
Introduction

Title

While the book of Job takes its name from its central character, there is no reason to assume that Job is the author of this work, since the text refers to him in the third person (except in the conversations quoted in the dialogues). As he is hardly known outside this book, we do not know much about who Job is. A single New Testament reference to Job (Jas. 5:11) describes his “perseverance,” but adds little to our understanding. Two references in Ezekiel (14:14, 20) connect Job with two other ancient men of great renown and righteousness: Noah and Dan’el.¹ This connection highlights the righteous character of these three men and fits well with the emphasis in the first few chapters on Job’s righteousness. What we know about the central character of this book, therefore, comes principally from details we find in the book itself: he is a righteous, faithful, wealthy Uzzite who is the father of many children and who enjoys great prominence among the non-Israelite “men of the East” (Job 1:1–5).

Dating

The dating of the book of Job is a complex issue about which there is little scholarly consensus. Scholars have fixed the date of the book variously from the patriarchal period (drawing on the picture of Job as a patriarchal clansman in ch. 1) to the postexilic period. While the association of Job with Noah and Dan’el in Ezekiel might seem to affirm an early date for the book, there is no reason to preclude the possibility of a much later literary expansion of an earlier tradition. Some point to the large number of Aramaisms in Job as evidence of a late origin in the Persian period. Others, who find evidence of Aramaic expressions much earlier in the history of the OT, discount Persian influence. Some also

attribute the picture of *the* Satan in the prologue to the influence of Zoroastrian dualism. While there are scholars who ascribe certain related ideas and themes to a dependence on Second Isaiah, others understand Isaiah to be familiar with an earlier Job.²

The core message of the book, that it is necessary to endure faithfully in the face of extreme loss and suffering, is particularly apt to address the questions of the dislocated Diaspora community. This emphasis suggests, in my opinion, a late, rather than early, date for the final form of the book. Hartley and others resist an exilic date, suggesting that an author in that period would certainly have made plain the connections to the exile (Hartley, *Job*, pp. 17–20). They also would have expected an exilic author to acknowledge Israel's sin as the cause of exilic suffering—a circumstance that does not fit well with Job's claim of innocent suffering. It is difficult to second-guess the author of any book and conclude what one would *certainly* include. It may well be that the author so inhabited the presumed non-Israelite identity of Job and his friends that he did not mention the exile and left it to more subtle expression. As regards the acknowledgment of Israel's sin, it is clear from the shaping of the Psalter that there were those in Israel at certain times (perhaps as late as 300–200 B.C.) who did not unequivocally associate the exile with judgment for sin. Indeed Psalm 89, which concludes the earlier segment of the canonical collection (Pss. 2–89),³ expresses no awareness of sin but takes God to task for his failure to keep his covenant promises to David and his descendants. This early Psalter collection represents a view that was in vogue in Israel sometime not long before 200 B.C. By this time, the subsequent generations of the Diaspora community who had not participated in the sinful excesses of the collapsing monarchy were desperately seeking to understand how to hang on to a God who seemed to have abandoned them among the nations. To such a community, Job's message would seem to resonate with particular power.

Any discussion of the dating of Job needs to take into consideration that the structure of the book implies different stages. It is quite probable that the narrative in the prose prologue-epilogue is much earlier than the poetic dialogue, monologue, wisdom poem, and theophany. Certainly the combination of these elements in the present canonical configuration represents a later movement to speak to a different context. There is no conclusive evidence to command assent to any particular date(s). A date for the final form in the exilic or postexilic period seems most appro-

priate. Regardless of the actual date of composition, the resonance of the primary message and themes of the book with the situation of the Diaspora community would have insured its preservation, transmission, and ultimate canonization.

The Wisdom Context

The book of Job falls squarely into that genre of biblical writing known as Wisdom literature. A brief discussion of the nature of biblical wisdom and the literature it produced is necessary in order to situate the book of Job within its appropriate context. Most generally, the biblical word for wisdom (Heb. *khokmah*) refers to the special abilities or characteristics of certain individuals. In this sense wisdom is what we might call “know-how”—practical skills and talents in areas as diverse as metal work, painting, agriculture, political scheming, and the like.

More specifically, biblical wisdom is a way of looking at life that seeks skill and mastery through reflection on observation and experience. Those who dedicate themselves to the life-long pursuit of such understanding are known as *sages* (Heb. *khakamim*). These sages collected their own insights, along with those of others, and handed down this instruction to future generations in an attempt to create a growing understanding and mastery of life. One of the primary means of transmitting knowledge from sage to sage (or age to age) was through proverbial aphorisms like those collected in Proverbs 10–31. These brief sayings encapsulate sagely observations on life in memorable form to be learned and followed by generations of students.

The underlying conviction of these proverbial statements and the worldview that produced them is this: those who seriously pursue wisdom will find it and thus gain mastery in life that will lead to blessing, satisfaction, and even prosperity. Those who resist the teaching of wisdom, on the other hand, are willful fools who will meet trouble and destruction. The following adage reflects this worldview, known as “retributive wisdom” or *retribution*: The wise prospers, while the fool perishes. (The biblical observation that one reaps what one sows also falls into the same category.)

While retributive wisdom carries an almost naïvely positive expectation, other forms of wisdom add balance to the equation. According to observation and experience, the hallmarks of the wisdom enterprise, wise and righteous persons do not always

prosper, and the foolish and wicked often seem to avoid suffering and judgment. As a result, biblical wisdom also produced more pessimistic compositions that question the basic assumptions of retribution thinking—especially the belief that humans can discover and master wisdom through their own powers of observation and will subsequently experience blessing and prosperity.

The hard-eyed observations of “pessimistic wisdom” compare and contrast the assumptions of retribution in more expansive literary forms, including the extended discourses of Ecclesiastes and the dialogue/debate at the heart of Job. These discussions expose the weaknesses of retributive thinking and explore alternative worldviews that acknowledge the prosperity of the wicked, the oppression of the poor, and the suffering of the innocent. They also raise questions regarding the sovereignty and justice of God, who permits such circumstances to exist. In the end, however, these questioning forms of wisdom do not seek to undermine faith in God. Rather, they offer their own testimony to a continuing reliance on God and acknowledge the pain and confusion that inhabit the real world of the observant sage. Both Ecclesiastes and Job, after their devastating critiques of naïve retributive thinking, counsel readers that the only way forward is to remain in a deep relationship of absolute dependence on God (what Israel calls “fear of God”), acknowledging his sovereign freedom and admitting, along with Job, that knowing this God transcends (but does not remove!) the questions and doubts that diligent sages uncover in their searching.

In the biblical canon, pessimistic, questioning wisdom is allowed to stand in continuing tension with retributive wisdom. Neither form of wisdom subdues and vanquishes the other, but together both occupy the opposing extremities of orthodox faith. The book of Proverbs stands alongside Ecclesiastes and Job. The proverbs testify to the observed truths that commend the life of wisdom and righteous reliance on God over against the bankruptcy of wicked dependence on self-centered power and control. Questioning wisdom, however, cautions us against assuming a simple cause-and-effect relationship between our righteousness and the experience of prosperity. The righteous suffer, but this does not mean that they will not finally experience divine blessing, even if they experience extreme suffering like Job.

The book of Job reflects this pessimistic, questioning form of wisdom. Job reveals the failure of naïve assumptions of retribution as adequate explanations of the world. Job’s own experience,

as confirmed by the evaluation of God himself, demonstrates that the innocent righteous *do* suffer in the real world, and that God—whose sovereignty Job never questions—allows such suffering and injustice to go on in this world without clearly judging its perpetrators. Yet, the ultimate purpose of the book of Job is not to reject the validity of retribution or even to raise questions regarding the justice of God. The book finally counsels that maintaining a faithful relationship with God is the only adequate refuge in a world where suffering and injustice remain unavoidable realities.

The Text of the Book

The book of Job is by far one of the most difficult Hebrew texts in the OT. The textual notes that grace the pages of most honest translations of Job contain a multitude of references to obscure, difficult, unknown, and unintelligible Hebrew words and phrases. The difficulties do not undermine our confidence in the message of the book as a whole, but they do render precise interpretation of many passages difficult, if not impossible. While any given translation may obscure the issues by rendering opaque Hebrew into clear English, comparing different translations will often reveal where these problems lie—the extreme variations are due to the difficult Hebrew text behind them.

The difficulty of the text ought to recommend caution and humility in our interpretation of this book. Rather than understanding the text based on the meaning of words, often the interpreter draws conclusions concerning the meanings of obscure words and phrases from the larger framework of the surrounding text and the book as a whole. This may sometimes be the only way forward, but the danger is that it allows the interpreter's view to rule unchecked and to align meaning with predetermined understanding—thus the need for caution and humility.

The ancient versions of the book of Job, while occasionally useful, are often of little help in clarifying obscure words and details of the Hebrew text. Interestingly, the Greek translation (LXX) is considerably shorter than the Hebrew text (by about 400 lines!). Most scholars have concluded that the Greek is a shortened version of the Hebrew, rather than an older version of the text that was later expanded.⁴ Often the LXX omits difficult or repetitious texts and on occasion appears theologically motivated in its alterations. The Aramaic Targum to Job generally follows the Hebrew text closely and expands at points with historical and theological

explanations. The oldest such Targum, the fragmentary 11Q^tgJob from Qumran, is usually dated to the second-century B.C. This early paraphrase largely follows the Hebrew text. Other versions, including the Syrian Peshitta (fifth-century) and the Latin Vulgate (fourth-century) are translations from the Hebrew and occasionally offer insights to the original Hebrew. But, for the most part, the Masoretic Hebrew text, carefully preserved by generations of scribes, remains our primary witness to the text of Job.

The Structure of the Book

A few words are necessary about the structure of the book of Job and its various literary components, which have been the subject of considerable discussion throughout the history of interpretation. Some scholars have identified certain components as late intrusions into the original book that should be removed altogether. Others suggest considerable reordering of materials in order to bring the book in line with their understanding of its nature and purpose.

Prose prologue and epilogue. The major division of the book is between prose narrative and poetic discourse. The first two chapters and the final eleven verses of the final chapter (42:7–17) are prose narrative—enveloping the central poetic sections. The prose sections present a cohesive narrative about the loss and restoration of Job’s family and possessions that (were the poetic center excised) would provide an effective cautionary tale encouraging righteous readers to endure suffering faithfully as a test of God, certain that their faithfulness will be rewarded by restoration. This morality narrative may well represent an early traditional story about Job that circulated independently from the poetic elements that now occupy the core of the book. As they now stand, however, the sections of the prose narrative function as prologue and epilogue to the poetic materials and serve a different purpose within the context of the whole canonical form of the book.

Poetic dialogue. The poetic discourse divides into several distinct sections, some of which may have existed independently before being brought together. The first of these elements is the extended poetic dialogue between Job and his three friends that begins with Job’s desperate complaint in chapter 3 and continues through chapter 31 (with the exception of ch. 28, which will be considered separately below). Following Job’s opening lament,

these chapters of dialogue are organized into three cycles of debate between Job and his friends (chs. 4–14; 15–21; 22–31), in which each of Job’s friends speaks in turn, followed immediately by a response from Job. The friends speak always in the same order—Eliphaz, Bildad, and then Zophar—except that in the third cycle of speeches, Bildad’s speech is truncated (only 6 verses), Zophar does not appear at all, and Job’s response to Bildad is considerably longer (6 chapters). Job’s final speech concludes with a postscript (31:40c) indicating that, “The words of Job are ended.” This signifies the completion of the dialogue cycle and Job’s argument so that the reader does not anticipate further input from either the friends or Job.

A wisdom poem. In the middle of Job’s extended last speech appears a beautiful poem in praise of the unsearchable nature of divine wisdom. The poem (ch. 28) is a skillfully constructed composition that contrasts the successful human search for hidden riches in inaccessible regions of the earth with the inability of human wisdom to search out and acquire true wisdom. All the industrious efforts of humans cannot find true wisdom, since the way to it is known only to God himself, who created it. As a result, humans are entirely dependent on divine revelation for any access to wisdom. The poem calls us, therefore, to adopt the “fear of God,” which is the only sure path to wisdom. In its present position, the poem forms part of Job’s discourse and provides a transition between his final response to his friends (chs. 26–27) and his conclusion, in which he expresses his desire for vindication and meeting with God (chs. 29–31). Most interpreters consider this poem an originally independent composition that was subsequently inserted into the Joban literary complex.

The poetic Elihu monologues. Immediately following Job’s final speech (chs. 26–31) and its concluding postscript, six chapters of monologues from a previously unknown speaker, Elihu, appear rather unexpectedly. A prose introduction to these speeches (32:1–5) explains why Elihu has been invisible to this point—his humility and reticence to speak out in a meeting of older and more experienced sages. There are several striking elements to note concerning Elihu, however. First, Elihu is nowhere mentioned in the dialogue cycle, nor does notice of him appear in any other part of the book—even when the *three* friends are mentioned in the divine rebuke in 42:7–9. Second, Elihu’s speeches break with the pattern established in the dialogue cycle in that there is no response from Job (nor is one anticipated after the postscript to his

words in 31:40c). Elihu is also the only speaker, other than God and the narrator, to mention Job by name—and he does so a remarkable ten times in these six chapters. Finally, while Elihu employs the same type of formulas to introduce his speech as those found in the dialogue cycle, he uses them *inappropriately* on at least two occasions.⁵

The Elihu speeches begin with attempts to legitimate the words of this young sage (32:1–33:7), proceed to attack the claims of Job (33:7–35:16), and conclude with efforts to justify God and condemn Job (36:1–37:24). The speeches clearly show great familiarity with the dialogue cycles, presenting certain interpretations of arguments advanced by Job in response to the friends and seeking to counter them.

The theophanic appearance of God. After the monologues of Elihu end rather abruptly in 37:24, God suddenly appears on the scene, speaking out of a whirlwind in full theophanic glory. God's address ignores Elihu's contributions completely. The five chapters of divine speech (38–42) take the form of a rather bombastic interrogation of Job regarding his ability to understand the divine plan for creation or to exercise any modicum of control over it. There are two separate examinations of Job (38–39 and 40–41), and each concludes with an opportunity for Job to respond (40:1–5; 42:1–6). Both sections consist largely of a catalogue of the wonders of the physical creation and the marvelous wild creatures that inhabit it. Without the two sections containing Job's responses, these five chapters could represent an independent wisdom composition in praise of the wonderful works of God in his creation.

Questions Raised by the Structure of the Book

The complex structure of Job and the distinctive characteristics of its various structural components have raised questions among interpreters regarding both the literary unity of the canonical book and its intended meaning. What follows here is a consideration of the major questions and some of the possible interpretive responses.

Prose prologue and epilogue. The primary question concerning this "prose envelope" is whether it represents an originally independent unity. Without the poetic section separating them, these two prose elements provide a satisfying moral narrative about the need for enduring faith in the face of the test of extreme

suffering. As a combined narrative, the prologue and epilogue speak rather hopefully to the suffering community of the post-exilic Diaspora, admonishing them to continue to hold fast to their ancestral faith, even when it appears to hold no benefit. This narrative presents the view that Israel's tribulations are a test of her faithfulness. As Job holds on to his faith even to death and is ultimately rewarded by divine blessing that exceeds his former prosperity, so the text admonishes Diaspora Israel to remain faithful. It seems reasonable to assume that this complete narrative circulated independently at an earlier date and was later adapted as the external framework for the canonical book of Job. In our discussion of the significance of the canonical form below, we will return to the question of how the earlier narrative as prologue and epilogue functions in the final form of the book.

The poetic dialogue. If the external prose frame of the canonical Job once functioned independently, can the same be said of the poetic dialogue between Job and his three friends? The dialogue is certainly a cohesive composition with a clear structure and thematic development. As a freestanding literary work, the dialogue reflects critically on the weakness of the naïve retribution theology presented by the three friends. The critique is based primarily on Job's experience of innocent suffering and also on extensive observation of the ongoing prosperity of the wicked, who openly reject God and actively oppress the poor. All of the friends' attempts to apply reverse retributive thinking in order to convict Job of sin on the basis of his suffering ring hollow. And, in the end, the arguments of the friends dwindle into silence, thereby effectively defeating the proponents of retribution.

Some interpreters redistribute the lengthy final speech of Job in order to fill out the truncated speech of Bildad, and to supply the missing contribution of Zophar. This completes the three cycles of debate in a more balanced fashion and undermines any apparent victory won by Job's anti-retribution critique. Such a format in an original and independent dialogue would have explored the tensions between a theoretical retribution theology and the experience of innocent suffering in the real world. We will consider the effect of placing the unbalanced dialogue within the larger framework of the final form in the next section.

Since non-biblical texts evidencing a similar critique of retribution theology are known among the broader wisdom traditions of the ancient Near East,⁶ it might seem proper to assume an intended audience from an earlier, even monarchical, date. But even

if its origin is early, the dialogue provides a later alternative to the predominant Deuteronomic stream of thought that played such a significant role in shaping canonical scripture. This validation of innocent suffering, and the undermining of a strictly retributive worldview, resonates with the experience of the later generations of the Diaspora community, who were seeking to live faithfully in the midst of escalating pressures to compromise ancestral traditions through cultural assimilation in the foreign lands where they lived. Thus the adaptation of an earlier exploratory dialogue to speak to a later Diaspora context is not surprising.

The poetic Elihu monologues. The exceptional characteristics of the Elihu chapters strongly suggest that these monologues are a later addition to the poetic core of the book. However, the obvious dependence on the poetic dialogues makes it unlikely that this section ever functioned independently. The Elihu monologues were probably written in response to the dialogues and appended to provide a modified interpretation of them. The issue that arises, then, is whether the Elihu speeches should be removed in order to recover the original meaning of the book.

If these chapters were omitted, the theophanic appearance of God in chapters 38–41 would immediately follow Job's concluding demands for an audience with God (chs. 29–31). This would give a whole new tenor to the interaction between God and Job—God would be responding almost in haste to Job's demands rather than delaying significantly to speak according to his own timing. We will consider below the effect of inserting the Elihu speeches in their present position.

The wisdom poem. Most interpreters consider the poem which comprises chapter 28 to be an independent wisdom poem that was later inserted in its present position. The poem serves here, however, as part of Job's final expression of his claims. Some scholars would remove the poem from its canonical position and either omit it altogether or relocate it as part of the speech of another. Clines, for example, places chapter 28 as the conclusion of the Elihu monologue. Since there is no textual evidence for such a move, the interpreter justifies this proposal by evaluating the poem's fit (or lack thereof) with the expression of Job (and other speakers) in the rest of the book. Other interpreters leave chapter 28 in its canonical position and seek to explain its literary function in the canonical composite.

The poetic theophany. The theophany of God in chapters 38–41 may represent an adaptation of an earlier independent

composition. These chapters refer to God with the Tetragrammaton (*yhwh*)—the peculiarly Israelite name for God. This shift clearly sets the section apart from the earlier dialogues and Elihu speeches where the deity is called *ʿeloah*—a form of the generic designation “God” with special associations with the region of Edom.⁷ The Tetragrammaton links the theophany with the prose prologue/epilogue which also uses the name *yhwh*. We will consider this link further in our discussion below on the final form of the book.

Without connecting links to the Joban story, chapters 38–41 offer a cohesive reflection on the sovereignty of God over his creation. Such a text could be the result of independent wisdom reflection on the relation of God to his creation. However, there is nothing to indicate that this section was not composed specifically to occupy its present position in the book of Job.

Purpose of the Book and Final Form

Although the book of Job contains many distinctive components, some of which may have circulated earlier as independent compositions, there is an intentional editorial unity with a cohesive purpose and message in the canonical form of the book. How do these diverse elements work together in the final canonical form of the book of Job? We begin with the meaning of the final form, followed by a more thorough consideration of the related issues with details of the evidence.

First, in its original, independent state, the poetic dialogue wrestles with the incomprehensibility of human suffering in relation to a retributive worldview. The outcome of the debate is inconclusive—especially if one redistributes the extended final speech of Job to create a balanced and complete third cycle (see the discussion of “The poetic dialogue” above). While the testimony of Job may be more persuasive in this reconstruction, there is no definitive rejection of the theology of retribution. When, however, the prose prologue is separated from the longer morality narrative—with its understanding of suffering as a divine test that the innocent must endure—and is placed before the poetic dialogue, the character of both segments changes decidedly. As prologue, the opening narrative removes from discussion several issues that figure prominently in the debate section. No longer can the reader wonder about the character of Job—whether he has sinned or is innocent—as both the narrator and God unequivocally describe

him as one “blameless and upright; feared God and shunned evil” (1:1; compare 1:8). In addition, the prologue leaves the reader in no doubt regarding the reason for Job’s suffering; it is a divinely sanctioned test of his willingness to endure faithfully without payment. With these issues settled from the outset, the dialogue can no longer be about the *reason* for innocent suffering—we *know* why Job is suffering. Nor can the debate actively pursue the question whether retributive theology is an adequate understanding of the world. We know that Job is innocent and yet suffers extremely; a strict interpretation of retribution is not able to illuminate his circumstance or that of any innocent sufferer.

The reader of the final form, then, must look for another issue to drive the dialogue. *The Satan* raises this question in his discussions with God: Is it possible to hold on to faith in God without receiving benefit? The upshot of the double tests Job endures in the first two chapters is to show that, indeed, it is possible for a human like Job to continue to live in fear of God even when he loses everything and stands on the brink of death without hope of restoration. Since Job’s faithfulness appears to answer *the Satan’s* question in chapters 2 and 3, what is left for the dialogue to accomplish? The dialogue states the issue in its most extreme form: Is it possible to endure, holding on to God, even if one dies *without being acknowledged as righteous*? As the dialogue progresses, the friends increasingly move to consider Job’s suffering as the deserved divine punishment for some sin. The reader knows from the prologue that this cannot be the case, since both God and the narrator affirm Job’s blameless character.

As the friends become increasingly suspicious, Job’s concern shifts from maintaining his own integrity before them to seeking some public vindication by God. The wisdom poem of chapter 28 marks the transition. As Job’s speech, it declares the inability of human endeavor to ferret out divine wisdom and points instead to the adoption of a relationship of absolute dependence on God. From here to the end of Job’s speeches he emphasizes more and more his desire for vindication. He has given up on convincing his friends, it seems, and expects to die without them having acknowledged his righteousness. He is willing to accept this, but he wants to have his day in court, knowing that God will have to publicly admit: “He is a righteous man!” This is the import of Job’s final plea in chapter 31, and his words end without any resolution of this question.

At this point Elihu intervenes, rejecting the idea of Job's righteous character and affirming that his suffering is God's statement of Job's guilt. God will not respond to Job's summons, Elihu claims, because God has already rendered definitive judgment on Job's sin through the suffering he is experiencing. The Elihu speeches have the additional literary effect of delaying God's appearance. This delay heightens the dramatic tension of the story, leaving the first-time reader to wonder whether God will arrive or not. Of course, in subsequent readings we know that God will come and thus read Elihu's speeches with that insight in mind. From the prologue we know that Elihu is wrong about Job's guilt, and from the theophany we know he is also wrong about God's judgment on Job. Elihu's final words in chapter 37 ironically rely on theophanic storm imagery to proclaim the awesome majesty of God to whom Job must submit. These words unwittingly prepare for the actual appearance of God in chapter 38.

The appearance of God in the whirlwind puts the lie to Elihu's claims that Job's suffering is God's final judgment against his sin. The introductory formula to God's initial speech mentions Job as the object of these words. The earlier introductory formulas in the dialogue and Elihu sections never mention the recipient, since the pattern of give and take is clear from the context. Here after Elihu's speeches, however, it is necessary to indicate that God is addressing Job and not Elihu. We know, therefore, that, at least in the final form, the Elihu speeches are part of the growing composition (even if the book does not refer to them at any other point).

In his speeches, God ignores Elihu and does not take sides in the argument with the three friends. Instead God examines Job and his understanding of God's sovereign control of creation. Some read the rather harsh and sarcastic language of the divine monologues as a rejection of Job and a rebuke of his arguments. This interpretation, however, conflicts with God's later affirmation of Job's words in 42:7–8. How, then, ought one to understand God's bombastic hammering of Job? The overwhelming appearance of God seems an intentional move on the part of the author to represent the absolute otherness of the sovereign creator God, who is beyond all human knowing. How else is it possible to describe a God who is so removed from human experience and unknowable and yet who condescends to come in response to Job's desire for meeting? God's appearance overwhelms Job. He is made small before God not because he is sinful or in the wrong, but because *all humans* recede to insignificance in the presence of

God (e.g., Ps. 8). The very presence of God threatens humans with catastrophe, and yet God makes a way for humans to stand in his presence without destruction (e.g., Exod. 33:18–23).

Thus, Job fades away before the presence of God not because he is sinful, but because he can do no other in the face of holy God. Job's first response to God's examination (40:1–5) is in effect a *non*-response. Overwhelmed by direct experience of God himself, Job's words fail. This initial response functions as a moment of relief in the divine attack and creates dramatic tension for the second wave of divine testing. There is no resolution here, only a delay that points the reader to the final response of Job (42:1–5) for resolution.

And how does God appear in these chapters? The God of Job 38–42 is mysterious, distant (and yet near!), fearsomely other than humans. He is the powerful creator and sustainer of the universe who is still in control. The inability of humans to exercise any control over nature or the wild animals highlights the absolute sovereignty of God over all things. As Job is forced to acknowledge his own lack of understanding and power, he is forced to submit to the wisdom and power of God. We see the mystery of God in his essential otherness, but also in the reality that holy God permits evil to exist in this world even in the face of righteousness. Humans are unable to fully understand what God is about in this world and so God is able to act freely, limited only by his essential holy character. We have the sense that in this divine encounter Job learns (as does the psalmist) that God is “not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell” (Ps. 5:4). Because God is at once holy and free, he cannot be called to account by humans, because they have insufficient understanding to judge (Job 42:1–3). God cannot be coerced into action, nor is he obligated to respond to human demands and pleas.

The divine appearance in overwhelming power essentially ignores Job's questions and demands. God never explains the reason for innocent suffering. The reader knows Job suffers as a test, but Job never learns this. He is forced to continue (as are we!) with mystery. Neither does God seek to justify his actions or clarify his purposes. God simply appears and places Job (and the friends—and you and me) in a position of powerless surrender to the free grace of God at work in the world. There is no hope of restoration here, nor is there any offer of personal vindication for Job. There is no marvelous “Ah ha!” experience of understanding. Job still suffers, his friends still consider him a sinner,

and he is still unable to understand why he suffers and why God permits evil to plague the world.

Job does not receive answers or understanding in this encounter, but rather God himself! Despite the suffering and mystery, the powerless inability to control oneself or one's world, God is still worth holding onto in a relationship of absolute dependence (which is the fear of God). Job's experience, then, pushes *the Satan's* question to the limit. Job has lost all of his possessions, wealth, family, health, and friends. He stands at the brink of extinction with no one to believe in his righteousness. And yet Job is willing to submit to this God who has come to him in overwhelming power and freedom. We need to remember that when Job submits in 42:1–6 he has no inkling of what is to come in the epilogue. He has no hint of God's coming affirmation (42:7–8) or of the abundant restoration of all he has lost (42:10–15). He submits not because he recognizes his sin, but because he cannot but recognize that God is the ultimate foundation of all existence and worthy in himself of continued relationship.

When Job does at last submit (42:1–6), there is no clear indication he is admitting sin. Instead, his motivation is a new and direct understanding of God as a result of the theophany: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (42:5). This new understanding of God leads Job to regret his former brash insinuations about God. And so Job changes his opinion about God, his understanding of the deity, rather than repenting of a named sin (42:6), and with this new understanding Job also lays down his need for personal vindication. This new experience of God—overwhelming as it is—is enough. Job is willing to lose everything, to suffer, and to die, even without any hope of justification. But he is *not* willing to give up on the God who has come to him in power and grace. Job's submission decisively answers the question of *the Satan* and wraps up the core message of the book.

How, then, are we to understand the epilogue that follows this conclusion? God first rebukes the three friends and affirms Job (42:7–8). God thereby affirms Job's speeches as relating truth about God in the world. We must therefore view the friends' words about God—and the naïve retributive theology that governs their thinking—as false. So deep is their failure that they must make sin offerings and seek (in the greatest irony!) intercession from the one they had sought to condemn as a sinner.

In the second part of the epilogue—*after* Job's decision to submit and lay down his quest for vindication—God restores

Job's fortunes. Expectation of restoration in no way motivates Job's change. Neither is there any indication that God intends the restoration as a response to the faithfulness of Job. Such a connection is unlikely, since it would seriously undermine the critique of retribution that occupied such an important place in the dialogue section. In addition, according to God's freedom (as established in the theophany section) God can choose to restore or not to restore Job's fortunes. So, rather than a retributive response to Job's faithfulness, the restoration is a free and gracious gift of God.

Finally, we need to remember that Job's loss and suffering have been, from the very beginning, a *test*. Once Job completes the test, having held faithfully onto God in the face of utter loss, the restoration of the epilogue amounts to a "resetting of the clock"—God is free to return Job to his pre-test circumstances, should God choose to do so. And "free" is the operative word here, since God is under no obligation to restore Job. This restoration was certainly a part of the originally independent prose narrative, with its exhortation to remain faithful in the face of extreme suffering. In that context the restoration might have been understood as a divine reward for faithful living. But in the canonical form of the whole book of Job the issues shift and become more complex, and we must read them accordingly.

Notes

1. While Noah is the righteous man God chose to survive the flood, Dan'el is most likely *not* the OT personality Daniel. Scholars more commonly identify Dan'el with the righteous man from the Ugaritic narrative of Aqhat. The name in the book of Daniel is spelled differently (*daniy'el*) than the Dan'el mentioned in Ezekiel (*dani'el*).

2. See the discussions in J. Hartley, *Job*, pp. 17–20, and M. H. Pope, *Job*, pp. xxx–xxxvii, for more complete information.

3. See G. H. Wilson, pp. 229–46.

4. See the discussion in Hartley, *Job*, pp. 3–4, and Pope, *Job*, pp. xxxix–xli, for further details.

5. See the discussion in §§112, 114, below.

6. See "Sumerian Job" and "Pessimistic Dialogue between Master and Servant" in Pritchard, pp. 437–38 and 589–91.

7. See the discussion in Additional Notes §157, below.