EXPOSITION OF JOB

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by

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Canonical Context

All 66 inspired books of the Protestant canon relate to the progressively revealed Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible, but not in the same way. Each book either *carries* the metanarrative,[1] *contributes* to it but does not carry it,[2] or *contemplates* the metanarrative.[3] A book's placement into one of these three categories does not necessarily depend on genre, even though a correlation frequently exists. Rather, a book's categorization depends on its contents and its relationship to other books.[4]

In the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of Scripture, the following compose the major elements of the story:

Table 1: Elements of the Metanarrative of Scripture

Setting:	Heaven and earth	Gen 1–2
Hero:	God the Father	Gen 1–2
Hero's desire:	Image bearers to rule the earth	Gen 1:26–28
Problem:	Image bearers gave their rule to the serpent	Gen 3
Solution (the plot):	Promise seed will strike the serpent and restore rule to image bearers	Gen 3:15–Rev 19
Turning point:	The Cross	Gospels
Climax:	The Great Tribulation	Rev 6–19
Resolution / denouement:	Image bearers again rule the earth	Rev 20–22

[1] The carrier category refers to biblical books that carry the primary plotline of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Many books of historical narrative and certain parts of prophetic books fall into this category because they carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative. Such books describe the outworking of the promise in Genesis 3:15–16.

[2] The contributor category refers to biblical books that contribute to, but do not carry, the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Most prophetic books and certain parts of the NT epistles fall into this category because while they do not carry the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative, they contribute important (often prophetic) information about that metanarrative. Additionally, certain historical narratives run in parallel to one another (e.g., Kings and Chronicles, the four Gospels). In these cases, 1–2 Kings function as the carrier and 1–2 Chronicles as the contributor. Among the Gospels, Matthew functions as the carrier and the other three as contributors.

[3] The contemplator category refers to biblical books that neither carry nor contribute to the plot of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative of the Bible. Rather, these books reflect upon (contemplate) the realities of that narrative. Books of wisdom, poetry, and most NT epistles fall into this category, because in light of the Genesis 3:15 promised seed having come, they address how the people of God should live until he returns to establish his kingdom.

[4] For this reason, certain biblical books fit into more than one of these three categories.

As shown in Table 1, the Bible as a whole presents God as the hero of the story who desires his image bearers to rule the world on his behalf. This metanarrative begins in the book of Genesis and concludes in the book of Revelation. Genesis presents the setting,[5] the characters,[6] the plot problem,[7] and the beginning of the rising action. The problem identified in Genesis 3 did not change God's desire for his image bearers to rule the world. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15–16 indicates a war between the serpent's seed and the woman's seed. This battle is the central conflict in the entire biblical narrative; a conflict not resolved until Revelation 20. In this prophecy, God promised the seed of the woman—a man—would defeat the serpent, restore humanity to the garden, and restore rule of the earth to God's image bearers. The anticipation of this promised seed drives the plot of the biblical narrative. The entire plot of the metanarrative thus revolves around how Genesis 3:15–16 comes to fruition. This prophecy reaches the first phase of its fulfillment in Revelation 20 in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth, and its final phase of fulfillment in Revelation 21–22 in the new heaven and earth.

As the metanarrative progresses through the story's *carriers* (Genesis–Kings in the OT), Yahweh elected the nation Israel to be his inheritance (Deut 32:9) and to function as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). The Gentile nations, by contrast, Yahweh gave to the "sons of God" (Deut 32:8), a reference to the fallen angels. The Pentateuch therefore identified the Gentiles as serpent-seed nations—those who rule the earth with the serpent (Gen 4:7). Without fail, each of those Gentile nations and their gods adhered to retribution theology. Retribution theology is defined as serving a deity in exchange for his or her "blessing" upon the worshiper's life. Poor life circumstances such as poverty or sickness, then, evidenced guilt on the part of the worshiper and required restitution to the deity in order to restore one's fortunes. This is precisely the accusation of the adversary against Yahweh, and it's the theology defended by the three sages and Elihu. The author of Job intended to warn Israel of this false theology as they interacted with the Gentile nations. Yahweh could not be bought or bribed, and one's life circumstances while outside the land of Israel did not necessarily indicate one's obedience or disobedience to Yahweh. Inside the land of Israel, of course, the Mosaic Law governed the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Obedience would result in blessing, while disobedience would result in cursing.

The book of Job is not part of the Messiah-redeemer-ruler metanarrative. Nor does it provide contributing prophetic information to it. Rather, the book of Job considers life in light of the incorrect theologies of the serpent-seed nations and their gods. Job therefore functions as a *contemplator* of the realities of the biblical metanarrative.

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[5] Heaven and earth, Genesis 1–2.

[6] God, the hero of the story; mankind, the object of God's desire; and the antagonist, the serpent.

[7] Despite God's desire for mankind to rule the earth on his behalf, the man and woman gave their rule over to the serpent (Gen 3).

Occasion

Who?

The text of Job does not identify its author. Given the difficulties of date and authorship for the book of Job, it is perhaps simplest to acknowledge the impossibility of certainty here. This paper will simply land on an anonymous author / editor / compiler.

When?

Dating the book of Job is likewise extremely difficult. Scholarly estimates range from 2100 BC to the post-exilic period. The setting of the story appears to be around the early or pre-patriarchal period (2100 BC), although this setting does not require such an early date of composition.[8] Like authorship, the date of composition remains unknown.

To Whom?

The text does not explicitly identify its audience. However, based on its purpose and its inclusion in the Hebrew writings, the audience certainly included the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If written before Moses' time, the message of Job would be especially poignant for the Israelites prior to their entry into Canaan as they suffered slavery in Egypt. If written later, it would still have just as much value to the Israelites because they always had interactions with the Gentile nations.

Where?

The text does not indicate the location of the author / editor / compiler. The setting of Job is in the land of Uz, outside the Promised Land of Canaan. Uz appears to be located in the vicinity of Edom.[9] This setting, however, does not require its composition in Uz. In the end, it is extremely difficult to determine the location of composition.

Why?

Because Adam and Eve fell (Gen 3), the serpent ruled the earth instead of God's image bearers. Whereas Yahweh inherited Israel as his chosen people, he gave the Gentile nations to the "sons of God" (Deut 32:8), a reference to the fallen angels. The Pentateuch therefore identified the Gentiles as serpent-seed nations—those who rule the earth with the serpent (Gen 4:7). Without fail, each of those Gentile nations and their gods adhered to retribution theology. Retribution theology is defined as serving a deity in exchange for his or her "blessing" upon the worshiper's life. Poor life circumstances such as poverty or sickness, then,

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[8] For a detailed discussion of the dating of Job, see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 1022–42, and Tremper Longman III, and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 225–26.

[9] Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1027–28.

evidenced guilt on the part of the worshiper and required restitution to the deity in order to restore one's fortunes. This is precisely the accusation of the adversary against Yahweh, and it's the theology defended by the three sages and Elihu. The author of Job intended to warn Israel of this false theology as they interacted with the Gentile nations. Yahweh could not be bought or bribed through service or sacrifice, and one's life circumstances while outside the land of Israel did not necessarily indicate one's obedience or disobedience to Yahweh. The author of Job therefore sought to dissuade his Israelite audience from ascribing retribution theology to Yahweh and to recognize that one's life circumstances outside the Promised Land bore no indication of one's right standing before him.

Genre

The book of Job defies facile genre classification. Broadly speaking, most consider it to be among the biblical wisdom literature. It contains both prose narrative (chs. 1–2; 42:7–17) as well as poetic speeches / dialogue from six characters: Job, the three sages, Elihu, and Yahweh (3:1–42:6).[10] Because Job has characters, a setting, and a plot, this paper proposes to analyze Job as a narrative literary work. The plot is primarily dialogue-driven with the interactions between Job, his counselors, and Yahweh. In any case, the tension and resolution of the narrative plot *make the author's point*. Additionally, the concept of wisdom is central to the narrative, the dialogue, and the message of the book. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the book of Job is considered a wisdom narrative.

Critical Issues

The text of Job contains "a great many problematical philological and textual issues,"[11] which has led to a plethora of imaginative emendations. Even the Septuagint translators apparently had difficulty with the text, and abandoned efforts at translating numerous verses due to their unintelligibility. While this paper can in no way resolve such issues, it will follow the MT as closely as possible.

Proposed Message Statement

In order to address the inevitable interaction between Israel and the retribution theology of the Gentile nations, an unknown author composed a wisdom narrative at an unknown date and unknown location in order to explain the fallacy of applying retribution theology to Yahweh so that the Israelite audience would avoid ascribing retribution theology to Yahweh and recognize that one's life circumstances outside the Promised Land bore no indication of one's right standing before him.

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[10] For a thorough discussion of genre, see Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1023–27.

[11] Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1043.

Proposed Outline

I. Prologue (1:1–2:13)
II. Speeches of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (3:1–27:23)
  A. Job (3:1–26)
  B. Eliphaz (4:1–5:27)
  C. Job (6:1–7:21)
  D. Bildad (8:1–22)
  E. Job (9:1–10:22)
  F. Zophar (11:1–20)
  G. Job (12:1–14:22)
  H. Eliphaz (15:1–35)
  I. Job (16:1–17:16)
  J. Bildad (18:1–21)
  K. Job (19:1–29)
  L. Zophar (20:1–29)
  M. Job (21:1–34)
  N. Eliphaz (22:1–30)
  O. Job (23:1–24:25)
  P. Bildad (25:1–6)
  Q. Job (26:1–27:23)
III. Wisdom Hymn (28:1–28)
IV. Job's final testimony (29:1–31:40)
V. Elihu's speech (32:1–37:24)
VI. Yahweh's speech (38:1–42:6)
VII. Epilogue (42:7–17)

Proposed Argument Exposition

In his **prologue (1:1–2:13)**, the author established the setting, the characters, and the plot problem (tension).

The narrator described the setting as the land of Uz (1:1), probably in the vicinity of Edom. With this setting, the Israelite audience primarily needed an awareness that Uz was outside the Promised Land, and thus outside the bounds of the Mosaic Covenant which applied to Israelites in the land of Israel. Furthermore, the setting includes the heavenly throne room, or "divine council" of Yahweh (1:6). This additional setting provides dramatic irony whereby the reader knows more than the characters (in this case, all the human characters). Having a view of these heavenly events in the prologue will be central to the message of the book.

The narrator described the major characters as Job, Yahweh, the adversary, and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. The following are important elements of characterization for each.

Job

- His name אִיּוֹב (Job) comes from the same root as אֵיבָה "enmity" (e.g., Gen 3:15). Ironically, Job will believe Yahweh to be his enemy. Yahweh actually vindicates Job while "the adversary," הַשָּׂטָן is the true enemy of Job. The three counselors—who agree with the adversary's theology, will furthermore prove themselves as Job's enemies.
- Blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning from evil (1:1).
- Wealthy (1:2–3).
- Acted as family priest (1:4–5).
- Yahweh's testimony of Job:
    - No one on earth like him (1:8; 2:3).
    - Blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning from evil (1:8; 2:3).
- Did not sin and did not charge God with wrongdoing (1:22).

The author's point of view aligns perfectly with Yahweh's point of view regarding the character of Job. This point of view must be respected—Job was blameless, and this is an important element of his characterization for the entire plot and for the argumentation between Job and the three sages.

Yahweh

- Sovereign over the angelic and human realms (1:6, 12; 2:6).
- Considers Job his servant (1:8).
- Considers Job blameless (1:8).
- Yahweh's character is challenged by the adversary (1:9–11; 2:4–5).
- Only the narrator (in chs. 1–2, 38–42) and Job (1:21, 12:9) identify the deity as יהוה, "Yahweh." The three sages and Elihu use different terms.

The Adversary[12]

- Can operate in both the earthly and heavenly realms.
- His charge that Yahweh bribes men for worship (1:9–11; 2:4–5) indicates his opposition to Yahweh and sets him up as the plot's antagonist.
- His charge against Yahweh constitutes the plot problem for the narrative.

Job's wife

- Her caustic comment that Job bless God and die (2:9) and Job's rebuke (2:10) characterize her as a foolish woman.
- She does not appear further in the narrative other than as, presumably, the vessel through which Job's ten later children are born (42:13).

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

- Initially characterized positively as they desired to comfort and console Job on account of his calamity (2:11).
- Their mourning (2:12) with Job in silence for seven days (2:13) likewise characterizes them as compassionate.
- After chapter 2, their speech toward Job will betray this initial characterization as they prove themselves to be Job's enemies.

The plot problem (tension) is actually not Job's suffering. Rather, the center of plot tension is the adversary's charge that Yahweh bribes men for worship (1:9–11; 2:4–5). This would run counter to the Torah's description that Yahweh is a God who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes (Deut 10:17). Job's suffering serves as the stage over which the drama concerning the adversary's charge against Yahweh's character will play out. Job himself will not impugn Yahweh's character on account of his suffering (1:22; 2:10). Nor will Job, during the dialogues (chs. 3–31), confess guilt and so malign Yahweh's own testimony concerning his blamelessness. The implication of Yahweh's retort to the adversary (1:8) is that Job is the finest of Yahweh's earthly servants, and so Job will serve as the test case regarding Yahweh's character.

That Job's sons blessed God (1:5) and Job himself blessed God (1:21) and both the adversary and Job's wife challenge Job to bless God (1:11; 2:5, 9) serve to highlight the central question of blessing (in the retributive sense) outside of the Promised Land. Most Bible translations, without any textual evidence whatsoever, freely interpret / emend ברך ("bless") as "curse." But Satan accused Yahweh of adhering to retribution theology: Job blessed Yahweh, and so in return, Yahweh blessed Job. Essentially, the accusation is that Job had "bought" the blessing of God by blessing / serving him.

Thus, the prologue (1:1–2:13) establishes the setting, characters, and plot tension in the narrative. It sets the stage for the speeches by the sages, Job, Elihu, and Yahweh in the

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[12] Most bible translations render הַשָּׂטָן as the proper noun, "Satan." In Hebrew, however, is exceeding rare that a personal proper noun would have a definite article placed before it (GKC §125.e; Joüon-Muraoka §137.f). The proper rendering of הַשָּׂטָן should therefore be, "the adversary," and not the proper noun, "Satan." One notable exception in translations is the NABRE which more acceptably renders הַשָּׂטָן as, "the satan."

remainder of the book. Job's suffering thus serves as the platform over which the drama concerning the adversary's charge against Yahweh's character (i.e., accusing him of retribution theology) will play out. His suffering is a requirement for the charge to be tested. Since the audience knows that Job is indeed blameless—for both the literarily omniscient narrator and Yahweh have said as much—they already understand that Job's suffering cannot be on account of sin.

The **speeches of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (3:1–27:23)** on the surface seek to explain Job's suffering, although they are really dealing with the issue of Yahweh's character. With a case of dramatic irony, the audience knows more than the characters because the prologue (chs. 1–2) gave them insight into the heavenly scene and the true reason for Job's suffering. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar will function as advocates of the adversary because they espouse his theology of retribution—that Job suffered because he had sinned; therefore God had justly punished him. Job, on the other hand, will function as an advocate of Yahweh because he will maintain his own innocence and integrity. His ultimate refusal to admit guilt is *positive* because doing so would malign Yahweh's testimony of Job's blamelessness. However, his own demand for a hearing with Yahweh will ultimately require his repentance (42:6). All of the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar must be read in light of Yahweh's concluding words to them that, "I am angry with you [three] … because you have not spoken the truth about me" (42:7).

Job (3:1–26) and his reflection on his misery functions to elaborate the shocked silence of the three counselors on account of "how great his suffering was" (2:13). Job will eventually move on to theological reflection, but at first, despair over his wretched condition overwhelmed him.

Eliphaz (4:1–5:27) espoused the adversary's theology of retribution (most notably in 4:7–9; 5:2–6, 11–26). For Eliphaz, Job's suffering constituted divine discipline (5:17) and had come upon him because of his own sin. Ironically, Eliphaz's assertion about abundant progeny and long life with full vigor (5:25–26) would indeed come true in Job's case (42:13–17), but not because of the repentance proposed by Eliphaz. Disturbingly, Eliphaz supported his theology with a vision given by a spirit in the night (4:12–21). The spirit essentially communicated that the earthbound mortality of humanity made them reprehensible in God's eyes. With humanity thus debased, Job could make no claim of moral purity. This concept resounds with the adversary's accusation that mortals only serve Yahweh insofar as it benefits them (1:9–11; 2:4–5).[13]

Job (6:1–7:21) pointed out that Eliphaz's explanation of retribution theology as a schema for understanding his current situation was of no use (6:14–21), for he was innocent (6:21–30; 7:20).

Bildad (8:1–22), like Eliphaz, advocated for the theology of retribution promoted by the adversary (8:3–5, 13–22). Since God does not pervert justice (8:3), Job's sons died having

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[13] Duane A. Garrett, *Job*, ed. David Lamb and Tremper Longman III, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2024), 104–110.

been given over to the penalty of their sins (8:4). Job would surely be restored from his miserable state (see chs. 6–7) if Job were indeed innocent (8:5–7). Ironically, Job *was* innocent and he would be restored—but not because of his innocence. Most clearly, Bildad's statement that "God will not reject the blameless (תָּם), and he will not uphold the hand of evildoers" (8:20) points to the theology of retribution. But in a case of dramatic irony, the audience already knows that Job *is* blameless (תָּם) as declared by both the narrator (1:1) and twice by Yahweh (1:8; 2:3). The audience can therefore recognize that Bildad's statements about God are false. Similar to Eliphaz, Bildad made two ironic predictive statements for Job. First, that God would yet give Job laughter and joy (8:21). Like Eliphaz's prediction (5:25–26), this will indeed happen, but not for the reasons either supposed. Second, Bildad's prediction that "those who hate you will be clothed with shame" (8:22) will actually apply to himself, Eliphaz, and Zophar at the conclusion of the narrative when Yahweh rebukes them and vindicates Job (42:7–8).

Job (9:1–10:22) betrays that, while still maintaining his innocence, he appears to actually agree with the sages regarding their theology of retribution (9:2; 10:14). For Job, then, since his own evil could not account for his suffering, God was therefore guilty of an injustice and so he desired his day in court to declare his innocence. Ironically, he does not know that Yahweh had already declared him blameless. Job still insisted on being guiltless (9:1, 15, 21; 10:2, 6–7) but simultaneously affirmed the "truth" of Bildad's statements regarding retribution theology (9:2). This constitutes contradictory thinking on Job's part, and is part of his character development as he grapples with the supposed wisdom traditions and the reality of his circumstances. Thus, while all four men apparently agreed on the principle of retribution theology, the three counselors assumed Job's hidden sins accounted for his suffering, while Job assumed injustice on God's part. Job noted (ironically) that none can question God's ways (9:12) while doing just that (9:2–3). As further irony, Job pointed to various elements of creation (9:5–9) as evidence of God's vast wisdom, something Yahweh himself would do in his speech to rebuke Job (chs. 38–42). He also pointed to God who would crush him in a storm (שְׂעָרָה) (9:17), something Yahweh metaphorically would do when appearing to Job in the "storm" (the homophone סְעָרָה) (38:1). Job's insistence on taking God to court (9:3, 32) implied God's injustice by punishing an innocent man.

Zophar (11:1–20) continued the other sages' assumption of Job's guilt (11:2–6, 14) and repeated the adversary's theology of retribution (11:11–16, 20). Like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar also ironically predicted Job's restoration (11:15–19) which does occur later in the narrative (42:7–17), but not for the reasons they supposed (repentance). Zophar further introduced wisdom (חָכְמָה) into the discussion of the four men. Wisdom will play a central role in the discussion of God's justice and the meaning of suffering in the remainder of the narrative.[14]

At this point, all three sages have spoken. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar all postulate retribution theology as accounting for Job's present state, and condition future restoration on his repentance.

Job (12:1–14:22) continued to maintain his innocence (12:4; 13:4, 16–19, 23) and express his desire to defend his cause to God (13:3, 15), confident of his own vindication (13:16–

[14] Namely, that there is a wisdom inaccessible to man which may account for why things happen.

19) and unimpressed with the "wisdom" and arguments of the three (12:2). Job (correctly) accused the three of speaking falsely of God by attributing partiality to him (13:7–8). Job's own contradictory understanding of his situation (noted first in chs. 9–10) continued here as he understood his current bitter condition as the reaping of his youthful sins (13:26) in the context of pessimism about a man's destiny—the brevity of a troubled life and the eternality of death (14:1–14).

Eliphaz (15:1–35) continued to rebuke Job's dogged declaration of innocence. If Job *were* correct in that the innocent suffer, then Job was undermining piety and hindering devotion to God (15:4). But since Eliphaz cannot accept the premise that the innocent suffer, he continued to charge Job of sin (15:5) and espouse the retribution theology of the adversary (15:20–34), including the theology of the spirit in the night vision (4:12–21) that mortals are inherently corrupt (15:14–16). It's clear that Eliphaz meant Job as the "sinner" who is no longer rich and whose wealth does not endure (15:29).

Job (16:1–17:16) repeated his assertions of innocence (16:17; 17:9), condemned the words of the sages as useless mockery (16:2–5; 17:2), and lamented his situation (17:6–7). He further pointed out that the wisdom of the three had failed to present a plausible understanding of his situation (17:10). The speeches thus continue to advance the notion that traditional human wisdom—including retribution theology—cannot adequately explain why the righteous suffer. With dramatic irony, the reader of Job already knows this.

Bildad (18:1–21) merely continued to propagate the retribution theology of the adversary (18:5–21), showing no interest in considering Job's arguments or even the remotest possibility that Job may indeed be innocent.

Job (19:1–29) continued to insist that God unfairly targeted him for punishment (19:6–20) because of his innocence (19:4). Ironically, Job longed for his words to be recorded (19:23–24). Whereas previously Job only held a pessimistic view of his future ending in death, now his thinking advanced to include a hope in his own resurrection (19:26) because of his redeemer's rising up (to life) on the earth (19:25). He could also hope for his vindication and the judgment of his three friends who insisted on Job's guilt and promoted retribution theology (19:28–29). This speech represents a significant advancement in Job's thinking as he now begins to distance himself from retribution theology and consider the possibility of a wisdom that goes beyond the traditional earthly wisdom and accounts for the righteous who suffer.

Zophar (20:1–29) on the other hand, still repeated the same old theology of retribution, claiming that this "wisdom" was as ancient as mankind's existence upon the earth (20:4–29). Whereas Job has begun demonstrating theological reflection and a development in his own thinking, Zophar and the other two sages did not progress beyond retribution theology, but stubbornly clung to it. For them, the abandonment of retribution theology would be catastrophic because the foundational premises of their worldview depended upon this ancient "wisdom." That Zophar was disturbed by a "spirit" (רוּחַ) (20:3)—by whom he meant Job—is ironic since

the theology of the Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar is influenced by a spirit (רוּחַ) aligned with the adversary (4:12–21).[15]

Job (21:1–34) now dared to defy the conventional wisdom of retribution theology. He expressed his own terror at the reality that the wicked prosper (21:6–13, 17–18) despite their defiance for God's ways (21:14–15). The terror stemmed not so much from evildoers prospering, but from the implications for his previous worldview which included retribution theology. He called upon the three counselors to heed the accounts of travelers who told of the wicked being spared calamity (21:29–33). Since reality contradicted the ancient wisdom, Job wanted the three to realize their claims for the necessity of Job's guilt were empty (הָבֶל) (21:34). If the wicked could prosper (and they did), then the righteous could also suffer. Job thus continued to move away from retribution theology in this speech.

Eliphaz (22:1–30) here exhibits increasingly frantic and irrational charges of Job's sins. Job's previous point that the wicked do sometimes prosper must have jolted Eliphaz and so he doubled down and insisted on Job committing a number of baseless sins (22:4–9, 15), continuing to spew the adversary's retribution theology (22:4, 19–21, 23–30). Ironically, Eliphaz's rhetorical question about what the Almighty would gain if Job's ways were blameless (22:3) is central to the entire narrative. Eliphaz of course implied that God would gain "nothing." But quite to the contrary: if Job were righteous (and he was), then the fact that the righteous suffer proves that the true Sovereign is impartial and not subject to bribes. It meant that the retribution theology of the adversary and the three sages was false.

Job (23:1–24:5) ignored Eliphaz and continued to maintain his innocence (23:6–7, 10–12) and long for a chance to vindicate himself before God (23:2–7). Job's recognition that God does whatsoever he pleases (23:13) demonstrates his continuing separation from retribution theology, a system seeking to bind God to tit-for-tat responses to humanity. In other words, this is early recognition that there is a wisdom that exceeds the human understanding of retribution theology. Job's trembling and fear because of this reality about God anticipates the twin truths in the wisdom hymn that some wisdom remains unavailable to man. Job further pointed to the realities of the innocent suffering and the guilty prospering (24:1–24), challenging the sages to prove his words wrong (24:25).

Bildad (25:1–6) offered a brief comeback simply amounting to an argument that nothing in creation can be pure; therefore, neither is Job pure. Echoing the spirit of Eliphaz's night vision (4:12–21), Bildad's claim of human repugnancy as justification for Job's blameworthiness (25:4–6) forms an inclusio on the arguments of the three sages.[16] Of course, for the three, the only escape from being a human worm is through the adversary's "wisdom" of retribution theology.

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[15] Garrett, *Job*, 268.

[16] Garrett, *Job*, 326.

While scholars point to the incoherence and brevity of this speech by Bildad as a suggestion of its extreme textual deficiencies,[17] perhaps the narrator *intentionally* left it brief and incoherent as a means of demonstrating how futile the arguments of the three sages were against Job. Job's deconstruction of the adversary's retribution theology is therefore shown unassailable. Furthermore, the so-called "cycles" of speech so far have always interspersed Job's speeches with the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Some wish to emend the text to include material by Zophar in ch. 27 during Job's dialogue, although there is no textual support warranting such a conclusion. Zophar's silence is rhetorical. Job's character development has elevated him above and away from retribution theology, while the three sages and their arguments plummet to the depths of incoherence. Bildad offers here a minimal reply, and Zophar, nothing whatsoever. The fact that the pattern of speech "cycles" breaks is, therefore, a narrative choice by the author. It serves a rhetorical purpose to highlight the descent of the three counselors and their "wisdom" of retribution theology. Their "wisdom" cannot account for Job's claims of righteousness alongside his suffering, nor the observed fact that there are times when the wicked prosper.

Job (26:1–27:23) in retort to Bildad's cosmological appeals (25:1–6) mocked the uselessness of Bildad's speech (26:2–4) and correctly insinuated that an evil spirit aligned with the adversary (as per Eliphaz's night vision [4:12–21]) had spoken from his mouth (26:4). He appealed likewise to cosmological and cosmogenic arguments (26:5–14) for the greatness of God's true wisdom. Job further swore three elements by oath: (1) that he would never lie (27:4), (2) that he would not deny his integrity by admitting the three counselors were right (27:5), and (3) that he would perpetually maintain his innocence (27:6). These oaths function as Job's final word on his integrity, and they serve as a nullification of the adversary's retribution theology and vindication of Yahweh's testimony regarding Job's blamelessness. Job had begun to move beyond retribution theology in ch. 19, and continued in an ascending trajectory in his speeches of ch. 21 and chs. 23–24. He recognized that retribution theology did not cohere with his personal experience as a righteous sufferer, nor the experience of the wicked who prosper. But in the end, he in fact had no other philosophical framework to cling to than God's justice in punishing the wicked (27:14–23). Yet even this did not resolve the issue of the righteous sufferer. The reader knows that Job's reliance on the traditional explanation of God's justice in making the wicked suffer does not resolve his dilemma, and it anticipates the wisdom hymn (ch. 28) which will explain that there is a wisdom *beyond* what man can grasp.

The **Wisdom Hymn (28:1–28)** is central to the message of Job and it offers two important conclusions regarding wisdom. First, that there is a wisdom of God which exceeds man's ability to search for and find (28:12–13, 20–21). Second, *for man*, wisdom means to fear the Lord and turn from evil (28:28). Since Job was already described by both the narrator and by Yahweh as one who fears God and turns from evil (1:1, 8; 2:3), the hymn therefore vindicates and validates Job as the human character who is truly wise, and it contrasts him against the three counselors who assume wisdom is found in the traditions of retribution theology. Yet even the identification of Job as the wise character does not resolve the central plot problem because this wise and righteous character could not understand the reason for his suffering.

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[17] See Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1030.

Is the wisdom hymn part of Job's discourse / proverb (מָשָׁל) that began in 27:1? In favor of inclusion, there is no clear grammatical break in 28:1 that demands a new speaker.[18] Yet the content differs substantially in style and substance. The suggestion by some that ch. 28 should be affixed to Elihu's speech is without textual warrant, and it betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the hymn and its place in the book of Job.

Indeed, a much weightier reason exists for excluding the hymn from Job's speech while leaving it in its present location. Critically, the message of the hymn is at odds with what Job says both before and after it. Indeed, all the human characters in the narrative assume they can explain Job's suffering based on human wisdom: for the three sages, they are certain Job has sinned. For Job, he both pointed to God's justice (ch. 27) while complaining of injustice because he knows his own blamelessness. For Elihu, who will declare himself "perfect in knowledge," he likewise insists Job must have sinned. Thus, if Job already understood that there is a wisdom known only by God and inaccessible to man, then his dilemma as a righteous sufferer would not exist and there would be no occasion for the drama in the narrative. In a case of dramatic irony, the reader of the text was already given insight into the heavenly occasion instigating Job's traumas and knows this. In other words, if the wisdom hymn were truly spoken by Job, then the whole point of the book becomes moot. Instead, the hymn functions as a guide for the reader to correctly interpret the book, and it anticipates Yahweh's speech which will emphasize the wisdom of God which is inaccessible to man.

In addition, the style of the hymn departs from the framework of the debate speeches from Job and the sages. It avoids the pronouns, accusations, defenses, and sarcasm so prevalent in the previous speeches, and it stands rather aloof of the debate while magisterially issuing claims regarding wisdom. For these reasons, the wisdom hymn is best understood as an authorial insertion to guide the reader in the proper interpretation of Job, and not as part of Job's speech. Ultimately, the wisdom hymn confirms what the reader has known ever since the prologue: outside of the Promised Land, there are reasons beyond the grasp of man's understanding and wisdom to explain the suffering of the righteous. One's life situation therefore cannot be viewed as a lens for determining their relationship with God. Rather, true wisdom is to fear God and turn away from evil.

Anticipating his soon departure to the grave (30:23), **Job's final testimony (29:1–31:40)** presented a testament of his legacy contrasting the former days of splendor (29:1–25) against his present humiliation and suffering (30:1–31). Resigned to death and no longer demanding an audience with God in court, he offered a final defense to all the accusations against him (31:1–40), ultimately reaffirming his innocence. These declarations function to nullify the adversary's retribution theology because Job did not suffer on account of sin, and they vindicate Yahweh's testimony regarding Job's blamelessness. Whereas the end of Job's words leaves the reader hoping for an audience with the Almighty (31:35), instead they are given the verbose and rambling speeches of Elihu.

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[18] While the conjunction כִּי at the beginning of 28:1 may signal an explanatory thought of Job's previous words, it is not necessarily so. כִּי is regularly used as the initial word in a discourse, and is probably its function here in Job 28:1 (Garrett, *Job*, 355–56).

Elihu (32:1–37:24) ultimately functions as a buffoonish parody of the three sages, leaving no doubt for the reader that retribution theology is incorrect. The name אֱלִיהוּא means, "My God is He." His father's name בַּרַכְאֵל means, "Blessed of God / El." Coming as he does from the clan of Ram (רָם), the Israelite reader may hope that this *possibly* Israelite character will set all the Gentile characters (Job and the three) straight as he speaks for God.

Instead, they receive the imprudent Elihu who magnifies the false arguments of the three sages and ultimately guides the reader to realize the foolishness of their arguments. This is so for several reasons. First, despite Elihu's own claims of timidity in speech (32:6), perfect knowledge (36:4), and speaking on behalf of God (36:2), the narrator introduced Elihu as "angry" (32:2 [twice], 3, 5) and "young" (32:6, 9). In wisdom literature, being angry and young are two deleterious traits (e.g., Prov 7:7; 22:15; 14:29, 15:18) and so the narrator immediately characterized Elihu negatively. Second, Elihu's conclusion that Shaddai does not regard the wise of heart (37:24) ironically applies to Elihu himself. Yahweh ignored ("did not regard") Elihu's long-winded speech, bypassing him entirely and instead answering only Job (38:1) in response to Job's cry for an answer (31:35). In so doing, Yahweh showed Elihu that of the five men, only Job was wise among them (28:28). Thus, the introduction and conclusion of Elihu frame his speeches negatively.

Third, Elihu claimed he would not answer Job with the same arguments as the three aged counselors (32:14), but ultimately spews out the same retribution theology as the three had already done (33:8–12; 34:7–12, 26–28; 36:3, 6–21; 37:13, 23). He even repeated (or alluded to) Eliphaz's night vision as a source of wisdom (33:15–18; see 4:12–21). For Elihu, Job is necessarily guilty (34:36–37), as with the three counselors.

Fourth, the language in Elihu's speeches exhibits unintelligibility, clumsiness, and rhetorical ineptitude. For example, "When [Elihu] declares that his belly is full of wind and is ready to burst (32:18–20) … He means that he has a lot [of ostensibly wise things] to say, but it sounds like he has gas."[19] Indeed, as one scholar concluded: "Though Elihu carefully frames his arguments through phonetic *apologias* and critiques, his words constantly escape him in such a way that they undermine the legitimacy of his voice."[20] He frequently avoided the inclusion of essential words in his sentences, leading not only to difficulty of interpretation, but also to a general level of incomprehension on some points.[21] Elihu's arguments therefore drown in his own inept words. His claim that Job opens his mouth in empty talk without knowledge (35:16) is later answered when Yahweh announced his wrath against the three sages with whom Elihu is aligned, and Job vindicated by his correct speech (42:7). Furthermore, despite Elihu's claims of perfect knowledge (36:4), Yahweh's first words (though spoken to Job) serve as a rebuke against Elihu's words: "Who is this darkening counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:1). The answer: Elihu and the three sages.

The cartoonish Elihu and his nonsensical speeches (32:1–37:24), then, epitomize the worldly wisdom tradition of retribution theology as portrayed by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

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[19] Garrett, *Job*, 412.

[20] Matthew J. Lynch, "Bursting at the Seams: Phonetic Rhetoric in the Speeches of Elihu," *JSOT* 30, no. 3 (2006): 363.

[21] Garrett, *Job*, 414. Garrett also pointed out how translators unfortunately smooth out Elihu's choppy words in a way that makes the English Bible reader think Elihu is more coherent than he actually is.

The arguments of Elihu ultimately sink under the weight of their ostensibly weighty truth. He is an angry, young, and overconfident fool who lacks the awareness to even recognize his own absurdity.

Yahweh's speech (38:1–42:6) functions to expound on the wisdom hymn's conclusion that some wisdom exists beyond human accessibility. Appearing to Job in a storm (38:1), Yahweh's rhetorical questions regarding Job's knowledge of, and ability to govern, the earth, sea, sky, and creatures (38:3–39:30) serve to highlight that God's wisdom far exceeds human capability and knowledge. Job therefore recognized his unworthiness to accuse the Almighty of injustice (40:3–8). Yahweh's illustrations of the behemoth (40:15–24) and the leviathan (40:25–41:26 MT [41:1–34]) contrast Job's inability to control these great creatures with God's sovereignty to approach them with the sword (40:19). Yahweh's speech resulted in Job's repentance for accusing God of injustice (42:1–6). Job's repentance applied to his speech espousing the ideas that (1) through "wisdom," he could explain human suffering and blessing, and (2) God had acted unjustly according to the "wisdom" of retribution theology.

Through the speech, Job never came to learn of the adversary's challenge to Yahweh's character. In a case of dramatic irony, the audience, who knows about the adversary's challenge to Yahweh's character in the prologue, continues to know more than the character Job does. The audience, in fact, had a preliminary awareness of the book's conclusion ever since the prologue: suffering and blessing may occur for reasons that exceed man's ability to know. This aligns with the wisdom hymn (ch. 28) and with Yahweh's speech. Retribution theology is thus shown to be false, and the adversary's accusation that men only worship Yahweh for gain is proven false.

In the **epilogue (42:7–17)**, Yahweh's anger at the three sages for their untruthful statements (42:7) further validates that their espousal of retribution theology was incorrect. Since the three sages—and by extension, Elihu, for he believed the same—functioned as the advocates of the adversary, their dismissal here therefore proves the adversary's accusation's false.[22] Yahweh's statement here about their false speech resolves plot tension concerning the adversary's charge that Yahweh bribes men for worship (1:9–11; 2:4–5). He does not. Job is the successful "test case" demonstrating this.

Job's restoration of fortunes (42:10–17) is secondary in the plot to the vindication of Yahweh's character, although it does resolve Job's tragedy by concluding his life in a literary comedy. Job's actions impacted neither the removal of his fortunes nor their restoration. The Israelite readers of the book of Job could thus recognize that outside the Promised Land and the Mosaic Covenant, one's circumstances in life bore no indication of one's right standing before God. Rather, reasons known only to God (wisdom inaccessible to mankind) may account for the apparent blessing or cursing of Gentiles in Gentile lands. Thus, the author of Job used this wisdom narrative to dissuade his Israelite audience from ascribing retribution theology to Yahweh.

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[22] The phrase כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב (42:7), as suggested by Garrett, may be translated as, "because you have not spoken the truth in my presence, as my servant Job has" (Garrett, *Job*, 570). While אֵלַי would normally mean, "to me," the three sages never actually addressed God, so this is best understood as locative.

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