Job

Robert Alter offers the following introduction:

The Book of Job is in several ways the most mysterious book of the Hebrew Bible. Formally, as a sustained debate in poetry, it resembles no other text in the canon. Theologically, as a radical challenge to the doctrine of reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked, it dissents from a consensus view of biblical writers—a dissent compounded by its equally radical rejection of the anthropocentric conception of creation that is expressed in biblical texts from Genesis onward. Its astounding poetry eclipses all other biblical poetry, working in the same formal system but in a style that is often distinct both lexically and imagistically from its biblical counterparts. Despite all these anomalous traits, it was quickly embraced by the framers of biblical tradition: extensive fragments of an Aramaic translation found in the caves at Qumran suggest that by the second century B.C.E. the Dead Sea sectarians (and no doubt others) already regarded Job as part of the incipient canon of sacred texts.

As is the case with so many other biblical books, we know nothing about the author of Job—not his class background and certainly not any of his biographical details and not even with any certainty the time when he wrote. Some scholars, perplexed by the many peculiarities of the book, and especially by the linguistic ones, have speculated that it is a translation from Aramaic, or Edomite, or even Arabic. There is virtually no evidence for such ascriptions, and they seem especially untenable in light of the greatness of the Hebrew poetry of Job, rich as it is in strong rhythmic effects, virtuosic wordplay and sound-play—qualities that a translation would be very unlikely to exhibit.

The Book of Job belongs to the international movement of ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature in its universalist perspective—there are no Israelite characters in the text, though all the speakers are monotheists, and there is no reference to covenantal history or to the nation of Israel—and it is equally linked with Wisdom literature in its investigation of the problem of theodicy. The troubling phenomenon of the suffering of the just is addressed in roughly analogous texts both in Mesopotamia and Egypt, but any direct influence of these on the Job poet is questionable. Scholars have often assumed that there were Wisdom schools in ancient Israel and elsewhere in the region where disciples guided by teachers mastered, and in all likelihood memorized, instructional texts and imbibed the general principles for leading a just and prudent life. It is hard to imagine that the Job poet could have been part of any such institutional setting, given the radical nature of his views. One should probably think of him, then, as a writer working alone—a bold dissenting thinker and a poet of genius who produced a book of such power that Hebrew readers soon came to feel they couldn't do without it, however vehement its swerve from the views of the biblical majority.

Dating the Text

No confident agreement among scholars on the date of the book has been reached. There are still a few stubborn adherents to the view that it was composed early in the First Temple period, although, as I shall explain, the linguistic evidence argues against that notion. The frame-story (chapters 1 and 2, concluded in chapter 42) is in all likelihood a folktale that had been in circulation for centuries, probably through oral transmission. In the original form of the story, with no debate involved, the three companions would not have appeared: instead, Job would have been tested through the wager between God and the Adversary, undergone his sufferings, and in the end would have had his fortunes splendidly restored. A passing mention in Ezekiel 14:14 and 19 of Job, together with Noah and Daniel

(not the Daniel of the biblical book), as one of three righteous men saved from disaster, reflects the presence of a Job figure—perhaps featuring in the same plot as that of the frame-story—in earlier folk-tradition. The author of the Book of Job, however, has either reworked an old text or formulated his own text on the basis of oral tradition, using archaizing language. There is an obvious effort in the frame-story to evoke the patriarchal age, though in a foreign land with non-Israelites, but the neat symmetries of formulaic numbers and the use of prose refrains resemble nothing in the Patriarchal narrative in Genesis. The style of the frame-story gives the general impression of early First Commonwealth Hebrew prose, but here and there a trait of Late Biblical Hebrew shows through—for example, the use of the verb *qabel* in 2:10 for "accept," a verb that occurs in late texts such as Esther and Chronicles but not in earlier biblical writing. Other late usages, such as a couple of the prepositions that follow verbs there, have been detected by Avi Hurvitz, a historian of biblical Hebrew.

Linguist Evidence

The poetry incorporates a noticeably higher proportion of terms borrowed from the Aramaic than does other biblical poetry. In some cases, even Aramaic grammatical suffixes are used, something that a translator from Aramaic would probably have avoided but that would have come naturally to a writer who was hearing a good deal of Aramaic all around him and probably actively spoke it himself together with Hebrew. (To cite one recurrent example: the Aramaic *milin*, "words," which would replace early biblical *devarim* in later Hebrew, appears thirty-four times in Job out of a total of thirty-eight biblical occurrences, and the Aramaic plural ending -in, instead of the Hebrew -im, is used several times.) All this suggests a historical moment when Aramaic was in the process of beginning to replace Hebrew as the vernacular of the Judahite population. That would place the Job poet in the fifth century or perhaps as early as the later sixth century B.C.E., though it is impossible to be more precise, and one cannot exclude an early fourth-century setting…

Structure

After the opening two chapters of the frame-story, the core of the book is introduced by Job's harrowing death-wish poem (chapter 3), to which God will offer a direct rejoinder at the beginning of the speech from the whirlwind. There are then three rounds of debate between Job and his three reprovers, each of the three speaking in turn and he replying to each. The third round of the debate was somehow damaged in scribal transmission. Bildad is given only a truncated speech, and the third contribution of Zophar to the debate seems to have disappeared entirely. In any case, after these three rounds, Job concludes the discussion with a lengthy profession of innocence in which he also recalls his glory days before he was overwhelmed by catastrophe (chapters 27 and 29–31, with his speech interrupted by the Hymn to Wisdom of chapter 28). At this point, in the original text, the LORD would have spoken out from the whirlwind, but a lapse in judgment by an ancient editor postponed that brilliant consummation for six chapters in which the tedious Elihu is allowed to hold forth.

Job: A Theological Argument

The Book of Job is, of course, a theological argument, but it is a theological argument conducted in poetry, and careful attention to the role that poetry plays in the argument may put what is said in a somewhat different light from the one in which it is generally viewed. The debate between Job and his three adversarial friends and then God's climactic speech to Job exhibit three purposefully deployed levels of poetry. The bottom level is manifested in the language of reproof of the three companions. In

keeping with the conventional moral views that they complacently defend, the poetry they speak abounds in familiar formulations closely analogous to what one encounters in many passages in Psalms and Proverbs. What this means is that much of their poetry verges on cliché. The Job poet, however, is too subtle an artist merely to assign bad verse to them, which would have the effect of setting them up too crudely as straw men in the debate. Thus, there are moments when their poetry catches fire, conveying to us a sense that even the spokesmen for wrongheaded ideas may exercise a certain power of vision. One might also surmise that this writer was too good a poet to be able to resist the temptation of creating for the three companions some lines and even whole passages of fine poetry.

In any case, the stubborn authenticity of Job's perception of moral reality is firmly manifested in the power of the poetry he speaks, which clearly transcends the poetry of his reprovers. The deathwish poem that initiates his discourse is a brilliantly apt prelude to all that follows. Biblical poetry in general works through a system of intensifications, heightening or focusing or concretizing the utterance of the first verset of a line in the approximate semantic parallelism of the second verset (and in triadic lines, this process of intensification often moves on from the second verset to the third). When Job takes up his complaint in poetry in chapter 3, he exploits this inherent dynamic of biblical verse to burrow progressively deeper into the aching core of his suffering. Anguish has rarely been given more powerful expression. All this begins in the very first line he speaks, a pounding rhythm in the initial verset, *yoʾvad yom ʾiwaled bo*, "Annul the day that I was born," followed by the second verset, "and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.'" In the pattern of intensification evident here, Job, longing for relief from pain through nonexistence, wants to wipe out not just the event of his birth, in the first verset, but going back nine months and moving from day to night, his very conception, evoked in the second verset. The mention of night then triggers a long chain of images of night and darkness, each deepening the effect of the ones that precede it…

Job uses metaphor

Still another source of metaphor tapped by the Job poet, beyond quotidian reality and nature, is mythology. The mythological register, too, is invoked in Job's first poem, when the amplitude of the curse he brings down on the night he was conceived is extended through these words: "Let the day-cursers hex it, / those ready to rouse Leviathan" (3:8). Leviathan, who will be mentioned quite a few times in the course of the poem, sometimes under other names, before he makes his full-scale appearance at the climax of the Voice from the Whirlwind, is the fearsome sea monster of Canaanite mythology (in some versions, he has seven heads) who had to be subdued by the weather god whose realm is the dry land. The day-cursers, we may infer, about whom little is known, are also mythological figures, able to exert a magical power through language—to this Job himself in this opening poem aspires—even over the dreaded beast of the sea, enemy of the ordered realm of creation. The poetry of Job, then, at least in its metaphors, reaches deep into the chaotic sea, up to the stars where celestial beings dwell, and down into the kingdom of death, that shadowy underworld bordered by a Current that can be crossed only in one direction. In this poem where intensification is the key to so much, mythology serves as the ultimate intensifier.

The third—and, ultimately, decisive—level of poetry in the book is manifested when the LORD addresses Job out of the whirlwind. Here, too, the Job poet's keen interest in nature is evident, but in an altogether spectacular way that, one might say, trumps Job in the game of vision. The poet, having given Job such vividly powerful language for the articulation of his outrage and his anguish, now fashions still

greater poetry for God. The wide-ranging panorama of creation in the Voice from the Whirlwind shows a sublimity of expression, a plasticity of description, an ability to evoke the complex and dynamic interplay of beauty and violence in the natural world, and even an originality of metaphoric inventiveness that surpasses all the poetry, great as it is, that Job has spoken. Many readers over the centuries have felt that God's speech to Job is no real answer to the problem of undeserved suffering, and some have complained that it amounts to a kind of cosmic bullying of puny man by an overpowering deity. One must concede that it is not exactly an answer to the problem because for those who believe that life should not be arbitrary there can be no real answer concerning the good person who loses a child (not to speak of ten children) or the blameless dear one who dies in an accident or is stricken with a terrible wasting disease. But God's thundering challenge to Job is not bullying. Rather, it rousingly introduces a comprehensive overview of the nature of reality that exposes the limits of Job's human perspective, anchored as it is in the restricted compass of human knowledge and the inevitable egoism of suffering. The vehicle of that overview is an order of poetry created to match the grandeur—or perhaps the omniscience—of God. The visionary experience that this poetry enables for Job is of a vast creation shot through with unfathomable paradoxes, such as the conjoining of the nurturing instinct with cruelty, where in place of the sufferer's longing for absolute darkness the morning stars sing together and there is a rhythmic interplay between light and darkness. Poetry of such virtuosity and power, dependent as it must be on the expressive force of the original words and their ordering, is bound to pale in translation.[1]

Michael Austin on the challenges to Job and ways to read the text

1. The story challenges much of the theology of the Bible.[2]

---

[1] Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, Volume 3*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2019, p.547-464.

[2] Much of the Hebrew Bible has been influenced by the Deuteronomist. This person or persons had a theology that helped to make sense of the world by teaching that when we do good, we are blessed and when we do bad, we are cursed (see Deuteronomy 28). While this teaching does often hold up under many circumstances, the very point of the bulk of the Book of Job is that in his life, Job is a dramatic exception to this idea. This brings us to conclude that Job is trying to tackle theodicy, or the problem of evil. I have read authors who argue both sides of this and do not agree. While I will not try to solve the problem of evil in this podcast, the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope that exists outside of the text of the Book of Job. President Packer put it this way:

"The course of our mortal life, from birth to death, conforms to eternal law and follows a plan described in the revelations as the great plan of happiness. The one idea, the one truth I would inject into your minds, is this: There are three parts to the plan. You are in the second or the middle part, the one in which you will be tested by temptation, by trials, perhaps by tragedy. Understand that and you will be better able to make sense of life and to resist the disease of doubt and despair and depression.

"The plan of redemption, with its three divisions, might be likened to a grand three-act play. Act 1 is entitled 'Premortal Life.' The scriptures describe it as our first estate (see Jude 1:6; Abraham 3:26, 28). Act 2, from birth to the time of resurrection, is the 'Second Estate.' And act 3 is called 'Life After Death' or 'Eternal Life.'

"In mortality, we are like actors who enter a theater just as the curtain goes up on the second act. We have missed act 1. The production has many plots and subplots that interweave, making it difficult to figure out who relates to whom and what relates to what, who are the heroes and who are the villains. It is further complicated because we are not just spectators; we are members of the cast, on stage, in the middle of it all!" Boyd K. Packer, The Play and the Plan [CES fireside for young adults, 7 May 1995], 1–2. See: The Great Plan of Happiness, Book of Mormon Teacher Resource Manual, 2004.

2. When Job speaks of a גָּאַל "Redeemer," he is not necessarily prophesying of Jesus Christ. He is invoking his right to an avenger. The Hebrew root word that Job uses here (and which Christian translators have long translated as "Redeemer") is *ga'al*, which means something more like "avenger" or "reputation fixer." This was someone who had the charge to preserve the reputation of a deceased family member. The role of a ga'al varied widely depending on the circumstances. It could require someone to avenge a death with bloodshed or to provide evidence exonerating somebody who died under a cloud of suspicion. But it could also include marrying a deceased man's wife and siring children in his name – as Boaz did with Ruth, acting in his role as ga'al.[3]

3. The finale of Job, in which he is richly rewarded for his faithfulness, is part of the frame, not the poem, which means that it is part of what the author is trying to undercut. The traditional Job story ends with God restoring Job's health and doubling his property. If we take this as the ultimate meaning of the Book of Job, we will end up reinstating all of the assumptions about rewards and punishments that the poet worked so hard to get us to reject. It is crucial, therefore, that we understand that this final scene is part of the frame tale, not the poem, and that one of the most important functions of the poem is to question the ideology of the frame.[4]

4. The much lauded "patience of Job" ends with chapter 2, after which Job complains almost constantly about God. The phrase "the patience of Job" has become idiomatic among people who have never opened a Bible. Religious materials often collaborate to reinforce this reading by ignoring virtually all of the poem and focusing on the lessons of the frame. This ensures that the Book of Job says the sorts of things that Bible stories are supposed to say. It tells us to worship God in good times and bad – and it warns us against forsaking God and "sinning with our lips." It gives us a great example of a man who loses everything and remains steadfast – and who is rewarded in the end for his patience and faith. And it allows us to comfort (but really to criticize) those who are complaining about something in their own lives with the allegedly cheery thought that, at least, they aren't as bad off as Job.[5]

5. The Job poet ultimately insists that being a good friend is more important that holding firmly to religious orthodoxy- and this, I believe, is the poem's most consequential critique of the Deuteronomist. Deuteronomy tells us that we must reject (often by stoning to death) friends and family members who stray from the faith. It leaves no room for loving people when we think they are wrong.[6]

Richard L. Evans shared this as a way of tackling the problem of evil and pain:

Some of the ponderable problems, the unanswered questions, the seeming injustices and discrepancies and uncertainties...which we often have a difficult time in reconciling, will find answer and solution and satisfaction if we are patient and prayerful and willing to wait. Part of them are the price we pay for our free agency. We pay a great price for free agency in this world, but it is worth the price we pay. So long as men have their free agency, there will be temporary injustices and discrepancies and some seemingly inexplicable things, which ultimately in our Father's own time and purpose will be reconciled and made right. Richard L. Evans, *Improvement Era*, Jun. 1952, 435.

[3] Michael Austin, *Re-Reading Job: Understanding the Ancient World's Greatest Poem*, Greg Kofford Books, 2014, p. 9.

[4] Austin, p. 10.

[5] Austin, p. 7.

[6] Ibid., p. 101. On Austin's claims that Deuteronomy condones stoning others for their alternate beliefs, see Deuteronomy 13.6-11. Elder Ballard emphasized the importance of people when he said, "Occasionally we find some who become so energetic in their Church service that their lives become unbalanced. They start believing

6. The Job poet dared to critique, and dismantle, the most powerful religious orthodoxy of his culture by confronting it with a set of facts that it could not accommodate. But beyond refuting this one particular orthodoxy, the poet demonstrated for us in excruciating detail how rigid orthodoxies of any kind can cause us to renounce both overwhelming evidence and basic human decency before abandoning our most cherished beliefs. The most profound readings of Job, I believe, recognize that the great poem is not just about suffering, or retribution, or God, or Satan, or knowing that Redeemers live; it is about how rigid orthodoxies can destroy our relationships and, thereby, our humanity.[7] Under the law, with its jealous and demanding God, all bonds of family and friendship must be sacrificed to ideology when a conflict between them occurs… This aspect of Deuteronomistic religion would eventually become the focus of the intense critique that we now call the Sermon on the Mount. There and elsewhere, Jesus argued that we cannot separate our relationship with other people from our relationship with God. Human beings matter, even if they are women taken in adultery, or prodigal sons, or members of foreign tribes- all of whom, according to the Deuteronomist, had to be put to death. Jesus begged to differ (see Matt 25.40). This was perhaps the most important theme of Christ's earthly ministry.[8]

Job 1-2: The first section of the frame

1. There was a man named Job,[9] a perfect man from Uz (Job 1.1).[10]
2. Job was wealthy and had ten children (Job 1.2-3).

---

that the programs they administer are more important than the people they serve. They complicate their service with needless frills and embellishments that occupy too much time, cost too much money, and sap too much energy...One of the most important things we do through the gospel of Jesus Christ is to build people. Properly serving others requires effort to understand them as individuals—their personalities, their strengths, their concerns, their hopes and dreams—so that the correct help and support can be provided. Frankly, it's much easier to just manage programs than it is to understand and truly serve people...Our goal should always be to use the programs of the Church as a means to lift, encourage, assist, teach, love, and perfect people...Programs are tools. Their management and staffing must not take priority over the needs of the people they are designed to bless and to serve." M. Russell Ballard, "O Be Wise," *Ensign*, Nov 2006, 17-18.

[7] Austin, p. 101.

[8] Ibid., p. 100.

[9] Job, אִיּוֹב *ee-yobe*, whose name potentially means either "Where is the divine father?" or "the persecuted one," is a non-Israelite living in an unnaturally idyllic world. He is rich and healthy, has a large and loving family, and is esteemed as the greatest man of his people. Furthermore, he is a member of a community with strong social bonds, a shared religion, and a common language. Job experiences all of this as the presence and friendship of God (see Job 29:2–7) and responds by living blamelessly, serving his fellow man, and defending the poor (see Job 1:1, 29:11–25). Nonetheless, as subsequent events will demonstrate, Job is, as yet, lacking both in self-knowledge and knowledge of God. He has personally experienced only goodness, tasting only the sweet. Mack Stirling, Job: An LDS Reading, *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 12 (2014), p. 131-132. Note that he is from עוּץ, the word for counsel, or plan. This word is also associated with the tree: עֵץ , *etz*. Indeed, the word uz means "wooded." He is in the garden!

[10] These initial words signal the fablelike character of the frame-story. The opening formula, "A man there was," *ʾish haya*, resembles the first words of Nathan's parable of the poor man's ewe in 2 Samuel 12, "Two men there were in a single town," *shney ʾanashim hayu beʿir ahạt*. The more classical formula for starting a story in Hebrew narrative is "there was a man," *wayehi ʾish*, the order of verb and subject reversed and the converted imperfect form of the verb used. Alter, p. 465.

3. The sons of God… the Satan came among them. The dialogue between "The Satan"[11] and God (Job 1.6-12).[12]
4. Job's children die, his wealth is lost (Job 1.13-20).
5. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return… blessed shall be the name of the Lord" (Job 1.21).
6. The Satan approaches God again and ups the ante (Job 2.1-6).
7. Job is smitten with boils "foot to crown" and his wife tells him to curse God and die (Job 2.7-9).
8. "In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2.10).
9. Job's three friends sit with him saying not a word for seven days (Job 2.13).

The Wisdom Dialogue: Job 3-27

1. Job's initial speech (Job 3).
2. Eliphaz's first speech (Job 4-5).[13]

---

[11] הַשָּׂטָן hasatan is different than satan. The definite article before "Satan" would render a better translation as "The Satan." When read in the context of the divine council of divine beings that was discussed in the ancient world this character makes more sense. Berlin and Brettler explain:

Similar meetings of the Lord enthroned on His heavenly throne and all the heavenly host standing before Him on either side are reported by the prophet Micaiah son of Imlah in 1 Kings 22.19-23, by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6, and in Ps. 82 and Dan. 7.9-10. The members of the heavenly court, here and in Ps. 82 called divine beings (here literally bene Elohim בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים "sons of the gods"; in Ps. 82.2 lit. "gods") are called in 1 Kings 22 "the heavenly host"; in Job 4.18 they are called "servants" and "angels"; in 15.15 they are called "holy ones" and "the heavens," while in 25.5 they are identified with the moon and stars, who, with the sun, are called "the whole heavenly host" in Deut. 4.19. Typically, these divine beings, though they have great power, may not act independently of God. **The Adversary, or "the Accuser," Heb "*hasatan*," is one of the divine beings**. He functions as a kind of prosecuting attorney, and should not be confused with the character of Satan as it developed in the late biblical (see 1 Chron. 21.1) and especially the postbiblical period, that is, the source of evil and rebellion against God. (Heb "ha-" is the definite article, which cannot precede a proper noun, "Satan.") Later, the idea of Satan developed into the devil, but these associations were not present at the time of our story. Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1506. While I see much that I agree with in Berlin and Brettler's assessment of the *hasatan*, I do see early conceptions of a power or force that opposes the council of the gods from early texts, documents that predate the postbiblical period by several hundred years. This force is usually personified as the sea or a dragon. For more on this idea (as I am still in the process of collecting many of these ideas from the texts that I am working with and do not as yet have a paper on this topic) see Book of Mormon Central, Why did Lehi "Suppose" the Existence of Satan? Some books that I have read on this topic include John Day's *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, Cambridge University Press, 1985. See also: Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, Princeton University Press, 1989.

[12] This celestial entourage is a literary vestige of the premonotheistic notion of a council of the gods and is reflected in several of the canonical psalms (perhaps, most notably, in Psalm 82). The Hebrew is rendered as הַשָּׂטָן *hasatan*, and it invariably uses the definite article because the **designation indicates a function, not a proper name**. The word *satan* is a person, thing, or set of circumstances that constitutes an obstacle or frustrates one's purposes. Only toward the very end of the biblical period would the term begin to drop the definite article and refer to a demonic figure. Marvin Pope imagines *hasatan* here as a kind of intelligence agent working for God, but the dialogue suggests rather an element of jealousy (when God lavishes praise on Job) and cynical mean-spiritedness. Alter, p. 466. Michael Austin also discusses the role that the Satan plays on pages 29-42 of his book *Re-Reading Job: Understanding the Ancient World's Greatest Poem*, Greg Kofford Books, 2014.

[13] Job's "comforters" aren't much comfort. We get this term for Job's friends from Job 2.11, "for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." Austin notes the difficulties:

3. Job's response (Job 6-7).[14]
4. Bildad's first speech (Job 8).
5. Job's response (Job 9-10).
6. Zophar's first speech (Job 11).
7. Job's response (Job 12-14).
8. Eliphaz's second speech (Job 15).
9. Job's response (Job 16-17).
10. Bildad's second speech (Job 18).
11. Job's response (Job 19).[15]
12. Zophar's second speech (Job 20).
13. Job's response (Job 21).
14. Eliphaz's third speech (Job 22).
15. Job's response (Job 23-24).
16. Bildad's third speech (Job 25).
17. Job's response (Job 26-27). [Note: Zophar does not give a third speech]

The Hymn to Wisdom: Job 28

1. Mankind seeks out silver, gold, always seeking treasure. Yet man's technology is nothing in comparison to the value of real wisdom (Job 28.1-17).
2. God is the source of wisdom, and to fear the Lord, this is wisdom (Job 28.18-28).

The first comforter, Eliphaz, takes his role seriously. He does not (at least initially) suggest that Job suffers because he has sinned. Rather, he says everything that he can to try to make Job feel better. But his suggestions fall flat. They sound a lot like the kinds of suggestions we might today call "Sunday-School answers": pray, read the scriptures, follow the prophet, etc. These are the sorts of answers that one might give about a theoretical person's suffering ("Yes, Mr. Brown, I know that you have had a bad day with all of your children dying and all, but try to remember that your Father in Heaven loves you"). But these answers do not respond in any significant way to Job's real suffering. How could they? Austin, p. 45-46.

[14] Note Job's barbed response to Eliphaz:
My brothers betrayed like a wadi,
like the channel of brooks that run dry.
They are dark from the ice,
snow heaped on them.
When they warm, they are gone,
in the heat they melt from their place.
The paths that they go on are winding,
they mount in the void and are lost.
(Job 6.15-18, Robert Alter translation)

[15] Job claims that God is not just:
הֵן אֶצְעַק חָמָס וְלֹא אֵעָנֶה אֲשַׁוַּע וְאֵין מִשְׁפָּט
"Look, I scream "Outrage!" I am not answered, I shout and there is no justice." (Robert Alter translation)
"Dude! I cry out for help due to violence (hamas) and I am not answered, I will cry out and still there is no mishpat/justice/fairness." (Mike Day translation)

Mishpat, a justly ordered society, is one of the foundational values of Judaism. The prophets railed against the absence of mishpat in the days of kings who abused their power. See: Mishpat, The Jewish Chronicle.

Job's Final Speech: Job 29-31

1. Job longs for his past days, in כְּיַרְחֵי־קֶדֶם "in the moons of yore" (Job 29.2).[16] He was one who helped the blind, the poor, and the stranger (Job 29.3-25).
2. Job laments his cursed condition (Job 30.1-31).
3. Job declares his innocence "A pact I sealed with my eyes- I will not gaze on a virgin" (Job 31.1), and affirms the virtuous life that he has led (Job 31.5-13).
4. Job declares that he was a worthy man who cared for the poor and the fatherless (Job 31.16-40).

The Speeches of Elihu: Job 32-37[17]

1. Elihu also reiterates Eliphaz's idea that God uses suffering to chasten men and bring them to repentance (Job 33:19–27, 5:17–18). This idea is true in a sense (as Elihu mixes truth with lies), but it does not apply to Job in his circumstance.
2. Elihu emphasizes that Job is wicked, and that God will not pervert judgment, therefore it is Job who is wrong, not God (Job 34.1-12).
3. Elihu emphasizes that God controls all things and that he brings the wicked into judgment (Job 34.21-28).[18]

---

[16] כְּיַרְחֵי־קֶדֶם as in the moons of *qedem* or the east. **I like the directional use here. Facing east, seeing things this way was to see into the past**. Robin Baker explains, "In archaic biblical contexts, in poetic passages but occasionally also in prose, [east and west] appear as *qedem*, 'fore', and *ʾāḥōr*, 'hind', respectively – indications of true orientation. The early Israelite ergo faced east. In keeping with this, south and north were referred to as *yāmīn*, 'right', and *śəmōʾl*, 'left', respectively. Indeed, all four of these archaic designations are to be found in a single passage in Job (23:8–9): 'Behold, I go forward (*qedem*, that is, east), but he is not there; and backward (*ʾāḥōr*, that is, west), but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand (*śəmōʾl*, that is, north) I seek him, but I cannot behold him; I turn to the right hand (*yāmīn*, that is, south), but I cannot see him.' [. . .] The Hebrew words *qedem* and *ʾāḥōr*, are not only spatially applied but are used temporally. *Qedem* has a dual meaning just as does the English word 'before', while *ʾāḥōr*, spatially 'behind' is also temporal 'after', or 'future'. *Qedem*, meaning past, is so common in Biblical Hebrew that no examples are necessary… In summary, the ancient concept of the flow of time is, outwardly, the very opposite of the modern, western, one, in which we look forward into the future and walk into it, while the past remains behind us… The **early Israelites** – and probably the ancient Semites in general – **regarded the past as revealed and spread out before them**, while the future lay behind them, unseen and unknown. Thus, they progressed backwards into the future. It is like a rower in a boat who faces the stern and rows 'backwards' through the water. Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women, Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges*, Brill Academic, 2022, p. 98-99. This strange way of seeing direction and time to us is right at home in the ancient Near Eastern conception of time and space. Note how this directly ties into the statement made in Alma 13, "And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children" (Alma 13.1). Alma then expounds something way back in the past: the pre-earth life. Yet he is asking his audience to "cite their minds forward." This makes sense if we read it and understand this idea in its context.

[17] In chapters 32–37, Job will face his last and possibly greatest test by Elihu. Elihu will try, without success, to engage Job in dialogue in order to bring him back to unity with the friends and derail his quest for God's face. Mack Stirling, Job: An LDS Reading, *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 12 (2014), p. 153.

[18] Elihu's picture of God dogging every man's steps in order to bring punishment on him as soon as he sins (see Job 34:21–25) reeks a bit of compulsion. This suspicion is strengthened by considering Elihu's rhetorical question: "Who gave him charge over the earth?" (Job 34:13, rsv). Elihu's assumed "no one" suggests a God who unilaterally imposes His will on mankind. This idea is subverted by D&C 121:46, which speaks of everlasting (divine) dominion as proceeding without compulsory means, in contrast to Satan's plan of compulsion (see Moses 4:1–4). Stirling, p. 160.

4. Elihu condemns Job as wicked and rebellious (Job 34.35-37).
5. Elihu further condemns Job as one who "multiplieth words without knowledge" (Job 35.16).
6. He tells Job that God will not respond to his cry, nor come to him (Job 35.9-16).
7. Elihu puts himself equal with God (Job 36.2-4; 37.16).[19]
8. Elihu states that we cannot know God (Job 36.26; 37.22-23).[20]
9. Elihu can represent the "final barrier Job must pass before speaking with God at the veil."[21]

God Answers Job, as he approaches the veil: Job 38-42.6[22]

1. God's first speech: Where were you Job, when I laid the foundations of creation? Job is invited to consider the great questions, things that he cannot possibly answer (Job 38.1-39.30).
2. Job's first nonresponse (Job 40.1-5).[23]

---

[19] Elihu begins his fourth speech (see Job 36–37) with an astounding claim: "I have yet something to say on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar … for truly my words are not false: one who is perfect in knowledge is with you" (Job 36:2–4, rsv; emphasis added). Shortly after, Elihu extols God as one "who is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16). Thus, he puts himself alongside and equal to God in a sense. The implication is that since Elihu shares common knowledge with God, his words are the words of God. Job must therefore decide whether to accept Elihu as a true prophet or continue to wait on the Lord. Hoping that Job will indeed give up his quest for God and accept him instead, Elihu reminds Job once more of his sin and urges him to repent (see Job 36:17–21). Ibid., p. 161.
[20] Behold, God is great, and ***we know him not***" (Job 36:26, rsv; emphasis added). "God is clothed with terrible majesty. The Almighty — ***we cannot find him***; he is great in power and justice" (Job 37:22–23, rsv; emphasis added).

Stirling explains: "In other words, Elihu says that man cannot find, speak to, or know God. Unlike a true prophet who facilitates his listeners' journeys toward God, Elihu is a false prophet, doing anything he can to stop Job from meeting God. As the reader has likely surmised, **I see Elihu as a figure for Satan, much like the serpent in the Garden of Eden.** This idea was first proposed by David Noel Freedman:

I believe that Elihu — who comes from nowhere and disappears from the scene as soon as he is done with his speeches — is not a real person at all. Like the other participants, he has a name and a profession, but it is a disguise … He is the person assumed or adopted by Satan to press his case for the last time." David Noel Freedman, "Is it possible to understand the Book of Job?" in *Bible Review* (April 1988), 29. Freedman's view is supported by Elihu's virtual equivalence with Satan in the Testament of Job, a probable Greek-Jewish work written in the first century B.C. or A.D. See James H. Charlesworth ed., "Testament of Job" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 860-863.
[21] Understood in this light, Elihu's speeches take on new significance, constituting Job's final and greatest test. Rather than viewing Elihu as derivative and secondary to the friends, he should be viewed as the source of their well-intended but distorted advice. **Elihu is the final barrier Job must pass before speaking with God at the veil**. He thus occupies the place of Satan before Joseph Smith's first vision (see JS–H 1:16–17) and before Moses's greatest visions (see Moses 1:9–27). In the latter, Satan demands that Moses worship him and responds angrily when Moses refuses, frightening Moses and shaking the earth. Stirling, p. 162-63.
[22] The book of Job can be understood as Job's spiritual journey in response to questions posed by God. Existential questions arising within God in the Prologue are shared with Job, eventually stripping him of everything dear to him. Job internalizes these questions in his darkened and bitter state during the Dialogues. He holds on, evolving toward a transformed understanding of God and man, and finally reaches God's presence and experiences redemption. Stirling, p. 131-132.
[23] This is similar to other veil type scenes. For example, we have Enos as well as Jacob contending with God. We can also consider the Brother of Jared's situation when he met the Lord face to face (Ether 3). "As the unredeemed soul, even a guiltless one, closes the gap between himself and his Maker, he perceives the contrast as so

3. God's second speech: (Job 40.6-41.34).
    a. Behemoth (Job 40.15-24).[24]
    b. Leviathan (Job 41.1-7).[25]
4. Job's second speech, Job penetrates the veil (Job 42.1-6).
    a. Job sees mankind differently, for he changes his mind regarding dust and ashes.[26]

Prose Frame Epilogue: Job 42.7-17.

1. The Lord gives Job back twice as much as he had before (Job 42.11-12).
2. Job has ten more children (Job 42.13).[27]
3. Job lives to a ripe old age and sees his children grow to maturity (Job 42.14-17).

---

overwhelmingly great that he is sorely tempted to shrink back, to give up the quest." M. Catherine Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the Veil" in *Temples of the Ancient World*, Deseret Book, 1994, 392. Stirling, p. 166-67.

[24] Behemoth: the power of procreation and fertility. Note that he has the "virile strength" in his belly, the "sinews of his thighs" and his "tail"… "Behemoth is the Primal Life Force that gives people the energy to do things and to have an impact on the lives of people for good or ill… Thousands of years after Job, Freud would call it Id and Eros… Austin, p. 82. Behemoth is "contained" in the text, "hedged" (Alter) or "embowered" (Austin). The King James translates it as "covered." God in this text is powerful enough to contain or to hedge the powerful force of procreation.

[25] Leviathan could also embody the power of creation, or violence. This most likely is the awesome chaos creature in Mesopotamian and Canaanite myth, the sea monster that is slain in the act of the creation of the cosmos. God has the power to play with or to subdue this force as one captures a bird for little girls (Job 41.1-7).

[26] Janzen translation:
a. You know that you can do all things,
b. and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
a. "Who is this that obscures design
b. by words without knowledge?"
c. Therefore, I have uttered what I have not understood,
d. things too wonderful for me which I did not know.
a. "Hear, and I will speak;
b. I will question you, and you will make me to know."
a. I have heard you with my own ears,
b. and now my eye sees you!
a. **Therefore, I recant and change my mind**
b. concerning dust and ashes.
See Stirling, Job: An LDS Reading, *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 12 (2014), p. 168, emphasis added.

[27] I would add that the dead children do not come back here in the text. Many LDS teachers emphasize that this fits with the "doubling" perspective because Job's children are "sealed" to him and therefore they are still part of the equation of the doubling. Though I appreciate this perspective, I do not necessarily think that this was the intent of the author, nor do I see evidence for this in the text of the Hebrew Bible as we have it today.