument in this direction.

He writes, who brings with him a ransom for the one who is about to descend to the pit. He speaks wisdom that prepares the sufferer to be in God's presence, eventually leading to full restoration. Robinson argues that after the cycle of speeches break down and the Friends are silenced by Job, the conversation has ended at an unsatisfactory point and the voice of Elihu is that of a mediator who will take up and move forward the broken down conversation, moving us to the point where God himself speaks into it.

There is a drawn out introduction to Elihu in his speech in verses 1 to 5, although the last

speech of the Friends was back in chapter 25 with Bildad. Verse 1 mentions that the three men cease to answer Job. Elihu is introduced to us with his patronym, his people and his family.

Elihu, Buz and Ram are all names that we find elsewhere in scripture used of different people. Elihu is a name that we see of Hebrews in places like 1 Samuel 1. In Genesis 22.21, Buz is the name of a nephew of Abraham. In Jeremiah 25.23, we also see the name Buz, in that context associated with people of Edom.

The giving of these various names alongside those of Elihu maybe suggests that although he was a young man, he had pedigree and status within the society on account of his family. Elihu's response to the whole situation is one of anger. He burns with anger.

He burns with anger at Job. He burns with anger at Job's friends. Once again, for a fourth time, we are told that he burned with anger at the situation in verse 5. Norman Harbell argues that anger is the defining characteristic of Elihu.

He's a hot-headed young man. He sees a possible indication of this in Elihu's threefold use of an idiomatic Hebrew expression of self-assertion in verses 10 and 17. He writes, Elihu is not happy with the unresolved character of the situation.

Job has seemingly been playing a zero-sum game between himself and God. One of the two has to be in the right and since Job is insisting upon his integrity, God must therefore be in the wrong. There is the possibility, as we will see in later parts of Elihu's speech, that he wants to present both God and Job as being in the right, at least in the case of Job in the principal matter.

The introduction of Elihu at this point opens our eyes to the fact that there was an audience to the earlier speeches. Job's dialogues with his friends occurred in the presence of at least one other person and probably a larger community. Once again, we should recall that Job's crisis was the whole community's crisis.

Job was one of the chief men of the East and most of the people around him would have been led by him and dependent upon him in various ways. When Job and his household are struck so catastrophically and signally, it is a crisis for the entire community. A great many people will have lost wives and husbands.

As Job's wealth was taken from him, all the people that depended upon him would also have been struck. In submission to the social etiquette and the customs of the culture, Elihu has not spoken to this point as he is the youngest of the company. But by this point he is burning, he needs to speak.

Everyone else has been struck down and so he enters the fray. His speech begins with a lot of throat clearing. Indeed, we don't actually get to the substance until the next

chapter.

Ascertaining whether this is pomposity or hesitancy on the part of a youth is nowhere near as straightforward as many commentators presume it to be. He begins by explaining why he has not spoken to this point. He has been respectful of seniority.

Wisdom is associated with age and so those who are older should be especially listened to. However, he pushes back against the association of wisdom with the aged at this point. The source of wisdom is the spirit of man, the breath of God within him, the gift we might say of the Holy Spirit.

His statement in verse 9 is probably not as categorical as it is rendered within the ESV. Anderson suggests we should read it as, not many old people are wise. The aged don't always have wisdom and on the other hand they don't have a corner upon wisdom.

There are young people with the spirit of God in them who can nonetheless speak with wisdom above their elders. We might think of characters like Joseph or Daniel or maybe the boy Jesus speaking in the temple. Elihu has done what he ought to have done as a respectful young man.

He has heard out his elders, he has listened to, he has paid attention to, he has weighed and he has considered their arguments and now he is going to speak. The friends he sees have laid down their cases, they have left God to deal with Job. However they had not effectively answered Job.

Job had been speaking to them and addressing their concerns and criticisms. But these don't scratch where Elihu itches. He has his own set of arguments and believes that he can make a case himself.

Job has not effectively answered his position yet and so his speaking at this point would not just be repetitious. He turns to Job in verse 15 and describes the state of the friends. They have been silenced, they have nothing more to say.

However it is time for Elihu to speak his part. He is bursting to speak like a fresh wineskin filled with new wine. His belly full of words is about to burst open.

Harville sees Elihu's self-description at this point as exposing his true character. He writes, Earlier Eliphaz had said in a snide remark to Job, and bloat his belly with an east wind. Chapter 15 verse 2 The prophet with wry humour has Elihu describe his condition in precisely these terms.

Elihu declares that he plans to answer with the dictates of his own mind or knowledge because he is bloated with arguments and has a belly bursting with wind. Verses 17 to 18 Unwittingly Elihu characterises himself as a windbag and a constipated fool by appropriating the sarcastic language chosen by Eliphaz to taunt Job. David Clines

however is one who questions this reading.

Elihu concludes his description of his qualification to speak by asserting that he is without partiality. He will try and be even handed, acknowledging with a fair mind what is true and false in the arguments of all the various participants in the conversation. A question to consider.

At this point in the text, what arguments do you find most persuasive for determining the character of Elihu? The character of Elihu introduced to us in Job chapter 32 continues his opening speech in chapter 33. Finally, after all of his throat clearing, he gets to speaking to Job. In contrast to the three friends, Elihu quotes from Job's speeches at various points.

Verses 1 to 11 and 31 to 33 correspond quite closely with elements of chapter 13 verses 17 to 28 and Job's appeal for a divine hearing. Although we were told that he was burning with anger at the beginning of chapter 32, Elihu adopts a more sympathetic tone towards Job and presents him with a way by which he might be restored. The sort of tone that he adopts is not something that we have really heard since chapter 4 and 5 and the first speech of Eliphaz.

As in the preceding chapter, the manner of Elihu's address to Job has led to commentators referring to him as pompous and patronising. Once again, however, this may be unfair on him. He may be more hesitant than patronising.

He claims to speak from an upright heart and from the wisdom given by the spirit of the Lord that dwells within. Even though many commentators see him as patronising, this is not something that he is claiming for himself. He presents himself as standing on the same level ground as Job himself.

I am toward God as you are. I too was pinched off from a piece of clay. He tries to assure Job that he is not meaning to be hard upon him.

His speeches don't contain the sort of harsh rebukes and castigations that we see from the previous speeches of the Friends. He represents Job's own position, drawing upon Job's words. For instance, in chapter 9 verse 21 Job had said, I am blameless, I regard not myself, I loathe my life.

He picks up that language. He also picks up language from chapter 10 verses 5 to 7. Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a man's years, that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty, and there is none to deliver out of your hand? However, the most pronounced parallels are to be found with chapter 13 verses 17 to 28. For instance, verse 24 of that chapter, why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? That's picked up in verse 10 here.

Behold he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy. And verse 11 picks

up verse 27 of chapter 13. You put my feet in the stocks, and watch all my paths.

You set a limit for the soles of my feet. Elihu's objection to Job's position seems to be that he's playing a zero-sum game with God. By the manner of his insistence that he is in the right, he is putting blame at God's door.

In contending with God, he's engaging in a futile endeavor. Job has also made a claim that Elihu wants to dispute. He will answer none of man's words.

God does speak, Elihu insists. He speaks in a number of different ways. Human beings may not perceive or understand what God is saying, but he speaks nonetheless.

He gives examples of dreams, visions of the night, deep sleep, and slumber in the bed. Dreams we might think of the dreams that are given to various kings in scripture, to Nebuchadnezzar, to Pharaoh, or to Abimelech in chapter 20 of Genesis. In Daniel chapter 7, he speaks of visions of the night.

The deep sleep falling upon man might remind us of chapter 15 of Genesis, and the vision of the fire passing between the divided parts of the animals in that chapter. A vision that Abraham received while placed into a deep sleep. Elihu offers a different way of seeing some of these things.

God speaks to man not merely to rebuke or to punish, but also to correct and to educate. This is, at the very least, an improvement upon what was offered by the three friends. God can also communicate to human beings, if they all listen to him, through suffering and pain.

Elihu presents the hypothetical case of an upright sufferer in verses 19 to 28. Norman Harvel summarizes the elements of this. A. Severe illness is a trial taking place within the sufferer.

B. Acute consciousness of death is a threatening presence. C. Intervention of a personal angel as advocate before God, pleading an appropriate ransom for the sufferer. D. Restoration of the sufferer to physical health.

E. Cultic manifestation of the divine presence, and consequent restoration of the sufferer to righteousness. F. Confession of sin and praise for redemption from death. As Harvel notes, we see several elements of this pattern on various occasions within the Psalms.

The reference to an angelic mediator might call our mind back to Job's wish for a redeemer. I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. In chapter 19 verse 25, Eliphaz had denied the possibility of such a one interceding on Job's behalf.

In chapter 5 verse 1, Call now, is there anyone who will answer you? To which of the holy

ones will you turn? The angel, a sort of attorney for the defense, calls for the sufferer to be delivered, and then also to be restored. Let his flesh become fresh with youth. Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor.

The angelic mediator seems to make some appeal on the basis of the righteousness of the sufferer. Although the righteous sufferer is not seen to be perfect and without fault, his life is regarded as having a general tenor of righteousness. On his restoration, he praises God and repents of his sins.

The suffering, in Elihu's understanding, does not relate to the sins so much as a direct punishment for a fault, but as something to educate Job towards the position of repentance. Job having been restored and having learnt from the experience, the suffering will have served its purpose. In verse 32, we find an element that might be surprising.

Having spoken of the way that God restores and brings people back, Elihu expresses his own intentions in his speech. I desire to justify you. Elihu is not intending to crush Job.

He never intends to prove Job to be some sort of notorious sinner. He holds that Job is fundamentally righteous, but he wants to prove that Job is righteous without playing a zero-sum game concerning God's righteousness. God is perfectly and spotlessly righteous.

Job is not righteous in that same way. But while not completely perfect, Job is righteous nonetheless. Elihu's position is not that of Eliphaz.

A question to consider, what are some of the insights that Elihu has into suffering that move his position beyond that of the three friends? In Job chapter 34, we come to Elihu's second speech. David Clines argues that it splits into two halves. The first half, in verses 2-15, addresses the friends of Job, and the second half, in verses 16-37, addresses Job himself.

Clines sees evidence for this in the second person singular address of verses 16-33. Eric Robinson, however, claims that it is addressed to the friends. Once again, on the way that we decide this matter, and on whether we see larger sections of Elihu's words here as remixed quotations from either the friends or Job, potentially hang a number of other larger issues of interpretation.

Robinson's understanding of the addressees of this passage, along with his belief that a number of passages here are quoting the friends, is a position that might be needed to sustain his positive portrayal of the character of Elihu. Clines, however, while regarding Elihu as much more critical of Job than someone like Robinson does, nonetheless qualifies his account much more than most commentators, for whom Elihu is often viewed as pompous, arrogant, and a bit of a buffoon. Clines writes, Despite occasional



appearances, especially verse 8, Elihu does not condemn Job for any deed, nor for anything Job may have said before his troubles came upon him.

In this speech, Elihu is concerned solely with Job's reaction to his suffering, and the allegations he is making against God. He wants, of course, to affirm that the world is governed according to the principle of retributive justice, verse 11, and that must mean that Job deserves what is happening to him. But explaining why Job is suffering is not Elihu's main point here, for his focus is on the infamy of Job's complaints against God.

Elihu opens by addressing the friends, summoning them to a collective act of judgement, to test the words of Job and to see whether they are in fact righteous and true. Elihu restates Job's own position in verses 5 and 6, and then again in verse 9. Job insists that God has not acted justly towards him, he has not given him his due. Job is a righteous man, yet treated by God as if he were a notorious sinner.

He still hasn't given up on his insistence on his righteousness. He hasn't admitted the guilt that others have been imputing to him. Between his quotations from Job, Elihu gives a characterization of Job.

What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing-like water, who travels in company with evildoers and walks with wicked men? Elihu here seems to be referring to Job's statements that he had made, throwing God's justice and judgement into question. Whether or not Job himself is an evildoer, he definitely has questionable travelling companions on the route that he has chosen. In chapter 15 verses 15 and 16, Eliphaz had characterized human beings as follows.

Elihu is clearly quite troubled by this. It is one thing for Job to bewail his condition. It's another thing for him to impugn God's honor and his righteousness.

In verse 9, Elihu presents Job as striking at the very base of true religion. He characterizes Job as saying, Job has indeed said some things that are similar to this. For instance, in chapter 21 verse 15, However, that was a characterization of the opinion of the wicked, and Job presumably distances himself from that.

Job's own words in chapter 9 verse 22 were, Elihu's concern in the verses that follow is to defend God from the apparent claim of his unrighteousness, or at least of his omission of justice in the case of Job. God, Elihu highlights, is the one who is the creator and sustainer of all things. He's the almighty, he's the judge of the whole earth.

He providentially rules and upholds all things by his power. Elihu wants Job to reflect upon what it might mean to claim that such a God is lacking in justice or failing in his duty. This would be a radical claim of an even more than cosmic scale.

It would throw everything into uncertainty and disarray. We might hear something similar to Abraham's statement to the Lord in chapter 18 verse 25 of Genesis, Elihu goes

on to argue this case further. By its very definition, to govern is to execute justice.

To imagine an unjust God at the helm of the universe is a radical thought, a thought which Job has probably not followed through. Besides, the impartiality of God in the ruling of the affairs of man can clearly be seen. He shows no partiality, he's not in any particular camp's pocket.

He brings down one prince and raises up another. He does not treat either the rich or the poor with a special preference. He is equipped to judge as the one who is omniscient.

He sees and knows all things about his creation. No creature can hide from his sight. The friends in Elihu may be investigating the case of Job.

God does not have to investigate in that way, he already knows. He overturns unfaithful kings and puts others in their place. He cannot be controlled or summoned by any human being.

He is above human power and demands, even of the richest and most powerful. He owes man no explanation for his ruling in human affairs. He has his reasons and purposes, but they may be beyond human understanding.

He cannot be summoned to any human bar to give an explanation of himself. God Almighty, who sovereignly brings down kings in his power and authority, relates to Job's situation in a very particular way. Job, of course, is a ruler of his people.

Toby Sumter writes, Job's whole nation is at stake, so Elihu ties his second speech directly to kings. He says that people do not just go up to kings and correct them. On the other hand, God is not partial to men in authority either.

God can speak to those people and correct them, and he does not regard the rich more than the poor. They are all the work of his hands. Therefore Elihu says it is God's place to rebuke kings and nobles.

He does this providentially, when bad things happen to them, when calamities strike suddenly. Perhaps the implication of all of this is that since God has brought down Job, the matter has clearly been decided and settled. Eric Robinson reads this argument differently.

He writes, Elihu's argument is that God has put the governors of people in place as he has chosen. He removes those who no longer have a heart for him, and there is no evidence that Job is not a righteous judge. God knows what he is doing and will leave a person in place who will come to him at the proper time, and it is not a wise man's place to say when that time should be ended.

God is not obligated to punish or rebuke according to these wise men's ways. As

Lighthouse has pointed out, Elihu desires to justify Job. Chapter 33, verse 32.

Therefore their arguments against Job are moot on the basis that, 1. They have no evidence to charge Job with wrongdoing, since he is an impartial judge. Chapter 34, verses 17-19. And 2. God knows exactly what he is doing in Job to bring him inwardly to the proper position before God.

The concluding verses of this chapter are very difficult both to translate and to interpret. For instance, even after considering naughty questions of translation, we are still left to determine whether the concluding verses of the chapter are the words of Elihu or the words of the men of understanding and the wise man that he begins to quote in verse 34. Is Elihu identifying himself with these opinions, or is this something that he is just reporting to Job? Clines writes, for instance, Elihu would like to envisage himself as being truly on Job's side, but he is aware, so he says, of a groundswell of opinion against Job.

The view among thinking people is that, in his assaults on God, Job has taken up the position of the godless. Verse 36b. Getting himself deeper and deeper into sin by the tone of his speeches.

Verse 37. Others are saying that such a stubborn Job needs to suffer even greater trials. Verse 36a.

Elihu himself, so he professes, is not saying anything so harsh. He is encouraging Job to give up his recalcitrance and take the penitent's stool, but he cannot hide the fact that others are being far less sympathetic. A question to consider.

Where else in scripture do we encounter portraits of God's righteous providential rule over kings and empires? In Job chapter 35, Elihu gives his third speech, this time addressed to Job. Within this speech, he addresses two key questions that Job has raised. Francis Anderson summarises them as follows.

What is the use of doing good, and why doesn't God answer prayers, particularly the prayers of Job in his suffering? Both of these questions are held together by a concern for the principle of justice, which Elihu raises in verse 2. Do you think this to be just? Behind much of this speech, we can discern Elihu's deeper concern for theological matters. God's character should not be impugned, nor his justice. By suggesting that he has a right before God that God has not acknowledged, Job presumptuously seems to be placing God in the wrong.

That, as far as Elihu is concerned, is completely unjustified. Likewise, in his appeal, he has been putting God, as it were, in the dark, calling God to answer for his actions. Eric Robinson writes, In his second argument, Elihu addresses Job in what can be encapsulated with the idea that God will not be forced to give account for his actions to any person.

He is God, for goodness sake, and demanding he play the defendant in court is both unacceptable and ridiculous. Tremper Longman argues that what we see at this point is deficiencies not just in the theology of the Friends, and maybe Elihu as well, but also in Job. He writes, The reader knows this from the prologue to the story in chapters 1 and 2. However, Elihu is also correct in saying that Job thinks not only that he is right, but also that God is wrong.

After all, Job wants to pursue God in order to set him straight. Job himself operates with a strict idea of retribution theology. He believes that his suffering is unjust because he does not deserve it, and such a belief depends on the supposition that suffering results only from one's own sin.

While there is a measure of truth to Longman's claim, I believe that Job's position has more to be said for it. Job has not merely experienced suffering as such. He has experienced signal judgments, the pharaoh of God descending, catastrophic judgments occurring on a single day.

Both Job and the Friends are justified in seeing this as not just generic suffering. This is more than just suffering. This is the hand of the Lord.

And the question is, why is the hand of the Lord striking his faithful servant? God doesn't just seem to be permitting Job to experience some of the difficulties of life. He is coming against Job as an enemy. Job, the king of his people, is seemingly singled out by the Almighty as a guilty man, condemned to destruction.

This is more, then, than just a matter of suffering to be accounted for, and there is a reason why Job's complaint so focuses upon the theme of innocence. Much more is going on here than the question of why do bad things happen to good people. The real question is, why does God so signally strike his faithful servant? This is the sort of thing that should only happen if the servant is guilty.

But as Job rightly insists, he has done nothing to deserve such treatment. While he never disputes that he is afflicted by the same sinful frailty as humanity in general, he has made no catastrophic breach of covenant with God that would deserve such extreme treatment at his hands. The question that Elihu puts upon Job's lips here, what advantage have I, how am I better off than if I had sinned, is one that Job has placed on the mouths of the wicked in chapter 21, verse 15.

What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit do we get if we pray to him? It is, we should remember, also the matter of dispute between Satan and the Lord. In chapter 1, verses 9 to 11, then Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge round him and his house and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to

your face.

Is Job merely a mercenary in his religion, hoping to get some gain and profit for himself? In their differing ways, both Elihu and Satan raise this question. Anderson argues that in his response to this, Elihu argues himself into a corner. From impartiality, he claims, Elihu ends up with indifference.

God ends up not caring whether people are righteous or wicked. However, this may not be completely fair upon Elihu. Elihu wants to give Job a sense of God's transcendence, and the purpose of righteousness is one of the issues at stake here as well.

Is our righteousness a claim that we have upon God? Is it a matter of entitlement of the justice that is owed us? Elihu wants Job to recognise that God as the creator of all things is transcendent and above all of these matters. God cannot be rendered beholden to Job for his righteousness, as if God were in some way dependent upon him. No, the beneficiary of Job's righteousness is not so much Job himself as Job's neighbour.

Your wickedness concerns a man like yourself, and your righteousness a son of man. This may be making a more general claim about righteousness as well, even on the horizontal level. Righteousness is not about establishing our own entitlement, either from God or from our neighbour, but about serving and doing good to our neighbour.

This said, however, Elihu may be unfair upon Job again here, as we saw in Job's speech in chapter 29, Job was very much concerned to do justice for his neighbour. Job's righteousness and fear of the Lord did not seem to be motivated primarily by self-aggrandisement and service of his own interests, or by the desire to establish a claim upon God and others. The question of justice continues beneath the second question, which is why God doesn't answer the prayers of many who cry out to him.

The problem that Elihu identifies here is that many of those who cry out are unjust themselves. To deliver them from oppression would merely give new oppressors the chance to rise up. No, they ignore God, and so God ignores them.

They are appealing to God purely for their own self-interest, and they have seemingly no regard for God himself as the maker of all things and the giver of all good gifts. They are thankless, yet demanding. When God does not heed them in their ingratitude and sin, they think that they have been wronged by him.

Yet their own pride is the reason why they cannot be heard. Job is presenting God as if God were in the wrong, yet he is not considering his own posture towards God. Longman writes, A question to consider.

How might some of Elihu's criticisms of Job find their target? Are there ways that Job has been presumptuous and wrong in his claims about God? Job chapter 36 opens Elihu's fourth and final speech. He begins by asking for further patience from the hearer. To this

point, Elihu has been fairly long-winded in his statements.

The question of whether this is because of his pomposity, or whether it's a result of his hesitancy, is a matter that divides commentators. Most attribute it to his arrogance, but there's no reason why we must do so. David Clines is one commentator who cautions against jumping to conclusions in this matter.

Elihu presents himself as bearing some great truth. He's carried this knowledge, as it were, from afar, like an Argosy bearing great treasures from exotic lands. He wants to speak on God's behalf and in God's defence.

He insists upon the truth and blamelessness of his words. These are carefully considered and accurate opinions, at least in his understanding. Within the retribution theologies of the Three Friends, there seem to be just two characters, the righteous and the wicked.

Elihu's theology, however, is a bit more sophisticated. In addition to the characters of the righteous and the wicked, he has the character of the righteous man who falls into sin. For him, judgement can serve a corrective purpose.

God is teaching and drawing him back. For instance, we might think about the story of David. After his sin concerning Uriah and Bathsheba, God's hand is heavy upon him.

Now, the purpose of God's judgement in that case is not finally to cut David off as a wicked man. It's, as a righteous man, to draw him back to himself, to teach him through suffering about the sinfulness of what he has done. While there is clearly a punitive and retributive element to God's judgement, God's purpose is to draw David back to himself, and so the restorative purpose of the judgement should not be missed.

Elihu seems to be developing a similar point here. His focus is upon kings. As we have seen before, Job is a ruler of his people.

Elihu had also spoken concerning kings in chapter 34. The king who is afflicted is being graciously treated by the Lord, given a warning so that he might return. But he is in a dangerous position.

If he is not careful, he might respond to the affliction by turning away from the Lord, rather than turning to him. In this way, the affliction is also a time of testing and proving. The king who does not respond appropriately to affliction ends up sharing the lot of the wicked.

However, the one who responds faithfully will be raised up again. Verse 11 One of the things to notice about Elihu's position here is that God's judgement of this kind is fundamentally a blessing. He judges not because he wants to finish the righteous man off, but because he wants to restore him to himself.

Elihu, of course, is not dealing with the case that Job is experiencing. Job is not a righteous man who has committed iniquity. Job is a righteous man who is suffering without having committed anything that would deserve such treatment.

His challenge is less that of repenting, than in trusting that God is good, even though all the appearances are that he has come against Job as his enemy. There are a number of occasions in scripture where to test his people. God comes against a faithful servant as an enemy.

And this can be a final test for a number of people. We might think of Abraham being told to sacrifice his son Isaac, or Jacob having to wrestle with God at the Ford of the Jabbok. The Lord seeks to kill Moses' uncircumcised son in Exodus chapter 4. And in the book of Job, God has come against his servant Job, the one who fears and honors him as an enemy.

The lesson that Job needs to learn is that of James chapter 5 verse 11. The message of Elihu, which again is slightly off target, is similar to that of Hebrews chapter 12 verses 5 to 11. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. While Elihu's message is off target, Job does need to learn to be a good son. He needs to learn to trust God as a gracious father, even when all the appearances seem otherwise.

While Job is currently suffering the lot of the wicked, Elihu wants him to be clear that this is not God's final word. This is rather a divine word calling for an appropriate response from Job. It is imperative that Job responds by turning to God, not by turning to iniquity.

By questioning the legitimacy and the justice of God's action in this, Job has taken a wrong turn. Rather, he should trust the hand of God and praise his maker. God is a good teacher and he knows what he is doing in Job's situation.

At the end of this chapter, which leads into chapter 37, which is the conclusion of Elihu's speech and his speeches more generally, and the speeches of all human beings within the book of Job, Elihu makes a case for creation itself as having some revelatory purpose. God reveals his wisdom and his intricate sovereignty and power within the great and mysterious processes of his creation. The water cycle is a means by which life is given to the land.

God establishes and governs this process. Likewise, he is the master of the thunder and the lightning. He directs it to wherever it should strike.

The way of God is mysterious and inscrutable, yet the creation itself gives us good reason to trust that it is wise and good. A question to consider, where else in scripture do we learn about God's gracious fatherly intent in his judgment of the righteous? With Job

chapter 37, Elihu's speech has come to an end, as do the speeches of all of Job's friends. Earlier, in chapter 36, Elihu had begun reflecting upon God's wonder in creation, the way that he displays his power and his wisdom in such things as the water cycle.

In several respects, this passage of Elihu's speech anticipates what the Lord will say when he appears in the chapters that follow. The direct challenge to Job, in which he peppers him with rhetorical questions, is Elihu's version of the speech that God gives to Job in chapters 38-41. However, perhaps this speech has a different sense coming from Elihu than it does when it comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Some commentators, as David Clines mentions, have noticed in the pattern of Elihu's images a progression through the seasons. In chapter 36 verse 26 to chapter 37 verse 5, we have the season of autumn. It's followed by winter in chapter 37 verses 6-10, or perhaps 13, followed then by spring, which some leave out in verses 11-13, and then by summer in verse 14 and that which follows.

The imagery used in Elihu's speeches, and also in the Lord's speeches that follow, join together some more poetic representations of cosmology, alongside more phenomenological accounts of the creation, and perhaps even some proto-scientific elements. As an example of the latter, we might think of chapter 36 verses 27-28, for he draws up the drops of water, they distill his mist in rain, which the skies pour down and drop on mankind abundantly. In chapter 38 we see similar meteorological phenomena described using different imagery.

In verses 25-27 and 37-38, who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, to satisfy the waste in desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass? Who can number the clouds by wisdom, or who can tilt the water-skins of the heavens, when the dust runs into a mass and the clods stick fast together? This chapter opens with Elihu interrupting his reflection to describe his own response to these phenomena. They provoke awe and trembling with him, and he has an immediate physical response. The power and might of the Lord displayed in his handiwork and creation, naturally and appropriately provoke fear and dread in his creatures.

The thunder and the lightning are great examples of this. God's power can be seen in the mighty storm. Elsewhere in scripture, the imagery of the storm is associated with actual or imagined theophanic events.

The appearance of the Lord at Sinai is a great example of this. We might also think of Psalm 18 verses 10-15. He rode on a cherub and flew, he came swiftly on the wings of the wind, he made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water.

Out of the brightness before him hailed stones and coals of fire, broke through his



clouds. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, Hail stones and coals of fire, and he sent out his arrows and scattered them, he flashed forth lightnings and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare.

At your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. In such things we can see the power and the might of the Lord. We can also perceive his wisdom in the governing of his creation.

However, although we perceive his majesty and his might, we lack the wisdom properly to understand what these things mean. Verse 7 is difficult to interpret. The ESV renders the key phrase, he seals up the hand of every man.

Literally, on the hand of every man he sets a seal. Various proposals for interpreting this expression have been advanced. With commentators like John Hartley and Clines, I think it is best read as a reference to shutting people indoors.

By the storm and other inclement weather, God prevents people from going about their customary affairs. Likewise, in verse 8, supporting this reading, the beasts have to retreat to their lairs and dens when the terrible weather comes. God is the master of all meteorological affairs, of every season.

Thunder and lightning, ice, rain and snow all come from the Lord's hand. The clouds are described like messengers and servants of the Lord, sent to do his bidding. Elihu suggests the number of different reasons for which they might be sent in verse 13.

They can be sent for correction, as a form of cautionary judgment to restore people to the right way. An example of this can be seen in 1 Samuel 12 verses 18-19. So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.

And all the people said to Samuel, Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king. In that case, the thunder and the rain were a warning from the Lord to his people, to remind them of his power and of their disobedience. The second reason that Elihu gives is for the land.

God cares for the well-being of his land and its creatures. His rains may be given to restore the land, or to ensure its fruitfulness. And then, for love.

God's loyalty to his people is another reason for which he may give rain. In Israel, prayer for rain was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles. In contrast to the agricultural system of Egypt, which depended mostly upon the river, in Israel it was seasonal rains that were dependent upon for fruitfulness.

And drought, as there was through the judgment of Elijah, could be devastating. As he moves towards a conclusion, Elihu addresses Job directly. He wants Job to follow his example in reflecting upon the wonderful works of God in his creation.

Job, he stresses, does not know how or why God controls the creation as he does. God is perfect in knowledge, he has his reasons, but for Job they are beyond searching out. Job cannot even control the heat of his own garments in the summer, let alone the actions of all of the elements.

As the great creator, the Lord established the firmament. Poetically described in verse 18 as like a hard cast metal mirror, by his manner of address to the Lord, Job had been speaking presumptuously, as if he was possessed of some greater knowledge that humanity in general lacks on account of their creatureliness. What makes Job think that he can speak to the Lord as if to inform God of something that God did not already know? When the clouds clear and the sun is shining in its full radiance, it is too dazzling to behold.

Verse 22 may refer to the way that the sun shines in the north of the heavens, an image of the awe-inspiring glory of the Lord. Others see here a theophanic image. God is coming from Mount Zaphon, the mountain of the north associated with deity in Canaanite myth.

This reading is far from persuasive to many commentators, however. Seeing the wondrous power of the Lord in creation, and his wisdom in governing all of its meteorological forces, should chasten anyone trying to render God scrutable to figure him out. However, we can be certain that he will not violate justice and righteousness.

We may not see how, but we should be able to trust him with these things. The proper response of humanity to their creator is fear, awe and dread of the one who has the majesty and power of all the creation at his disposal, and indeed so far transcends them. Such a God looks upon the humble, but he pays no attention to those who are proud and lifted up in their hearts, who presume to call upon the Lord to give an account of himself, as Job has done.

A question to consider, why are the meteorological elements that Elihu singles out, fitting images for God's power and rule in creation more generally? In Job chapter 38, for the first time since the prologue, the voice of the Lord is directly heard. We might recognise some of the connections between chapter 38 and the preceding two chapters, where Elihu challenges Job, sometimes in similar terms. In chapter 37, Elihu had discussed things like the Lord's power in meteorological forces and the storm, and now in chapter 38, the Lord comes and the world went.

The Lord's stormy advent on the scene might remind us of other appearances of the Lord in scripture, in places like 1 Kings chapter 19, where the Lord appeared to Elijah at

Mount Horeb, or we might think of the Lord's appearance to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The questions that the Lord asks Job here are also similar to ones that we see elsewhere in scripture. We might think of passages such as Isaiah chapter 40, verses 12 to 26.

Statements from those verses include things like, Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who has measured the spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Later on, do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in. From the Lord's rhetorical questions to Job, a cosmological vision, and a portrayal of the Lord's creative power and wisdom can be derived. The Lord's statements here should also be read over against such things as Job's own ironic doxological statement in places like chapter 12, verses 13-25.

He leads priests away stripped, and overthrows the mighty. He deprives of speech those who are trusted, and takes away the discernment of elders. He pours contempt on princes, and loosens the belt of the strong.

He uncovers the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light. He makes nations great, and he destroys them. He enlarges nations, and leads them away.

He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth, and makes them wander in a trackless waste. They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man. Discerning the tone and the purpose of the Lord's speeches is not easy.

David Clines raises the interesting question of the tone of the Lord. Is the Lord being bullying? Is he intimidating, patronizing, or is he being playful with Job? Does the Lord, as it were, have a twinkle in his eye, or is he sternly rebuking Job? Clines, weighing up the different options, argues that the Lord's tone is indeed severe and not at all gracious, yet not offensive and by no means cruel. The intended message and the intended purpose of the Lord's speech is also something that divides commentators.

How are we to make sense of it? We should probably begin by thinking about some of the elements or details that orient or limit our interpretations. Reading the Lord's speeches in a way that just affirms the position of the Friends is untenable. The Friends are later declared to be incorrect in their assessment of Job, and Job is vindicated.

On the other hand, Job is challenged. The Lord speaks to him, and there certainly seems

to be a corrective tone here. A further thing to note is that in the Lord's challenge to Job, the focus is upon Job's words, upon what happens in the discourses, not upon something that Job did prior to the disasters falling upon him.

This contrasts with the Three Friends, though perhaps not with Elihu. We should also be alert to the use of irony, which can complicate the apparent meaning of the Lord's words. Gerald Janssen, for instance, makes a lot of this in his interpretation of the book.

We should also consider not merely what the Lord is saying, but what he is seeking to accomplish by what he is saying. Why does the Lord speak at this point? Why doesn't he just retain his silence? In answering that question, we should not forget the concerns of the prologue that the Lord expresses, and the concerns of the dialogues that Job expresses. In the prologue, the Lord set up Job as a champion, presenting him against the charges of Satan.

And in the dialogues, Job was concerned to have an audience with the Lord. He wanted to appeal against the injustice with which he perceived the Lord had treated him, and he wanted to be vindicated by the Lord. While he does get the vindication in chapter 42, the confrontation with the Lord does not go as he expects.

He is not the one confronting the Lord, the Lord is the one confronting him. When reading the book of Job, we should always have in the forefront of our mind that these speeches are not occurring in some airless theological space, where everyone is just dispassionately discussing the Lord's justice, and the relationship between that and evil in creation. No, there are vital interests at play.

The Lord is concerned to disprove the statements of Satan, and to show that his servant Job, in whom he delights, does not just serve him for mercenary purposes. Job is devastated by being seemingly cut off and abandoned, and indeed condemned by God, and desperately wants to be vindicated. He has lost his authority and his rule within the society, and his counsellors and the society around him have now gathered against him and are treating him as a scapegoat, calling for him, an innocent man, to confess his fault.

He wants to challenge God's apparent injustice, and for God to intervene in his situation and vindicate him. The Friends, for their part, are in various ways insisting upon the traditional school teaching of retributive justice, but we might also discern some political motivations at play. They are the political vultures circling.

As the king is losing his authority, they likely envisage rich pickings if Job's downfall is complete. And some progress seems to be made in the book. Job does not end up in exactly the same position as he was at the beginning.

He seems to have been matured and blessed through the experience. As we read in

James 5, verse 11, Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

In James' reading of the book of Job, the Lord has a purpose through all of Job's sufferings, not just to prove his point against Satan, but a compassionate and a merciful purpose towards Job himself. He wants Job, having gone through the experience, to be more than he was than when he began it. Toby Sumter emphasises these themes in his commentary, drawing attention to the sacrificial elements, particularly in the prologue.

Job is being set up as a sacrifice, and through this sacrificial experience, he will be raised up to a new level. He is maturing into a new form of sonship. Gerald Janssen makes a similar point.

The questions, as from another burning bush, have to do with the issue of Job's willingness to enter upon human vocation to royal rule in the image of God. When the implications of that image are intimated in terms of innocent suffering. Like a later description of a son in the book of Hebrews, Job learns obedience through the things that he suffers, not as punishment, not even as correction, but as a means of learning steadfastness and endurance in faith.

The fact that God answers Job then should be considered seriously. God could easily have just ignored Job. If God's purpose was merely to dismiss Job, then he needn't have said anything at all.

The fact that God speaks to Job, even in this challenging way, suggests that he wants to communicate with Job, for Job to learn something, and by the lesson that he learns, for Job to grow. Let us not forget that the Lord delights in Job. Despite the force of the Lord's challenge to Job in these chapters, the Lord's fundamental favour to Job should not be forgotten.

Chapter 38 contains a number of extended rhetorical questions to Job, presenting in succession different realms of the creation. It begins with a question about the foundation of the earth. The Lord describes the creation as if it were a house or an edifice that he had constructed.

It has a foundation that's laid, its measurements are determined, a line is stretched out upon it, its bases are sunk, its cornerstone is laid, and there is a public celebration for its establishment by the sons of God, the angels in heaven. The varied terms here give a sense of the many forms of competence that the Lord has in creation. He acts in mannerful, purposeful and wise ways to establish and maintain the world that he has created.

Job has, throughout this book, been trying to get to the bottom of things, but yet he was

not there when the Lord laid the foundations of the earth. He cannot, by his very nature as a creature, get to the bottom of things. He doesn't know what underlies it all.

Job is here being reminded of how much the creation is hidden to him. He cannot, by its very nature and his very nature, comprehend it. In verse 8 we move from the earth to the sea.

The sea is an important image. The sea is connected with the primeval deep. The sea is an untamed, threatening realm.

It's a realm in mythology associated with hostile forces to the order of the world, a chaotic realm, always threatening to overflow the land and to undermine its order. The Lord describes the sea as if it were a boisterous infant. It has burst forth from the womb, and the Lord has wrapped it in the veil of clouds and with the swaddling bands of the darkness.

The storm clouds and the darkness that veil things and are threatening elements to man are things that the Lord has placed upon the sea like clothing upon a beloved child. And there's something of the ambivalence of the sea expressed in these verses. As Jansen observes, The sea is both restrained and sustained.

It's treated like an infant, but it's also bounded. It's prevented from going beyond its limits. The Lord prescribes limits for it and sets bars and doors.

He observes the parallels between the sea and the limits that the Lord placed upon Satan in the narrative of the prologue. The attentive reader needs to recognize that chaos has a place in God's world, but it's a bounded one. The sea has a place in the picture, but that place is limited by the Lord, who is the master of the sea.

There is a lesson here for Job concerning his own sufferings. The world of God's creation is a place of both darkness and light. And in verses 12-15, the Lord asks Job concerning the dawn.

Does Job have the power over the morning and the dawn? When the Lord brings light, he dispels the darkness. And here the advent of the morning is connected with the dispelling of the darkness or wickedness. Tremper Longman writes of some of these verses, The description of the morning light hitting the earth is powerfully subtle in verses 13-14.

First, the light is seen as enveloping the earth so that it grabs the horizon. Evil is often done in the cover of night, so the coming light is seen as shaking wicked people out of the earth, like a cloth is shaken to get rid of dust. Verse 14 provides a second image.

A seal is pressed on flat and undescrpt clay to produce meaningful impressions on the clay. In darkness, the earth looks flat and featureless. But the light reveals hills and

valleys.

Verse 14b is difficult, but may describe the same phenomenon of hills and valleys by comparing them to the folds of a garment. Again, it is important to notice the analogies between this and Job's experience. The Lord created both the darkness and the light.

And Job's recent experience has been one of deep darkness. Yet the existence of the night does not deny the fact that God is the God of the dawn. He is the God of both the light and the darkness.

He created them both. Such a God can have a purpose for the time of darkness, even if it is a time when the wicked prosper and the righteous seem to suffer. In verses 16 and 17, the Lord asks Job concerning the deep, the abyss, death and the realm of deep darkness.

Once again, these are realms of terrifying forces for man. Forces that overwhelm simplistic accounts of the universe. But yet they too are under God's control.

Likewise, the expanse, the dwelling of light and the dwelling of darkness, both of them have their place. The Lord knows them. Job does not.

Then there are the storehouses of the elements, of the snow and the hail. Arsenals of the great storms that God can send on the day of war. In verses 25 following, we might be reminded that mankind does not directly appear within the picture that the Lord is creating.

Man is being addressed in the person of Job. But much of what God describes occurs outside of man's vision. Perhaps the Lord is suggesting to Job that Job is not the centre of the universe.

The Lord has purposes for his creation that far exceed his human creation. He takes concern for the land where no man is found, for the uninhabited wilderness. And if Job would lift his eyes upwards, he will see the stars and the heavens that the Lord set there to rule.

Job, once again, can neither control nor understand these. In this challenge, Job is being put in his place as a creature. But he has not been denied a place as a creature.

The Lord, let us never forget, is speaking to him at this point. That alone is a truly remarkable thing for the creator of all these things to do to such a humble creature as a human being. The concluding verses of the chapter move from what we might term the inanimate creation, although within the Lord's portrayal many elements of it seem to be very much alive, to the animate creation of the animal kingdom.

The creatures focused upon in verses 39-41 are not creatures that are domesticated by

man. They are wild beasts and birds, the lions and the ravens. They are also animals that prey upon others.

As in Psalm 104, the Lord is involved in predatory processes. The Lord is the God of darkness, not just of light. The Lord is the God of the underworld, not just of the overworld.

The Lord is the God of the predators, not just the herbivores. The Lord is the God of the restless and fierce sea, not just the dry land. Of the destructive hailstorm, and not just the light rain shower.

Of the vast and desolate wilderness and desert, not just the habitable and well-watered land. All of this should teach Job and the reader that the Lord is involved and over seemingly chaotic and dark and dangerous and predatory forces. They have their place within the divine order.

But the divine order isn't chaotic, predatory and dark. The world is rich and variegated. It has apparently contrary forces and elements, but they have their proper place within the whole, all governed and controlled by a gracious and wise creator.

The presentation of the cosmos in this chapter has a lot more of a comprehensive character to it than for instance within Job's ironic doxology in chapter 12. Job's statements in chapter 12 presented the world as if the forces of chaos, darkness, predators and the deep had the upper hand and as if God was chiefly the God of them, not also the God of the dawning light that exposes the wicked in their deeds. Or the God of the rain that sustains human life in the land.

The God of this chapter is a God who delights in, who sustains and preserves his creation, even in its contrary and ambivalent elements. And although Job has been appealing for justice, justice seems to fall out of the picture here. Or rather we might say that justice is part of the picture, but it is not all the picture.

The Lord by presenting the creation in the way that he does, gives Job a way of thinking of justice as a part of the Lord's governing of creation. But not all that there is to say about it. A question to consider, what things might we learn by reading this passage alongside Genesis chapter 1? Job chapter 39 continues the Lord's speech to Job from the whirlwind.

Chapter 38, the first part of the speech, focused upon the cosmos, the meteorological elements and began to speak of the animal kingdom at the very end. Chapter 39 continues this panoramic vision of the creation, especially focusing upon the animal kingdom. The Lord grants Job a different perspective upon the creation.

By his questions he offers Job a sense of how he looks at his creation. And in the process he shakes Job out of his narrow anthropocentric perspective. What might look like



arbitrary divine power to Job in the middle of his sufferings, appears very differently when he steps back from the immediacy of his human situation.

Job's vision of creation, which had naturally focused upon and been ordered around his limited human vantage point, is answered by a divine vision of creation, where human beings are virtually entirely absent from the picture and the cosmos is instead a place of immense and powerful celestial bodies, wastes and wiles, untamed and proud beasts, boisterous meteorological forces, and the dreadful deep and underworld, the engulfing primordial darkness, and all of these things operating under the rule of a gracious creator who both sustains and bounds them. These forces and creatures and realities, threatening and indeed hostile to man on occasions, are nonetheless part of God's good creation, graciously given their place within the whole by the Lord. Robert Alter sheds light upon the way that the Lord's speech to Job from the whirlwind revisits and reconsiders some of the imagery and examples that appeared earlier in the dialogues, and that we need to read the two alongside each other.

For instance, in Job 4, verses 10-11, Eliphaz describes the lions as predators and images of oppressors and wicked people. However, when the Lord speaks about the lions, he presents them in a strikingly different light. In chapter 38, verses 39-40, can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket? The lion's hunting is supported and aided by the Lord, and it is the means graciously ordained by God for them to sustain themselves and their cubs.

In Psalm 104, the Great Creation Psalm, we have a similar expression in verses 21-22. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens.

Predation, which Job might regard as a force merely of death and chaos, is, in God's economy of creation, also a force of life. The Lord's speech is full of images of animals caring for their young. Such images in *The Mountain Goat* and *The Eagle* bookend this chapter, and also, by strong implication throughout, these images afford us a way of thinking about how God himself relates to his creation.

Alter especially foregrounds the relationship between Job's anguished discussion of the creation and existence in chapter 3, where he cursed the day of his birth, and the Lord's portrayal of it in these chapters. He writes, Instead of the death wish, it affirms from line to line the splendor and vastness of life, beginning with a cluster of arresting images of the world's creation, and going on to God's sustaining of the world in the forces of nature and in the variety of the animal kingdom. Instead of a constant focusing inward toward darkness, this poem progresses through a grand sweeping movement that carries us over the length and breadth of the created world, from sea to sky, to the unimaginable recesses where snow and winds are stored, to the lonely wastes and craggy heights

where only the grass or the wildest of animals lives.

In Job's initial poem, various elements of the larger world were introduced only as reflectors or rhetorical tokens of his suffering. When the world is seen here through God's eyes, each item is evoked for its own sake, each existing thing having its own intrinsic and often strange beauty. In chapter 3, Job wanted to reduce time to nothing and contract space to the small dark compass of the locked womb.

God's poem, by contrast, moves through eons from creation to the inanimate forces of nature, to the teeming life on earth and spatially in a series of metonymic links, from the uninhabited wasteland, in verse 26, to the mountain habitat of the lion and the gazelle, the end of chapter 8 and the beginning of chapter 39, and the steps where the wild ass roams. Job then wants to return to the darkness of the womb and the tomb and to extinguish life in that place. The Lord's response is the inverse of this.

It's a bracing celebration of the manifoldness, the wonder and the goodness of life. What has been presented as images merely of death and chaos in Job's curse upon the day of his birth, appear in the Lord's response as elements of a vast vista of a glorious and good creation, each with their own part to play. If Alter is right, the Lord's speech sets itself up in responsive dialogue to Job's curse, through presenting its own portrayal of the creation in careful literary contrast to Job's.

For instance, chapter 3, verses 7 to 9, describes the night of Job's birth, wishing that all of its stars were extinguished. Behold, let that night be barren, let no joyful cry enter it, let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan. Let the stars of its dawn be dark, let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning, because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes.

In chapter 38, verses 4 to 7, the birth of the earth is described by the Lord, with the angelic stars themselves as a chorus of celebration. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know.

Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? The Lord's response to Job is full of images of birth, accenting its wonder, glory and mystery, answering to Job's tragic and annihilationist desire. Alter writes again, the poetics of suffering in chapter 3 seeks to contract the whole world to a point of extinction, and it generates a chain of images of enclosure and restriction. The poetics of providential vision in the speech from the storm conjures up horizon after expanding horizon, each populated with a new form of life.

In chapter 38, verse 8, the sea is an infant coming forth from a womb and being

swaddled by the clouds. The ice and the frost also come from their womb, in chapter 38, verse 29. Beasts and birds giving birth and providing for their young are throughout chapter 39.

Creaturally life is exuberant and overflowing. This is seen most especially in its divinely given power of procreation. As Robert Alter observes again, the Canaanite cosmogonic myths, their stories accounting for the origin of the universe, tended to focus upon the act of creation as victory over a sort of chaos monster, creation through battle.

While God's creative works are poetically depicted in such ways at points in scripture, what is notable is the way that such images are also subverted. In the Lord's response to Job, different motifs predominate. Rather than battle, creation is described in terms of procreation.

Alter again, what we are invited to imagine in this fashion is creation not as the laying low of a foe, but as the damming up and channeling of powers nevertheless allowed to remain active. The poet uses a rather unexpected verb, to hedge in, in order to characterize this activity of holding back the womb of the sea. And that is a double allusion to God's protective hedging round of Job mentioned in the frame story, and to Job's bitter complaint toward the end of his first poem of having been hedged in by God.

Images of warfare are also seen at several points in the Lord's speech. The war horse is a notable example. The creation is a realm of awe, dread, fear and wonder, and such responses to it are nowhere more elicited than when we see the might of the creation and its creatures exhibited in the full expression of their strength in battle or predation.

The hailstorm, reserved for the day of battle and war in chapter 38 verses 22 and 23, and the power of the war horse, snorting, shaking his mane, stamping, every muscle poised and waiting for the release of the command to charge, are images of the power and terror of the creation, and in the war horse, an image of how that can be mastered by someone for the cause of battle. The mighty elements are like the Lord's own war horses. The portrait of creation here is one in which God can set vast and mighty forces loose, but he never loses absolute control over them.

By great contrast, a human being like Job is incapable of mastering, truly understanding or controlling the dizzying array of forces and creatures enumerated by the Lord. The chapter begins with the mountain goats and their giving birth. Once again, the focus upon birth helps us to think of the creation as a place of burgeoning life, and also of tender provision.

There are also subtle plays off Job's initial speech to be found here. For instance, in verse 2, can you number the months that they fulfill, and do you know the time when they give birth? The numbering of the months was also mentioned in Job's initial speech. In chapter 3 verse 6, that night, let thick darkness seize it.

Let it not rejoice among the days of the year. Let it not come into the number of the months. Like the mountain goats, the wild donkeys live in wildernesses, in uninhabited regions where human beings do not dwell.

Men do not watch over them or see their comings and goings, but the Lord does. He knows their most hidden and secret ways. He has graciously provided their dwelling places for them.

The wild ox, like the wild donkey, will not serve man. He is a free and mighty beast, driven by his own will. The ostrich, which comes next in verses 13-18, is an interesting case.

She has an unusually careless attitude towards her young. God the Creator has made all of his creations gloriously different. In the process, the desire to reduce everything to a universal principle is thwarted.

God has given the ostrich speed to outrun its predators, but also to compensate for its stupidity. That stupidity also comes from God, and is part of his good purpose of creation. While David Kline's questions their legitimacy, many see in the figure of the ostrich a comparison with Job's own condition, being deprived by God of a degree of wisdom.

Some commentators have seen in verse 18's reference to the horse and his rider, a transition that moves us to the figure of the war horse in verses 19-25. The war horse is a majestic creature, seen in its full power in the context of battle. War horses fearlessly charging towards the enemy lines are a stirring sight.

The images of this chapter are not just images of power, tamed and untamed. There are many differences that the Lord highlights between the creatures that he portrays. He wants Job to recognise not just the untamed might of the creation, but also the variegated majesty of it.

The chapter ends with the hawks and the eagles, who soar in the heavens, a nest in inaccessible heights from where they espy their prey. These are birds of prey and carrion, but though associated with death, they too have a place within God's good order. The sucking up of blood and the eating of dead bodies is a means by which their young ones are given life.

In Book 12 of *The City of God*, St. Augustine speaks about the goodness of the transitory character of animal life. Although from a limited perspective it may seem to be a bad thing that animals die, in the larger scheme he sees it as a good thing. There is a fitting beauty to that which is transitory, to the seasons.

Even the terrible process of death can be subordinated and the servants of a good order of life. Things have to perish in order that new things can come into existence. He writes,

We are very properly enjoined to believe it, lest in the vanity of human rashness we presume to find any fault with the work of so great an artificer.

He goes on later, In this speech, the Lord is in many respects giving Job something of the perspective upon the whole that Job naturally lacks from the limited vantage point of his own suffering. Graciously granted such a vantage point, Job might begin to be better placed to understand his own sufferings. A question to consider.

In this chapter the Lord sends Job to consider the animals. When we read accounts of creation in scripture, in Genesis 1-2 for instance, or in the Great Creation Psalm of Psalm 104, animals are very prominent in the picture. Why did God create the animals? What can we as human beings learn from reflecting upon them? And what do we lose when they drop out of our vision of creation? In Job chapter 40, the Lord continues his challenge to Job from the whirlwind.

In the preceding two chapters, he had directed Job's attention to the creation and the various elements of the natural world, and then to the animals in chapter 39 especially. Within the Lord's portrait of the various realms and forces of the cosmos and various creatures that he had fashioned, Job's anthropocentric, or human-centered vision of the world was unsettled, and the Lord indicated the fact that there is a place within his creation for forces that are threatening or ambivalent. God created the terrifying abyss, not just the dry land.

He created Sheol and the darkness. He created the meteorological forces that give rise to the storm. He created the wild wastes, not just the habitable lands.

Likewise, he populated his creation with untamed, and in some cases untamable, creatures. Within this portrait of the creation, Job should start to see his own suffering in a different aspect. Job had rightly insisted upon the fact that he was innocent, but in the way that he had done so, he had impugned God's justice.

He had suggested that God had been unjust in the way that he had treated him. The Lord then addresses him here as a fault finder who has to make a case for himself. Earlier in the book, Job had wanted to put his case before the Lord and have the Lord answer him.

Now, however, Job himself is in the dark, and the Lord is cross-examining him. Job's initial response to the Lord's challenge is to refrain from speaking. This is less than the full act of repentance that we see later on, but Job is recognizing that he has overstepped the bounds.

Job, in the claims that he had made for himself, had been presumptuous, trying to backseat-drive the universe. Yet, as the Lord charges Job in verses 6-14, Job lacks the wisdom, the strength, the authority, and the justice to actually rule the universe. So why

has he undertaken to judge God for the way that he does it? It is very easy in ignorance to speak dogmatically about things that we simply do not understand.

Much as a very young child may not understand the various things that their parents are doing for them, yet ought to trust in their parents' goodness and wisdom, being confident in their good intentions towards them. So Job, like other human beings, needs to trust the Lord with the ruling of the universe, even if God is moving in mysterious ways and his purposes are difficult to understand. A childlike trust in God's character can go a long way to relieving the anxiety that can arise from the inscrutability of God's purposes within his hard providences.

It is at this juncture that the Lord brings forward two key figures onto the scene, Behemoth and Leviathan, over the history of the interpretation of the Book of Job. These figures have excited all sorts of speculation. There are naturalistic interpretations.

Behemoth is the hippopotamus and Leviathan is the crocodile. Like certain features of the creatures in chapter 39, they are exaggerated. Perhaps this is for poetic purposes, or perhaps it is because they have assumed exaggerated proportions through tall travellers' tales.

These are not creatures that Job would have had first-hand encounters with. They are exotic creatures from foreign countries. Mighty and powerful as the hippopotamus and crocodile may be, identifying these creatures as the hippopotamus and crocodile respectively does seem a little underwhelming.

They are depicted as something so much greater. Is the hippopotamus really the first of the works of God, or does he make his scrawny tail stiff like a cedar? Advocates of this naturalistic interpretation can see the tail as perhaps a reference to the penis. The tail being made stiff like a cedar is an image of the animal's virility.

Comparing his bones and limbs to bronze and iron within the naturalistic interpretation of this beast is entirely legitimate poetic license. Others doubting that these are to be identified with the hippopotamus or crocodile, even in the exaggerated ways that these might have been portrayed by travellers, suggest that maybe these are legendary beasts, creatures imagined to exist in some far-off land where dragons and mighty monsters dwelt. Leviathan, for instance, seems to be a fire-breathing dragon, the sort of creature that appears in legends all around the world.

More recently, young Earth creationists have argued that these creatures resemble nothing so much as dinosaurs. What other creature, for instance, has a tail like a cedar? Or is so appropriate to be brought forward by the Lord as an example of his most mighty creatures? While I've not encountered such a position within the commentaries, one could also imagine a hybrid naturalistic position. The Lord is describing a monstrous beast and a dragon of legend, but these things are grounded in actual creatures that he

created.

Even though they were extinct, human beings in their exploration of the Earth may have come across the bones of these great beasts, and the legends had been built up around them. Others see here a composite image of mighty land beasts, representing and mythologically embodying the beasts more generally. The behemoth is a symbol of something very real, the mysterious, terrible and awe-inspiring might of the beasts.

The behemoth's name is an intensive plural of the word for beast, much as the Hebrew word for God is an intensive plural. Naturalistic readings of the behemoth and leviathan, to my mind, leave quite a lot to be desired. Reading these figures as imaginary or symbolic has a long history.

We have references to such readings going back to the early church. The interpretation of behemoth that I've found most compelling is that given by Robert Feil. In his book, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You, Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, he argues that the figure of behemoth is to be associated with the character of Maat, a mythological deity associated with death, and likely referenced elsewhere in the Book of Job.

The god Set, who in Egyptian mythology was associated with the underworld, appeared on occasions as a red hippopotamus, which may explain in part some of the images that are drawn upon here. Feil also notes that Maat and Baal in the Canaanite stories are depicted as going about like wild oxen, and the eating of the grass like the ox may not just be a reference to eating, it may be a reference to devouring. This is a creature that consumes and devastates the grass.

If he is to be associated with death, then it makes more sense to speak of him as the first of the works of God, a great powerful creature that will be later set loose upon humanity and allowed to prey upon them after their fall. Feil translates verse 20 as follows, God, however, is the creator of all, and he is the master even of the monsters of chaos. The figure of behemoth, then, is, I believe, mythological, but very real.

It is an imaginative portrait of the monster of death within the world, a monster that can be seen in the face of nature itself and in many of its features. When we see an image of a great dinosaur, for instance, we see something of the face of death. It is not just a particular beast that we are seeing, it is an aspect of nature more generally.

In this poetic portrait by the Lord, Job is being introduced to this monster, that is a monster that God created and can tame and control. A question to consider, how might Job apply this teaching concerning the behemoth to his own experience? As in the interpretation of the figure of the behemoth in chapter 40 of Job, the interpreter of Job chapter 41 is faced with the question of what sort of creature is in view. Is it real, but poetically exaggerated? Many have regarded Leviathan as a crocodile.

Is it a legendary or cryptozoological creature, believed by Job and his contemporaries to be real? Is it a poetic description of a species of dinosaur? Perhaps it is a representation of an extinct species through the lens of legends of great monsters and dragons, developed surrounding discoveries of dinosaur fossils. Is it a supernatural creature, a symbolic or metaphysical creature? Is it a complex personification or some creature of ancient Near Eastern mythology? In treating Job chapter 40, I argued, largely following Robert Feil, that behemoth was a personified representation of the real power and existence of death in nature. The personification of death as behemoth or mart, within ancient Near Eastern society, would be a lot thicker than our personifications of death, as the figure of the Grim Reaper, for instance.

The depiction of behemoth drew upon elements of actual and legendary creatures and pagan mythology, as all of these things partially manifest the greater reality of the power of death in creation. The figure of the Leviathan, which is the centre of chapter 41, first appeared in Job's cursed lament of chapter 3, where he invoked the powers of chaos and decreation to extinguish his life before it first came to birth. In verse 8 of that chapter, Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.

In the context of chapter 3, the Leviathan was manifestly more than just another of the great sea or water creatures, like the crocodile or even the whale. It was a chaos monster of the deep. In Ugaritic literature of the Baal cycle, Lotan is a seven-headed serpentine dragon of the deep, defeated by Baal-Hadad.

In Job, Leviathan personifies the forces of chaos and evil. If behemoth is the personified power of death, his fitting counterpart is the personified force of chaos and evil in Leviathan. In considering the nature of Leviathan, we might relate it to the question of the character of the serpent in Genesis chapter 3, and the great dragon of Revelation chapter 12.

Is the serpent of Genesis chapter 3 merely a natural species of snake, or perhaps the ancestor of all later species? Almost certainly not, although its connection with actual snakes is essential to its characterization. In Genesis chapter 3, the serpent seems to be a physical and visual manifestation of a supernatural heavenly being, of Satan himself. Elsewhere, the serpent figure is manifested in actual snakes, in symbolic serpents, in the representation of tyrannical human powers, for instance.

It's also a metaphysical portrayal of the great satanic power behind and in them all, a figure that is even represented in the stars of the zodiac. In Revelation chapter 12 verse 9, the dragon is described as follows, and the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. In that chapter, the dragon is represented as engaging in actions in his dragon form.

Are we supposed to believe that somewhere an actual material and physical dragon did the things described in that chapter? No. But is the dragon real? Yes, absolutely. The



figure of the dragon corresponds to an immense and mighty hostile devilish power at work in reality.

The figure of the dragon helps us to recognize the existence of a single malicious purpose and agency behind all sorts of events. It characterizes that power as cunning, monstrous, devouring and destructive. It is a power that cannot be mastered or controlled by mankind.

It is immense and mighty. It represents something of the cruelty of nature itself, while also being strange and uncanny. Representation of such forces is one of the purposes of mythology.

It helps us to see things that are real, even if they aren't material. The presence of the great dragon at the end of Job should not surprise us in the least, for we encountered him in the form of Satan at the beginning of the book. If we were not supposed to see a manifestation of the figure of Satan in the Leviathan, the book would leave key elements of its plot somewhat unresolved.

The Lord's interactions with Satan were prominent in the prologue of Job in chapters 1 and 2, but Satan doesn't appear anywhere in the epilogue. However, if we recognize that Satan is to be seen in Leviathan, the dragon of the abyss, of whom the Lord speaks in his concluding address to Job, we begin to see where some of the remaining pieces of the puzzle fit. Through his discussion of the figure of Leviathan, the Lord is also giving Job some hint or indication of what lay behind his suffering.

In Behemoth and Leviathan, the forces that have terrified Job are being named. The figure of Rahab, related to the figure of Leviathan, also appeared earlier on in Job, in chapter 26. Fyde remarks upon the great similarities between chapter 26 and the Lord's challenges to Job in chapters 38-41.

As in these current chapters, chapter 26 depicts the creation in mythological terms. Verses 5-13 of that chapter read as follows. The dead tremble under the waters and their inhabitants.

Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering. He stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth on nothing. He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not split open under them.

He covers the face of the full moon, and spreads over it his cloud. He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astounded at his rebuke.

By his power he stilled the sea. By his understanding he shattered Rahab. By his wind the heavens were made fair.

His hand pierced the fleeing serpent. In chapter 26, Sheol and Abaddon personify the realm of death and the underworld. Rahab and the sea personify the terror of the deep, of chaos and of evil.

Rahab is like Leviathan, as the great dread monster of the sea, a supernatural agency that the Lord overcomes. Elsewhere in scripture Rahab is connected with tyrannical powers, like those of Egypt, helping the reader to recognize demonic power operating through and in them. Psalm 89 verses 9-10 More powerful still, Isaiah chapter 51 verses 9-10 He is like the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over.

Here imagery of the Lord's victory over the chaos monster, drawn from ancient Near Eastern mythology, is used to depict the Lord's victory over Pharaoh and his might in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The figure of Leviathan appears on several similar occasions in scripture, helping us to appreciate the mythological force of this dragon. In Psalm 74 verses 12-14 You divided the sea by your might, you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters, you crushed the heads of Leviathan, you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

Psalm 104, the great creation psalm, describes Leviathan in verses 24-26 There go the ships and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it. And then again one of the strongest references, in Isaiah chapter 27 verse 1 Leviathan then should not be understood as just another creature of zoology. He has never existed as that sort of entity.

Nevertheless, he is a real mythological creature. He is the dragon of revelation. He is the serpent of Genesis 3. He is the shadowy agency behind tyrants throughout the story of the scripture.

In this great poem, the Lord describes Leviathan as an untamable monster, who cannot be mastered by human beings. He cannot be bound, controlled or subdued. The forms of hunting that might work for a whale or a crocodile do not work on him.

He isn't just another creature in the sea. He dwells deep in the bowels of the metaphysical deep, the terrifying abyss that threatens to swallow things up. Yet despite describing Leviathan as a force that no human being can subdue, the Lord implies throughout that he can control and subdue the Leviathan.

Feil translates verses 9-12 in a way that brings the conflict between Satan and the Lord to the forefront, enabling us, through its arresting language, to see the futility of Satan's challenge to the Lord. Look now, there is no hope of your subduing him, even the mere sight of him is overwhelming. No one is fierce enough to arouse him, and who is there who can stand and face me? If anyone tries to outface me, I will pay him back.

Everything under the heavens is mine. I will silence his boasting, and his mighty words,

and his fine argument. In the description of Leviathan in the verses that follow, the reader might hear resemblances between the description of his coming and the language of divine theophany.

Against those who would think of Leviathan as a crocodile or a dinosaur, he is described as a fire-breathing dragon. In verses 18-21, it is the fiery breath of Leviathan that is his most notable feature. Like Leviathan, Satan is one whose destructive power is chiefly located in his mouth, in his false and vicious speech.

He is the father of lies, he sows discord. He is the accuser, the slanderer, and the destroyer. No weapon human beings have forged is of any use against him.

As Paul writes in Ephesians 6, verse 12, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The figure of the dragon has the power of death, and therefore holds people hostage through fear. Hebrews chapter 2, verses 14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

The devil has the power of death and fear, but he himself is fearless. He throws the deep into a tumult. Here we should think not just of the physical deep, but of the symbolic deep.

He brings up terrors from the abyss against us. He stirs up the seas of the nations against the people of God, in keeping with the language of a sort of demonic theophany. Even the angels quake before him in verse 25.

There is no way to master, overcome, or defeat Leviathan, this dread monster of the primordial deep. No weapon or power that human beings could devise would ever make us his match. And the Lord wants Job to recognize his powerlessness against this great monster.

Only God can overcome the Leviathan, and he will do just that. The Lord subdues all of Leviathan's evil might. Satan and his power are terrifying, but the Lord is utterly invulnerable to all of his evil raging.

As Farl observes, Luther's great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is Our God, echoes this chapter's depiction of Leviathan in his description of Satan. The ancient prince of hell has risen with purpose fell, Strong male of craft and power he weareth in this hour. On earth is not his fellow.

It is only with a more complex understanding of the great and terrible powers that operate within the fallen cosmos, that Job will begin to be equipped to understand what

has been happening in his experience. In the final description of the figure of Leviathan in this chapter, the terrible dragon of the abyssal deep is finally brought into the light and out of his shadow and darkness. As we finally reckon with his malignant agency, much else that has formerly been in shadow is illumined.

A question to consider, what might we learn from this chapter about the Lord's relationship with Leviathan? What are the important lessons that Job might have learned from that? Job chapter 42 is the final chapter of the book and the conclusion and resolution of the entire drama. The Lord had challenged Job in chapters 38 to 41, declaring his insufficiency for the task of just government and control of the creation that he had presumed to judge the Lord concerning. Job, although he had rightly maintained his own integrity against the friend's accusations, had wrongly charged the Lord with fault in the handling of his case.

And now after the Lord confronts him, he finally repents. He confesses the Lord's unrivaled sovereignty. In verse 3, he quotes a version of the Lord's opening charge to him at the beginning of the first speech in chapter 38 verse 2. Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Job responds to the quoted charge by a confession of his guilt in the matter.

He had spoken presumptuously of matters beyond his understanding, competence or station. As a result, he had obscured rather than illuminating the truth of God by his statements. In verse 4, Job quotes the second half of the Lord's introductory statement with which he opened his initial speech from chapter 38 verse 3. Job confesses that until this point he had been working chiefly with others teaching about God.

Now, however, the Lord has spoken directly to him and into his situation. His old theology, which was another species of retribution theology, not that far removed from that of the friend's, lies in tatters and he sees something of his former ignorance. His response is to repent in dust and ashes, an expression of humble mortality, which he employed earlier in chapter 30 verse 19.

Of what exactly is Job repenting? Job is soon going to be vindicated of the charges made against him by the friends. Job's sufferings did not come upon him on account of any sin on his part. However, Job had been in the wrong in his bitterness towards the Lord and in the charges that he had made against the Lord for injustice.

Job had not, contrary to Satan's insistence that he would, curse God to his face, but he had impugned the Lord's justice. He had failed to recognize that it was possible to insist on his own innocence while also insisting upon the Lord's justice. Faced with the Lord himself, he dropped his defiant claims and confessed the justice and goodness of the Lord and the illegitimacy of his earlier charges.

In confessing himself to be dust and ashes, Job resumes an appropriate creaturely

position before the Lord, expressing his creatureliness in an unrelenting way that anticipates his future mortal dissolution to the elements of his composition. He recognizes that the Lord alone is the ruler of all. This need not entail a shrinking back from appeal to the Lord for justice.

The only occasion outside of the book of Job where we encounter the expression dust and ashes is Genesis chapter 18 verse 27. In that chapter, Abraham is in the presence of the Lord interceding for Sodom. Abraham answered and said, Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

In this interaction, Abraham is both recognizing his creaturely limitation and speaking from that consciously acknowledged position to the judge of all of the earth, appealing to him as the free and sovereign God to manifest his justice in the handling of Sodom. The discourses that represent the main body of the text of Job have now come to an end and we return to the prose form of the prologue in the epilogue that corresponds to it. From addressing Job in his speech, the Lord turns to speak to the three friends, speaking to Eliphaz the Temanite as their representative.

Eliphaz was probably the oldest of the three friends and was also the one who led them as he had spoken first and at greatest length of the friends in each of the three cycles of speeches. No mention is made of Elihu. Lest we forget, Job's crisis was never merely one of private and personal suffering.

Job was a public figure, indeed he was a prominent leader or even king of his people and his sufferings concerned not merely the loss of his possessions and members of his household but also social opprobrium and scapegoating. He had desired more than relief of his suffering and restoration of his personal relationship with the Lord. He longed for public vindication sufficient to counteract the supposed condemnation that he had earlier suffered by means of the Lord's signal actions against him.

He had seemingly been marked out by the Lord's judgement as a wicked man. That sentence needs to be publicly reversed. The confrontation of the friends and the declaration that Job is in the right with the Lord to them is necessary to the resolution of the conflict.

Satan, the adversary and accuser, had wrongly charged Job in the heavenly court but his unwitting servants, the three friends, had served as the accusers of Job in the court of Job's own society on earth. They also had to be silenced for the Lord's victory over the false charges of the adversary to be accomplished. The friends are blamed for their failure to speak truthfully concerning the Lord.

Their dogmatic yet narrow retribution theology and their insistent yet unjust and often cruel accusations of Job mark them out as badly in the wrong. However, the Lord surprisingly contrasts them with Job himself who is said to have spoken of the Lord what

is right. Considering the fact that the Lord has just rebuked Job for his claims during the discourses this might not be what we would expect.

In what way has Job spoken truthfully about the Lord? Despite his insinuations of divine injustice, Job had addressed himself to the Lord. He had expressed elements of hope looking to the Lord to act into his situation and vindicate him. He had also just repented of his past faults.

In the final statements of his final speech to Job, Eliphaz had declared that Job, if he were to repent, an outcome in which Eliphaz probably had limited confidence, he would be restored and would indeed be able to act as an intercessor for others. Chapter 22, verses 26 to 30 For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you, and you will pay your vows.

You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways. For when they are humbled, you say, It is because of pride, but he saves the lowly. He delivers even the one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.

The irony is that Job does indeed get established as an intercessor on his restoration, but for Eliphaz and his friends. The fact that Abraham's self-description of himself as dust and ashes also occurs in the context of an act of intercession is perhaps worthy of further reflection. The way that the Lord deals with the friends is a departure from strict retribution.

He does not deal with them according to their folly, but shows them mercy on account of the prayers of Job. It is important to see in this, for instance, the freedom of the Lord's dealing with his creatures and their sin and folly. God's justice has a free and creative character to it that human justice lacks.

It is so much more than just an administration of a retributive code, even though it includes retribution as an element. As Gerald Janssen observes, the freedom of God's own grace and forgiveness offers the possibility of actions on the part of Job and his friends that restore and overcome the breaches between them, and open up the possibility of a future liberated from the evils that have befallen them and had occurred between them. Job must forgive and seek the good of his friends, much as the Lord had dealt graciously with him, and the friends, for their part, have to humble themselves before the Lord, and acknowledge their fault against Job and seek good through reconciliation with him.

In the creative liberty of God's action in the face of sin and folly, he can liberate us from the bondage of past sins and wrongs, whether committed by us or against us. We should also consider the contrast between the accusations of Satan against Job at the beginning of the book and Job's intercessions for his friends at the end. The friends are instructed

to offer sacrifices for their fault.

As James Bajan notes, that they are instructed to offer seven sacrifices of each kind may be a sign to Job, who had offered such sacrifices for his sons at the beginning of the story of the book. Perhaps God is giving Job a reassurance of the fact that his earlier sacrifices and prayers were also received by him and that his lost children will be reunited with him at the resurrection of the just for which he had so longed. The full restoration of Job occurs after Job heals the breach with his friends.

This restoration is again an act of God's gracious and good freedom, bringing about a fitting outcome, not a strict reward or retributive justice, giving Job his just desserts. Commenting on the possibility of an allusion to Exodus 22, verse 4 and the law demanding that double restitution of a stolen sheep be made, mentioned by Francis Anderson and others, Janssen argues that perhaps, rather than thinking of the action of God and Job in terms of the law, we ought to think of the law in terms of the action of God and Job. He suggests that rather than regarding the law as a formulaic retribution and a narrow demand, we might see it in terms of a felicitous enactment of freedom.

These final verses of the chapter alternate between divine action and human action within Job's restoration. The visiting of Job's kinsfolk and their gifts, in verse 11, overcome the social breach that had occurred between him and his relations and his society. It also grants him the comfort necessary for the grieving process to proceed.

The book of Job began with an enumeration of Job's family and then of his possessions. Job chapter 1, verses 2-3 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

It concludes, chiastically, with an enumeration of his possessions and then of his family. Now, however, the numbers of Job's livestock are doubled, both in their total number and for each type of animal. As it was in the opening prologue, the number seven is prominent in the epilogue.

The number of Job's sheep and camels in the prologue was seven thousand and three thousand, a seven to three ratio, which both adds up to the number ten and represents, in the single numbers, fullness and glory. We see a similar ratio in the number of Solomon's seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines in 1 Kings 11, verse 3, which, while not recorded in praise of Solomon, is an indication of the greatness and prominence that he had as a king by Near Eastern standards. The ratio here is the same as that of the prologue, but the number of the animals has doubled.

Job's sons and daughters are not doubled in their number, perhaps because his lost sons and daughters would be restored to him at the resurrection. This said, some have seen

in the unusual form of the Hebrew word used for the number of Job's sons in verse 13, a dual form of the number seven, suggesting to some that he had fourteen sons after his restoration. The number of daughters is not doubled, however, which is one of the considerations weighing against such a reading.

On the other hand, in 1 Chronicles chapter 25, verse 5, we have another biblical character, Heman David Seir, who is said to have been exalted by being granted fourteen sons and three daughters. Surprisingly, it is not upon the sons, but upon the daughters that the text elaborates. We are given their names and their birth order, Jemima the oldest, Kazeer the second, and Kerenhapuk the youngest.

David Klein suggests that their names mean turtle dove, cassia, and horn of coal, suggesting that they might invoke the three senses. Jemima, who is associated with the turtle dove, hearing, Kazeer, taste or smell, being cassia, and Kerenhapuk, whose name means horn of coal, associated with eye makeup, would be sight, possibly. Whatever else we are to make of their names, the names do seem to be suggestive of their delightful and prepossessing appearance and characteristics.

Indeed, their remarkable beauty is then mentioned. Just as Job was uniquely great in the land in the prologue, his daughters are uniquely beautiful within it in the epilogue. What might the beauty of the daughters and their names add to the story? The beauty of the daughters and the language of sensual delights by which they are named implies that not merely the strength that sons chiefly offered was restored to Job, but also the delight, the joy, and the colour that is more particularly associated with young and beautiful daughters.

Job's life, which had been under the darkness of affliction, all of the colour sapped out of it, is once more vibrant with life and youth in its season of new love. Daughters did not usually inherit as sons did, saving exceptional situations where no sons were born in a clan, as we see in Numbers chapter 27 verse 8 and the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. While other daughters of wealthy families might have enjoyed a generous dowry, it seems likely that Job's daughters had something more.

The point of this note might be that since Job had such bountiful wealth, he did not have the same worries that a poorer man might have had about the significant diminishing of his wealth as it might be sapped into other families as his daughters married. Job had so much that he could give as much to his daughters, who would leave for other families, as to his sons, who would more continue the legacy of Job's own clan. Another possible aspect of this is the gracious character of Job's bequest.

Job isn't merely doing what is expected in the law and cultural custom, he is going over and above in a gratuitous generosity. Job lives for 140 more years, twice 70, which is described elsewhere as the typical human lifespan. That said, Job is set in a patriarchal period where human lifespans were longer.



He sees four generations of his offspring. The blessing on Job continues to those that follow after him. When he finally dies, he dies as an old man and full of days, not prematurely as we might have thought he would earlier on in the book.

James 5, verse 11 declares Finally arriving at the conclusion of the book of Job, what are we to make of the purpose of the Lord? Toby Sumter perceptively maintains, in keeping with James, that the Lord's purpose was never merely winning the challenge with Satan, with Job's sorrows as collateral damage and the blessing at the end merely compensatory. No, the Lord's intention was always one that involved raising Job up to a new level of sonship. Job learns obedience through the things that he suffers.

He has rendered a sort of sacrifice, he suffers a death, and is, in a sort of resurrection, raised up to a new level of maturity and glory at the end of the book. At the end of the book, he enjoys a greater glory. He is also advanced in his knowledge of and relationship with the Lord.

He receives a double portion of what he had once enjoyed, perhaps suggesting a rise to the status of firstborn son. A question to consider, how might the Christian reader of this book see the character of Job as a type of Christ?