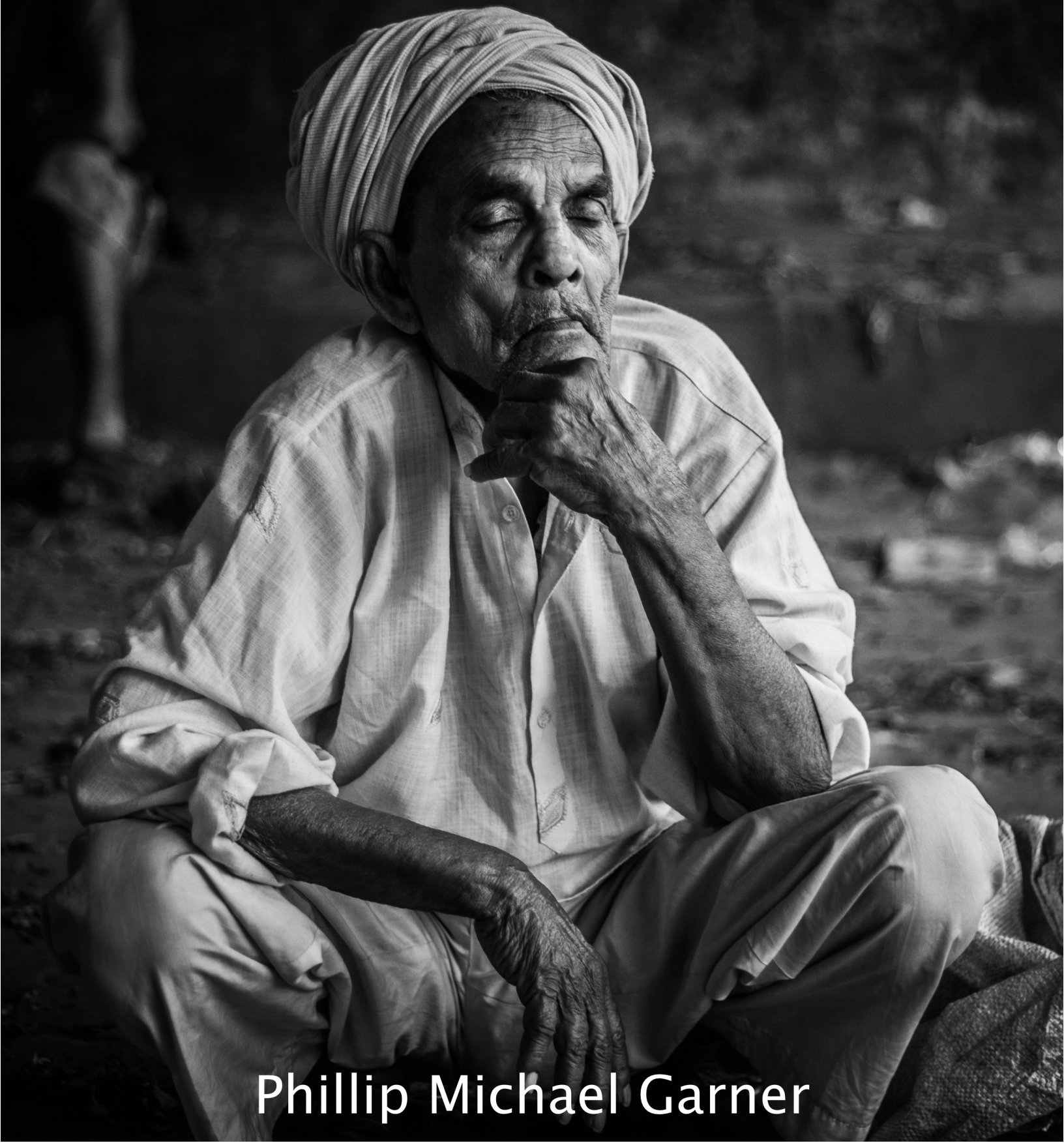


A Translation and Exploration Job 19:21–29



Phillip Michael Garner

Job 19 A Translation and Exegesis

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Introduction

The following exegesis of Job 19:21-29 began initially with verses 23-27 as the selected piece, however a study of the relationship of verses 21-22 and 28-29 have shown that the four verses are linked together in thought and grammar. The result is that verses 23-27 is a distinctively isolated piece framed by verses that both contribute to their overall interpretation and also serve to isolate them as a separate piece for reflection.

Some work has been done on the Hebrew phrase 'who will give' which plays a significant role in determining the element of 'pathos' that marks the entire piece of verses 21-29. The piece is one of deep emotion, expressed in a way that draws attention to the piece. The literary genius, or author(s) of Job, have captured the emotions of the character Job. Semitic idiom of 'eating another's flesh' as a way of expressing slander also plays a significant role in interpreting the piece and is explored in the paper.

The text used is the MT as found in BHS. The LXX is not consulted for this exegesis. Since the exegesis interprets the passage from a 'canonical' view, it is not the purpose of this paper to do a study on the book of Job that contributes to the nearly innumerable ideas on how the book was formed. This does not exclude recognition of the different sections of the book, (e.g. the prose prologue chapters 1-2, 'dialogue' chapters 3-27, The Wisdom Hymn chapter 28, Job's monologue chapters 29-31, Elihu's speeches chapters 32-37, Yahweh's speeches including Job's responses chapters 38 - 42:6, and concluding with the prose prologue) nor does this approach exclude knowledge of the many theories of the book's formation. Within the understanding of the canonical framework an appreciation of the formation of the book is acknowledged, while the exegesis is done in light of the final form.

The subject of the redeemer, and the witness is covered and presented as being God himself. ¹The subject of existence after death is touched on as a possibility for which Job contends in the event his death pre-empts his vindication. This does not exclude from the piece any eschatological value, for such is a possibility presented by verse 25b. There is also discussion of the connection of Job 19:25-27 with Job 42:1-6 offered as a possibility of better understanding the canonical form and the interwoven fluidity of the book as a whole.

The book of Job presents for us the conflict of retributive theology and experience, and the conflict of faith and contradiction. The writer of Job deals with the problem of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked, and presents for us a theology caught in the tension of a righteous and omnific God who allows for the suffering of the innocent.

My appreciation for the literature that comprises the book of Job has grown enormously through this study. The following exegesis is but a small offering on a passage that no doubt will continue to draw theological writers and biblical studies writers into its embrace.

¹ Since the subject of resurrection is not taught within the book of Job I use the words 'existence after death as a possibility' to express a strain within the text. The book of Job itself strains under a shifting theology that questions biblical norms, such as the parody of Psalm 8:4-5 found in Job 7:17-18. Likewise Job 21:19-21 challenges the common understanding of Exodus 20:4-6 and Exodus 34:6-7 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10. Job's argument 10:4-5 is presented as a valid challenge to God's ability to fully comprehend the human experience from the outside and becomes an early presentation of the gospel bound up in the need for what Job nor the writers of Job ever grasped – the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

A translation of Job 19:21-29

Be gracious to me, be gracious to me you my friends.
 For the hand of God has reached within me.²
 Why do you pursue me as God,
 and from my flesh you are not satisfied?³
 Who will give – then - that my words were written?
 Who will give – their inscription in a book?⁴
 With a chisel of iron, and *filling with* lead,
 their engraving, in a rock, forever.⁵
 For I know that my redeemer is living
 and at the last upon the dust he will rise.
 And after my skin, this *skin* which they have struck off,
 Then from my flesh I shall see God.⁶
 Whom I shall see on my side.⁷
 And my eyes they will see, and not a stranger.
 They cease, my emotions, within my bosom.⁸
 For you say, “How we will pursue him”
 and “The root of the matter is found in him.”
 You! Fear yourselves, from the face of the sword,
 for wrath *brings* the punishment of the sword.
 So you may know there is judgment.

² The twice repeated words beginning verse 21 are in the imperative, and should imply a strong call for graciousness to be given to Job. To translate the preposition ׁ with the 1c.s. suffix as ‘*within me*’ is in keeping with the motif of Job’s integrity, and with the idiomatic use of the phrase ‘...and you are not satisfied from my flesh,’ as used in Semitic thinking, see Daniel 3:8.

³ Job speaks of being God’s target and of being rushed upon by God as though God were a warrior in pursuit, (Job 16:14), for this reason and the corresponding use of the word pursue in 19:28a I have chosen to use pursue as the appropriate translation in both places. Not only does the word fit, it is consistent in the word usage enabling the English reader to note the link between verses 21-22 and 28-29.

I have retained use of the preposition ‘*from*’ preceding the word flesh as it is in the Hebrew, the implication of the Semitic idiom is thus maintained. To partake of one’s flesh is to speak slanderously of him, this is a crime that has been committed by Job’s friends in their speeches to him. Job does not accuse God of slander, however he does desire a judicial hearing to plead his innocence to any wrong-doing.

⁴ I have kept the literal translation of the phrase ׁ and through use of the hyphen have maintained the sense of desire or wish intended by the phrase, yet kept the literal sense. Overall such a translation opens the English reader to the poetic drama, and serves to familiarize them with a phrase that is used in the Old Testament primarily directed to God. (See my notes on the use of the phrase in the OT.).

⁵ The practice of pouring lead into engraved letters is recorded in a footnote by Hartley. (J.Hartley, “The book of Job,” NICOT [1988] 291).

I have chosen the word chisel over stylus as it fits better with the description of the activity of engraving a rock.

⁶ In keeping with the idea of slander being represented in the partaking of one’s flesh, I have kept the preposition ‘*from*’ preceding the word flesh, for Job desires to answer God from his integrity.

⁷ ‘*On my side*’ is a retention of the NRSV translation which seems appropriate here.

⁸ Since kidneys in Hebrew are the seat of the emotions I have utilized the word emotions here. Although the phrase sounds awkward in this construction to the English reader, if one will imagine a person delivering these lines before a group of people as an actor, then they better communicate Job’s intense pathos.

An Outline of Job 19:23-27

I	Job's Desire	23-24
	A. 1 st emotive phrase – desire	23a
	B. 2 nd emotive phrase – desire	23b
	C. Established permanence of desire	24ab
II	⁹ Job's deepest convictions	25 –27c
	A. 1 st declaration – Job's redeemer	25a
	B. 2 nd declaration - 1st appearance of Job's redeemer	25b
	C. Job's imminent end and God's appearance	26ab
	D. God's positional shift from adversary to defender	27abc
III	Final emotive phrase	27d

⁹ Although I would like to use the words 'Confession of Faith', I have opted for 'Deepest Convictions' (following John Hartley). (As the paper progresses I will use the phrase 'Confession of Faith'). The purpose for this decision is not to annul the idea that faith is a part of Job's expression, but rather to listen to the text. The text does not make faith a motif for Job's suffering, rather it is the fear of God that the writer brings to the attention of the reader. God is pleased with Job being not only a man who is blameless and upright, but *one who fears God* and turns from evil (Job 1:1). The fear of God is *the satan's* motif for questioning Job's integrity (Job 1:9). The subject of faith certainly is a valid concern for the interpreter of Job. The New Testament writers found faith a valid subject, (Hebrews 11:17) and in Genesis 22, although the word faith is not used in Gen. 22, nor is it the specific motif, the fear of God is the motif, (Genesis 22:12). For this reason any exegesis of the book of Job must answer the question, 'What does it mean to fear God?' The word אֱמוּנָה, translated faith, is however found in the book of Job in a variety of places, but not as a motif by the writer of Job. So what does it mean in Job to fear God?

The wisdom literature of Israel expresses fear of Yahweh as conformance to the observable, natural laws of governance found in life, (Proverbs short pithy sayings). Thus Proverbs 1:7, 'The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.' Obedience to these observable laws found in the sayings of Proverbs 10-31 is the lived expression of the fear of Yahweh. Fear of Yahweh is 'obedience'. Genesis 22, the *akedah*, or binding of Isaac, likewise demonstrates obedience as the lived expression of fear of Yahweh. The Proverbs suggest that obedience to Yahweh through following the instruction found in the wisdom sayings produces blessing. Likewise Abraham's obedience produced blessing. Job brings this simple rule of obedience and reward into question. Job finds that the wicked who do not 'fear God' but say '*Leave us alone! We do not desire to know your ways*' live with peace and prosperity, and do not suffer God as their attacker. The shifting theology of Job is straining under the contradiction of his experience, and the claims of traditional wisdom. Obedience alone is no longer enough, rather an unconquerable devotion, an immovable *faith(!)*, is the lived expression of the fear of God. In light of this last statement I will address in this paper the element of faith as found in Job and in the selected passage as a theological motif.

Poetic Analysis of Job 19:23-27

Since most of Job is poetry it is important to perform a poetic analysis of Job 19:23-27. Such an effort is enlightening in exegeting the passage. I will examine the verses in their format of parallel lines, utilizing my own translation.

Who will give – then – that my words were written?

Who will give – their inscription in a book?

The initial phrase expressing emotive desire opens up each line of the first two verses. Job desires his words to be written, in the next line he states where, *inscribed in a book*.

With a chisel of iron and *filling* with lead,

Their engraving in a rock forever.

With a chisel of iron parallels *their engraving*, as, *filling with lead* parallels *in a rock forever*. Likewise the intensity of Job's desire is growing, moving from written in a book to engraved in a rock.

For I know that my redeemer is living

And at the last upon the dust he will rise.

For I know parallels *And at the last*, as, *my redeemer is living* parallels *upon the dust he will rise*.

And after my skin, this *skin* which they have struck off,

Then from my flesh I shall see God.

Whom I shall see on my side.

And my eyes they will see, and not a stranger.

And after my skin, this skin which they have struck off, parallels *Then from my flesh. I shall see God*, parallels *Whom I shall see*, and parallels *And my eyes they will see*. Continuing – *on my side* parallels *and not a stranger*.

They cease, my emotions, within my bosom. Job concludes his confession, and from the experience he finds himself having reached the depths of his convictions, and communicated it in words.

The Surrounding Structure of Job 19:23-27

An important key to understanding Job 19:23-27 is found in the structure of the two verses preceding and the two verses following the piece, because through their grammatical linking they identify an effort on the part of the framer of the book to isolate verses 23-27. Verse 20 of chapter 19 brings the section starting at verse 13 to a fitting conclusion. Verse 21 begins a new focus as Job speaking in the imperative warns his friends that graciousness ought to be their attitude toward him for judgment awaits them if they do not show graciousness. The NRSV translates, *'Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends.'* my own translation is more suited to the grammatical form and intent of the language, *'Be gracious to me, be gracious to me you my friends'*, his change of direction shows a break from the preceding discourse begun in verse 13, and ending at verse 20. Unless note is made of the linking of verses 22-23 with 28-29 for the purpose of isolating 23-27 as a separate piece, (to which the framer wishes to draw our attention), the last two verses seem disconnected and inappropriately placed.

I will utilize my own translation to demonstrate the linking of verses 21-22 with 28-29 by comparison.

21a,b Be gracious to me, be gracious to me you my friends,

21c for the hand of God has reached within me.

29a,b You! Fear yourselves from the face of the sword,

29c for wrath brings the punishment of the sword.

Job warns his friends with the imperative form of the word translated *'Be gracious to me'* ..., which is repeated twice for emphasis.. He identifies his words as being directed

now in a specific manner to his ‘friends’, that is his three counselors. The warning is written in verse 29c, ‘...*You! Fear yourselves from the face of the sword.*’

Job says, in 21c ... *‘for the hand of God has reached within me.’*

This line is linked in thought with ...*for wrath brings the punishment of the sword’.*

If they continue to exercise their own wrath that is exhibited in their graceless behavior towards Job they will find themselves judged.¹⁰ This of course is played out in the epilogue of 42:7-17. Also when Job says the hand of God has reached within him his integrity is what comes to mind, which was the initial issue that was challenged by the satan. Job challenges the integrity of his ‘friends’ who have not been gracious to him through his terrible ordeal, they already exhibit wrath in their judgment of him and if Job is innocent (‘blameless’ and ‘upright’), they are in danger of punishment, (perhaps even if Job were not innocent).

Verses 22 and 28 demonstrate an even stronger link than verses 21 and 29.

22a *Why do you pursue me as God,*

28a *For you say, “How we will pursue him.*

The verbal link of the two lines is obvious.

22b *and from my flesh you are not satisfied?*

28b *and “The root of the matter is found in him “.*

Remembering the Semitic idiom that allows for the ‘partaking of a person’s flesh’ as a way of slandering them is important in linking the two phrases. Thus 28b “The root of the matter is found in him” is a direct assault on Job’s integrity.

¹⁰ The linking of the entire piece (21-29) with the epilogue is further demonstrated by the exegesis.

The Courtroom Metaphor

The writer of Job uses courtroom imagery in order to give to the character Job the strongest use of language possible in contending for his innocence. The courtroom metaphor employed by the writer of Job must be kept within the boundaries provided by recognizing the metaphor as a tool utilized by the writer. If the metaphor becomes the interpretive lens through which the words of Job are understood then the metaphor is taken literally and not metaphorically. Even Job the fictional character is well aware he cannot come to court with God (Job 9:19, and 32-33).

The metaphor serves the purpose of allowing the writer to use the character to exhibit in the strongest language available to him the certainty of Job's innocence. Likewise the many questions presented in the book by the character Job can only find a satisfactory hearing through the use of a 'blameless and upright' person. Only an innocent person could use the defense that God is not a mortal (Job 9:32), or imply because God has not been human and does not possess eyes of flesh that see as humans see that God cannot fully comprehend the human condition (Job 10:4,5). If the heavenly witness of 16:19 is to be understood as a member of the heavenly court, the radical monotheism of Job expressed in statements like Job 9:24 are in direct contradiction to the theology of Job.

¹¹“If the heavenly witness is only a personification of Job's declaration (s) of innocence, and the redeemer of 19:25 is likewise a personification, then the writers presentation of Job's progressive thought loses the coherence found in the move from use of the word

¹¹ For an example of the writers progressive development of the thought of Job see my piece 'Excursus on the phrase 'who will give' and its importance in the book of Job', found in this paper

‘witness’ to ‘redeemer’. ¹³In 19:23-27 the use of the word redeemer is more than a ‘bold metaphor’, rather it is an intentional and purposeful selection of the writer.

A Desire only God can Fulfill

At the beginning of verse 23 Job cries out according to the NRSV with the words ‘O that’, however the literal translation of the Hebrew is ‘Who will give’. This phrase expressing a desire or wish is used 19 times in the MT, of which Job accounts for nearly half of the uses with the phrase occurring 9 times in Job. Primarily the phrase expresses a strong desire that can be accomplished only by God. The two exceptions to this are of interest. The first one we will explore is in Job 31:31 which offers assistance to us in understanding Job 19:21-29.

Job 31:31 reads:

*“...if those of my tent ever said,
O that we might be sated with his flesh!”*

In this single verse we have two phrases, one found in our passage, and the other in the verse preceding it, both of importance. First is the phrase “Who will give” translated in the NRSV as, ‘O that’. The second is that those under Job’s ‘tent’ never cried out that they might partake of the meat served to Job. ¹⁴Job did not save the finest delicacies for himself but all under his ‘tent’ shared alike in the benefits of his prosperity.

¹³ See Clines, David J.A. “Job 1-20”. (Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishers, 1989) Pp 459. Clines refers here to the use of the term redeemer as a bold metaphor.

¹⁴ The word tent is of significance because the Hebrews viewed the sky as the dome of a tent. The comparison is that Job has never had anyone cry out “Who will give” from under his tent, whereas Job has cried out “Who will give” under the ‘tent’ of God. Likewise in chapter 1 verses 1 and 8 Job turns from evil, guiltless of any act of evil, of harming another person, yet God in 2:9 has brought evil into the life of Job. Job turns from any act of evil, yet when God brings evil into the life of Job, he embraces the evil and blesses God.

The statement in Job 31:31b nearly shares the same words as Job 19:22b except that Job 22b is not immediately preceded by the phrase מִי־יִתֵּן as in Job 31:31b, and the parsing of the words is different, (The phrase “Who will give” is used twice in 19:23).

Job 31:31b מִי־יִתֵּן מִבְּשָׂרוֹ לֹא נִשְׂבַּע

¹⁴Job 19:22b וּמִבְּשָׂרִי לֹא חֲשַׁבְעוּ - NRSV “...never satisfied with my flesh.”

Job declares that the people under his ‘tent’ or his care never cried out “Who will give” to be satisfied with the delicacies of Job, yet Job has cried out (Job 19:23) to God, “Who will give” in his desire for his words to be recorded permanently.

The second exception for use of the phrase, “Who will give” is found in Deuteronomy 5:29. In this verse it is God himself who uses the phrase “Who will give” and the answer to his question is that only he himself can fulfill that which he desires.

Deuteronomy 5:29

¹⁵ *If only they had such a mind as this,*

¹⁴ To say that you ‘ate the pieces’ or the ‘flesh’ of a person or group of people meant you slandered those persons, (as in Daniel 3:8 and Job 31:31).

¹⁵ *The NRSV uses ‘If only’ in place of ‘Who will give’. It is interesting to note that God himself fulfills his desire expressed in Deuteronomy 5:29 in Jeremiah’s prophetic announcement of the ‘New Covenant’ (Jeremiah 31:31-35). The word translated mind (Deut. 5:29) in the NRSV is literally heart as is found in Jeremiah 31:33, ‘...I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts’. The significance of ‘Who will give’ as a phrase is increased dramatically by the usage found in Deuteronomy. Since Deuteronomy is the book believed to have been found prior to Josiah’s reform, the ‘Who will give’ is now delivered in retrospect and serves both as a comment on the past performance of the people of God, and on God’s desire for their future performance in keeping the covenant of the decalogue. Their future performance is already brought into doubt by God’s use of ‘Who will give’ followed by his desire for them to have a heart capable of keeping his commandments always.

Exodus 20 has the Sabbath as the seal of the covenant, whereas the passage in Deuteronomy 5 has remembrance of the exodus as the seal of the covenant, coupled with the remembrance of the Sabbath. Remembrance of the exodus will be very important for them in their upcoming exile into Babylon, as they must look for a new exodus. Even as the seal of the covenant is being changed to fit the present conditions of the people of God, the prophetic spirit moves toward the New Covenant with the use of the phrase ‘Who will give’ being uttered by God himself. Likewise the essence of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:33-34 is found in the desire of God uttered in Deuteronomy 5:29.

It is my conclusion that the phrase ‘Who will give’ is a phrase denoting emotion and followed by statement of a desire. In the aforementioned case ‘Who will give’ carries with it the prophetic spirit since it is spoken by God.

to fear me and to keep all my commandments always,

so that it might go well with them and with their children forever!

Job 14:13 also utilizes the “Who will give” phrase and is addressed to God.

O that you would hide me in Sheol,

that you would conceal me until your wrath is past,

that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!

It should be noted that the prospect of release from Sheol is a possibility presented here by Job as he requests to be *hid* in Sheol *until* God’s wrath is past and he can be remembered at a set time. This possibility of vindication coming to Job after death is found in Job 19:25-27, at least according to the translation of the NRSV in verse 26. Our phrase “Who will give” from 14:13 provides us a linguistic link to our passage in Job 19:23-27.

The phrase “Who will give” is found at the beginning of some of the most emotional passages in scripture. In Numbers 11:29 Moses desire for all the people of God to speak under the power of the Spirit is preceded by “Who will give”. In II Samuel 18:33 David in anguish expresses his desire that he would have died rather than Absalom using the phrase “Who will give”. Jeremiah asks that his head be made a spring of water that he might weep over the people of God, (Jeremiah 9:1). The phrase “Who will give” is also used in passages where the absence of God’s mercy is found, such as Deuteronomy 28:67 where the Israelites suffer under the judgement of God. ¹⁶I have included a list of the passages where the phrase “Who will give” is found in the footnote.

¹⁶ Job 6:8, 11:5, 13:5, 14:13, 19:23, 23:3, 29:2, 31:31 and 35, Exodus 16:3, Numbers 11:29, Deuteronomy 5:29, 28:67, II Samuel 18:33, Psalms 14:7, 53:7, 55:7, Jeremiah 9:1.

While “Who will give” may sound awkward in English it represents the words of the text more literally and in the truest sense. A simple footnote in any study Bible can direct the reader to the use of the phrase by the Biblical writers and serve to better express the feelings represented in the phrase in its original language. ¹⁷מִי־יִתֵּן or “Who will give” is an expression that marks out the words following as ‘words of pathos’.

To further establish Job 19:23-27 as a piece filled with emotion the last phrase of the passage must be noted. The NRSV reads, *‘My heart faints within me.’* A literal reading of the Hebrew is, *‘My kidneys cease within my bosom.’* The kidneys are the seat of the emotions for the Hebrews and thus a more correct rendering is, *‘They cease, my emotions, within my bosom.’* Job has spoken his desire for his words to be recorded, and expressed his desire for their permanence, until such a time as his ‘redeemer’ will bring his vindication. So Job 19:23-27 is bracketed off with highly emotive phrases. Truly Job has spoken from the depths of his being, and exhausted for the moment his inner strength. ¹⁸Job’s words will be partially fulfilled, his words will not be chiseled into a rock, but he will see God.

Understanding Job’s Desire and Deepest Convictions

If the prologue and epilogue comprised the story of Job we could say that it was Job’s integrity alone under scrutiny. However the poetic sections reveal a conflict of theological understanding concerning the justice of God in the world. The theology of the writer (or framers) wrestles with the tension of faith (fear of God), experience, and retributive theology.

¹⁷ Romans 9:1-5 is a New Testament passage filled with pathos. The expression of deep emotion is an important part of religious expression.

¹⁸ In Exodus 20 verse 25 forbids an altar of stone to have been touched by a ‘tool’.

The poem of Job 19:21-29 opens with Job's command and warning to his 'friends'.

When Job says the hand of God has reached within him, it is not his disease to which he refers, nor is it his integrity that is under scrutiny, for his integrity was established in the prologue with his responses; Chapter 1:20

*Then Job arose, tore his robe shaved his head,
and fell on the ground and worshiped.
He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked shall I return there;
the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
blessed is the name of the LORD."*

Chapter 2:9-10

*Then his wife said to him,
"Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die."
But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak.
Shall we receive the good at the hand of God,
and not receive the (evil) bad?"
In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*

While Job's integrity is established in the prologue, the author continues his story and his theological wrestling through the poetic dialogs.¹⁹ The dialogues demonstrate that integrity must accompany fear of God, producing a faith that Gustavo Gutierrez calls 'a disinterested faith in God'. Obedience to the wisdom sayings with their retributive edge

¹⁹ Gutierrez argues that Job is the vehicle through which the writer of Job argues that human beings are capable of a faith that in the midst of unjust suffering can be disinterested in reward, that faith must operate free of a barter conception of religion. See Gutierrez, Gustavo, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987 P 1.

cannot produce a sufficient theology to answer for the suffering of the innocent.

Likewise obedience to the wisdom sayings as the lived expression of the fear of Yahweh can falsely accuse the innocent, and exonerate the successful in spite of possible guilt.

Job continues to insist on his right as a 'blameless' and 'upright' man who clings to his integrity, but it is his faith that is now being stretched beyond the bounds of reason. Like Abraham and the 'Binding of Isaac,' God is testing Job, and faith (devotion) and reason are captured in the tension of contradiction.

Job, in a moment of pathos-filled conviction, speaks words that express his faith. Job's faith has been pressed to the limits of human endurance, without divine support, and Job's faith is in place. Job cries out "Who will give", his desire is that his words would be recorded forever.

²⁰The question is, to which words does Job refer? The structural analysis of the passage at this point that assists us in identifying the words that Job wants preserved. The separating of verses 21-22 from 28-29, (which altogether form a single piece) isolate verses 23-27 for the purpose of drawing the reader into the encased piece. ²¹Further the emotive words surrounding the passage itself encase the piece.

Job desires his words to be, written, inscribed, and engraved (a series of three), likewise in his confession of faith that he will 'see God' the seeing is written in a series of three. This is the writer's way of identifying for the reader the words to which Job refers.

²⁰ If the reference here is to the entirety of Job's declaration of innocence made in 31:5-40, then the significance of the attention brought to verses 25-27 by the surrounding structure of 21,22 and 28, 29 is annulled. Likewise the bracketing of verses 25 -27 with emotive phrases loses the power of their purposeful and artful isolation. Some believe Job is referring to his declaration of innocence, Hartley concedes that Job '*...does not specify the content of the inscription*', but he continues, '*he surely has in mind his lament, his declaration of innocence, his affirmation of trust in God, and his appeal for vindication.*' See John E. Hartley, "The Book of Job," *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988) P 291.

²¹ I refer here to the "Who will give" and the end piece, "They cease, my emotions, within my bosom."

The words Job desires to be preserved forever are verses 25-27a,b. Furthermore when Job says, 'I know' he qualifies the following words as his deepest conviction. This conviction has grown out of Job's faith expressed through his life of integrity, and comes to the surface through his recent calamities.

²²Despair has given way to faith and brought (momentary) certainty to the sufferer.

Job's conviction begins with his statement, "For I know that my redeemer is living,..."

The one who will redeem Job from the onslaught of accusation brought against him by his 'friends' is the one who is always alive. There is no threat that death will take Job's redeemer, for this reason Job continues – "...and at the last upon the dust he will rise."

²² Although Job's certainty as to the fulfillment of his confession of faith may be momentary, he does not cease to appeal to God. His appeals grow stronger and more blatant in both language and form. Utilizing courtroom imagery and blessing and curse formulas, Job pushes forward with every available medium of communication until the narrator writes at the end of 31:40, 'The words of Job are ended'. Exegetes who understand 27:7 to refer to God as Job's enemy will likely not agree with my assessment of Job 19:23-27.

However I take the position that Job now refers to retributive theology as his enemy, and his friends as the godless. The word enemy (אֵיבֹ) is found three times in the book of Job. In 13:24 Job accuses God of hiding his face and counting Job as his enemy. In 33:10 Elihu uses the word enemy in response to Job's complaint in 13:24.

The opening lines to chapters 27 and 29 reflect Job's complete defeat of the arguments of his friends. Zophar does not respond because he has been silenced by Job's resolve to speak to God and hold fast his integrity, as he says in 27:5 *Far be it from me to say that you are right*. Job has warned his friends that they would bring upon themselves the judgement of God for their lack of mercy to him, and now Job refers to them in a poetic piece (27:7) as his enemy. In 27:7 Job has come to the end of all tolerance for the retributive theology of his 'friends' they are now both defeated and ignored by Job.

The Hebrew for Godless is אֵיבֹ is given a valid definition in Proverbs. אֵיבֹ is used in Proverbs 11:9 and reads like a commentary on Job's relationship with his 'friends', 11:9 *With their mouths the godless (אֵיבֹ) would destroy their neighbors, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered*. Isaiah uses אֵיבֹ in 32:6 to describe the godless as speaking error concerning Yahweh, *For fools speak folly, and their minds plot iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the LORD*. Likewise then Isaiah 32:6 reads like a commentary on Job's 'friends'. In Job אֵיבֹ is used once by Bildad (8:13), once by Eliphaz (15:34), once by Zophar (20:5), and twice by Elihu (34:30 and 36:13). Job uses 'godless' three times (13:16, 17:8, and 27:8) once after each use of the word by his 'friends'. Job insinuates that his 'friends' would not call upon God if they were put in his place, 7:9-10. Job ultimately calls upon God at all times, even at the conclusion of the curse formulas, 31:35. Job 27:12 continues, 'All of you have seen it yourselves; why then have you become altogether vain?' Job 7:13-23 that sits in direct opposition to Job 21:13-23 is to be understood in light of verse 12, and is a mocking of the retributive theology of his 'friends'. The message of chapter 27 is that retributive theology does not produce people who can take delight in the almighty and call upon him at all times.

Job still contends that his redeemer ‘*at the last upon the dust will rise*’. ²³This statement 19:25b affirms Job’s belief that God is the redeemer, and that he will at the end rise. The writer either intends us to understand that Job is thinking of an event at the end of time, or at the end of the dialogue, (the meaning remains intentionally elusive).

Identifying the Redeemer of Job 19

Identifying Job’s לאל is crucial to the interpreting of the piece. לאל is a Qal active participle and is usually translated as redeemer, excluding those passages primarily found in Numbers, Deuteronomy 19 and Joshua 20. The aforementioned passages all translate לאל as avenger and are either in construct with the word blood, or are connected to the idea of the ‘avenger of blood’ through the context of the passage.

In Job 16:18 Job desires his blood to be left uncovered. This is Job’s way of declaring his innocence, not that his blood would be avenged against God, only that an answer be given for his suffering. Job’s witness is in heaven, the question is who is the ‘heavenly witness’? In Job 16:18-22 it is God whom Job seeks to vindicate him, this is expressed in verse 21, *that he would maintain the right of a mortal with God, as one does for a neighbor.*

²³ Hartley presents an excellent argument for God to be Job’s redeemer. Ibid. Pp 292-293.

Job 16:18-22 form an interesting chiasm:

*“O earth, do not cover my blood;
let my outcry find no resting place.*

*Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.*

My friends scorn me.

*My eye pours out tears to God, that he would maintain the right
Of a mortal with God, as one does for a neighbor.*

*For when a few years have come,
I shall go the way from which I shall not return.*

The center piece of the chiasm comprises a constant in the book of Job, the betrayal of Job’s friends and their accusatory stance against him. This same theme is found in Job’s plea for his friends to be gracious to him in 19: 21 before they bring God’s wrath upon themselves. While Job accuses God of attacking him, he does not accept that the attacks are punishment for his actions.²⁴ Likewise the chiasm aligns the ‘witness’ of verse 19 with God in verse 20b and 21. Job desires his vindication to take place while he is still alive. Job’s theology progresses throughout the book as he finds himself captured in the tension of devotion to God (faith in God) and the contradiction of his experience. This same tension is found in an analysis of Job 13:15-16:

See, he will kill me; I have no hope; - a negative statement

but I will defend my ways to his face. - a positive statement

This will be my salvation, - a positive statement

That the godless shall not come before him. - a negative statement

²⁴ If the witness is a member of the heavenly court can a witness accomplish anything more than Job’s own integrity in his claim of innocence? While the personification of Job’s declaration of innocence answers the difficulty of God being both attacker and witness, it ignores the constant tension within the book of Job as both responsible and beyond responsible, of God as attacker, witness, and judge.

On the one hand Job believes God is going to kill him, yet he finds salvation in his right as a righteous man to appear before God.²⁵ But there is no arbiter who can lay hands on both of them and cause them both to submit to his decision.

The poetry of Job 13:15-16 shows Job contending for his desire to appear before God. The two positive statements reveal Job's belief that his salvation will be found in his continual assertion of his innocence. Job's (בֹּקֵל) redeemer is God, who is also his heavenly witness, he is the one who '*at the last upon the dust will rise*'.

Job continues with his confession of faith, after his skin has been struck off then from his flesh he will see God. The confession is bold, Job is convinced that even if his flesh is completely removed he will yet see God. His living redeemer can give him life to 'see him' even when life should have expired. The word from the righteous sufferer continues with the tenacity of a prophet. When Job sees God, he will see God on his side, defending his integrity, his theology, and approving his 'disinterested faith'. No longer will God be rushing upon him as a warrior, faith will have conquered and the contradiction removed as a theological barrier.

Again Job declares he will see God, and with his eyes. A theophany, a revelation, an experience which Job says will confirm that God is not a stranger to him, that his faith is true and correct, (even if his understanding is not). The God of Job's faith is the living redeemer who will stand upon the dust at the last, and at the last Job believes he will see God.

²⁵ Job 9:33 *There is no umpire between us, who might lay his hand on us both.* The submitting of God to an arbiter and his decision is not a possibility, Job is using this language to assert his innocence. Job can go to court with God appearing only as judge, and no one else may appear, (23:7).

Job's emotions cease within his bosom, he has believed with the resolution of certainty, and confessed his belief, thus his life of faith has not been lived in vain. The last two verses of chapter 19 now return the reader to the two verses preceding verses 2:27, drawing the reader back to read again this passage that has drawn so much attention. The framer of the book however is not yet prepared to end his story. There is more dialogue, the insertion of the Hymn of Wisdom and the Elihu speeches, confirming the book's place in the wisdom literature of Israel, and dealing with issues concerning wisdom.

There is a linking of 19:21,22 and 28,29 with the prologue of Job 42:7. The verses that surround 23-27 which I refer to as Job's plea for graciousness from his 'friends' and a warning of judgement for their slander against him find their fulfillment in the epilogue.²⁶ In the epilogue Job finds his vindication for Yahweh says, "*My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.*" It is Job's prayer that delivers his 'friends' from the wrath of Yahweh.

There is also a linking of Job 19:23-27 with Job 42:1-6. Job's confession of faith proclaiming that he will see his redeemer, that he will see him with his eyes finds fulfillment in 42:5.

²⁶ In this statement Yahweh gives assent to the honest statements of Job found in the dialogues. Yahweh accepts responsibility for the calamities that have overcome Job. The questions asked by Job are validated as right speaking. Psalm 8 is given a broader range of meaning in Job 7:7 and Yahweh approves. Likewise Job's argument in Job 10:4-5 that God has not known the human experience is validated.

Concluding Comments

The book of Job is a pivotal shift in the wisdom literature of Israel, questioning established norms of action and consequence, of reward and punishment. It is notable that God has only spoken well of Job (the prologue and the epilogue) while Job's friends have brought slanderous accusations against Job based upon their retributive theology. Still Job desires a hearing before God, for Job holds a shifting (living) experience. God's vindication of Job will rescue Job's friends from their mistaken theology. However Job's faith in God is greater than his experience and his theology. His desire to appear before God is built upon his being blameless and upright. Job's conclusion is that for him to suffer such direct assault from God gives him the right to appear before God. Job can say that his heart does not reproach him for any of his days, (Job 27:6).²⁷ There is no place where Job's faith is better expressed than in Job 19: 23-27, for his attacker is also his redeemer. As Job's understanding shifts he can refer to his ordeal not as injustice, but as a test. It is in Job 23:10 where Job refers to his ordeal as a test, he is confident that he will come forth as gold. Although Job experiences a shifting sense of an end to his ordeal he is still in the midst of his suffering, and uncertain about how God will deliver him. The tension of faith, and contradictory experience, are given a hearing through Job 23: 13-17. Job's understanding shifts in 23:10, and his faith soars in 19:23-27, but he is still a man in the midst of suffering for which God is responsible.

²⁷ Unable to deal with the tension of God as both redeemer and adversary Clines reduces Job's redeemer to a personification of his declaration of innocence. See Clines, David J.A. "*Job 1-20*". (Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishers, 1989) Pp 459-460.

The mental dexterity expressed through the righteous sufferer defies the limits of human strength. Job initially finds himself expressing the desire to have never existed, (The book of Jeremiah records a similar lament {Jeremiah 20:14-18} after Jeremiah suffered torturous treatment under the hand of Passhur).²⁸ Although the book of Job possibly finds roots in the life of a pre-patriarchal figure, and ANE writings of righteous sufferers, the book is clearly a question raising treatise set in the context of a story, that challenges retributive theology, traditional wisdom. The use of poetry further separates the book from any literal reading as though a scribe had set with Job and his friends. The poetry of Job is designed to evoke the reader to thought by presenting multiple layers of interpretive possibility within the text. The poetry of Job encourages associative thinking and aesthetic appreciation of the ambiguity of life under God's tent.

In the end Job is left without any direct answers for his suffering, he has come up against one who does terrify him. In the end Job finds restoration, however Job's losses are not to be ignored, as the loss of his children is permanent even though he produces more. Job has learned the faith of disinterested religion, his faith and theology have a place for the contradiction of a just omnific God and an unjust experience.

Excursus on the Phrase 'Who will give' and its importance in the Book of Job

The use of the Hebrew phrase מִי יִתֵּן in the book of Job numbers more than in any other book of the MT with a total of nine times. The first use of the phrase in Job is in chapter 6:8. Chapter 6 is Job's first reply to the 'mocking' of his friends. At verse 8 we are provided with words from Job that give us a basic understanding for the use of the phrase 'Who will give'.

²⁸ See Ezekiel 14:14, 20, and Hartley *ibid*.

*“O that (Who will give) I might have my request,
and that God would grant my desire;*

With his first use of the phrase the writer of Job has provided for us understanding that the phrase ‘Who will give’ is used prior to the expression of a desire. Within the poetic sections the phrase ‘Who will give’ likewise is placed at pieces of great emotion.

The expressed desire following the phrase ‘Who will give’ is usually directed towards God as the only one who could fulfill the desire, (as in verse 8). However in Job we find some exceptions to this use of the phrase.

Job 11:5- 6a has the next use of *אֵלֹהֵי יִתְיָן* placed upon the lips of Zophar in his first speech.

*But O that (Who will give) God would speak, and open his lips to you,
and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!*

This response of Zophar is prompted by Job’s statement in 6:14, (following Job’s initial use of ‘Who will give’ in 6:8). In 6:14 Job delivers a proverb, or a wisdom saying.

“Those who withhold kindness

from a friend

forsake the fear of the

Almighty.”

The wisdom saying deals with the *fear of Yahweh* that is the basis used by ‘*the satan*’ to provoke God to test Job. Job’s proverb (6:14) also delivers for the reader another theme found throughout the book, that theme is the lack of mercy showed to Job by his ‘friends’.

Fear of Yahweh in the wisdom literature of Proverbs is expressed by obedience to the wisdom sayings. Through use of his own saying (6:14) Job counters his ‘friends’ with several accusations. Firstly is that they are guilty of being merciless, secondly is that they have forsaken fear of Yahweh, culminating in a claim that they have failed to use wisdom. Thus in 11:5 Zophar (beginning with ‘Who will give’) mocks Job and denies that Job speaks with wisdom and will continue in 11:6b with the claim that wisdom is many sided, (or double beyond Job’s comprehension).

The next use of ‘Who will give’ is in 13:5 where Job desires that his friends give expression to their wisdom by keeping silent, for Job desires to speak to God.

If you would (‘Who will give’) only keep silent, that would be your wisdom!

Job’s response is to Zophar’s use of **מִי־יִתֵּן** in 11:5 and reveals a continuity of thought with Job’s proverb in 6:14 and his initial use of ‘Who will give’ in 6:8.

The next use of the phrase **מִי־יִתֵּן** is found in a speech of Job in 14:13. The use of the phrase in 13 links the reader to another reoccurring theme in Job, (Sheol). I have expressed in my exegesis that the book of Job proposes questions to the reader that seek an answer, and although the questions are not answered in the book of Job, they are answered in ‘salvation history’, either directly through events like the incarnation and resurrection, or provisionally through eschatological expectations.

Job 14:13-15 forms a chiasm with a center- piece. The center-piece reveals the strain under which the theology of the sages was suffering. If retributive theology is not experientially true, then undeserved suffering must find vindication, even if it is found beyond the grave.

O that you would hide me in **Sheol**,

that you would conceal me until your wrath is past,

that you would appoint me a set time,

and remember me!

If mortals die, will they live again?

All the days of my service I would wait,

until my release should come.

You would call and I would answer you;

you would long for the work of your hands.

This question of life beyond the present order is linked to two words in this passage, first is *Sheol*, and the second is *remember*. In chapter 7 beginning at verse 7 Job for the first time in the book begins to direct his speech to God. The first word that Job uses 'remember' is a word of theological significance in the Hebrew Bible. This passage 7:7-10 struggles with the subject of **Sheol**, and utilizes the word **remember**.

Remember that my life is a breath;

My eye will never again see good.

The eye that beholds me will see me no more;

While your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone.

As the cloud fades and vanishes,

So those who go down to **Sheol** do not come up;

They return no more to their houses,

nor do their places know them any more.

The Sheol passages and remember passages form a progressive linking of thought.

Job 7:7a

*“Remember that my life is a breath; (verse 9 speaks of **Sheol** as a place of no return)*

Job 10:9a

“Remember that you fashioned me like clay;

and will you turn me to dust again?”

Job 14:13c,d

*“...that you would appoint me a set time and **remember** me.” (in **Sheol**)*

Job 17:13

*If I look for **Sheol** as my house, if I spread my couch in darkness,*

if I say to the Pit, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ of ‘My sister,’

where then is my hope?

*Who will see my hope: Will it go down to the bars of **Sheol**?*

Job 24: 19,20

Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters;

*so does **Sheol** those who have sinned.*

The womb forgets them;

*the worm finds them sweet; they are no longer **remembered**;*

so wickedness is broken like a tree.

Job 26:6

***Sheol** is naked before God,*

and Abaddon has no covering.

These passages are placed in chronological order and reveal a progression of thought. The first passage limits life to the present, the second asks a question seeking an answer, the third is found in the chiasm of 14:13-15 and proposes Sheol as a visiting place until

God's wrath is past. It is important to remember that 14:13-15 has the center-piece question, "If mortals die will they live again?" and begins with the phrase מִי־יִתֵּן.

The fourth passage asks the question, *Will it (Job's hope) go down to the bars of Sheol?* The meaning of 17:13-16 is elusive. There is a hint here of insistence that Job's vindication will come while he is alive, yet the question allows for the possibility of a different outcome. The fifth passage speaks of the wicked as being no longer remembered. In the final passage using the word Sheol it is a place which is naked (ערום) before God. Even the contents of Sheol cannot be hidden from God.

The next use of the phrase 'Who will give' is found in Job 19:23, where it is used twice, (use of מִי־יִתֵּן. In 19:23 is covered in the exegesis). In 19:23 Job believes he will see God, in 23:3 he cries out with 'Who will give' and desires to come to the place of God. Job's confidence increases after his 'confession of faith' in 19:23 and he is now prepared to speak to God and believes he will be vindicated. In 23:7 God the attacker responsible for Job's calamities is Job's judge. Job now sees his calamity as a test from which he will come forth as gold, (23:10).

The next use of the phrase 'Who will give' is 29:2 where Job finds hope for restoration, no longer does he seek to be hid in Sheol as in 14:13.²⁹ The next use of the phrase is found in 31:31, which is covered in the exegesis.

²⁹ See page 8

The final use of the phrase found in the speeches of Job is 31:35. The writer of Job continues his use of courtroom metaphor. The courtroom metaphor is a tool used by the writer to communicate the lessons brought out through the messages of the book. Job knows that he can appear before God only with God as judge. He also knows that no arbiter can assist him in his plea of innocence. Job recognizes God as both attacker and redeemer. Job has prepared a declaration of innocence in a curse format of ‘if / then’ (31:5-40). He delivers his final **מִי־יִתֶּן** in verse 35 expressing his desire that God would hear him and seals the document with his **ת**, that is his signature. The powerful expression **מִי־יִתֶּן** accompanies Job’s final plea to God.

Job 31:35

Oh that (מִי־יִתֶּן) I had one to hear me!

(Here is my signature!

Let the Almighty answer me!)

O that I had the indictment

Written by my adversary!

The writer of Job has used the most powerful tools of metaphor and language available to him in his presentation of Job contending for his innocence, and his integrity. The Hebrew phrase “Who will give” is crucial to properly interpreting the book of Job. Job has silenced his ‘friends’ as is indicated by the change in the speech formula found at the beginning of chapters 27 and 29. Job has exhausted all use of language and metaphor so the narrator adds to verse 40, ‘*The words of Job are ended*’. Job is convinced that his

adversary, his judge, his witness and redeemer would present to him an indictment that would amount to a complete vindication of innocence, even a source of pleasure for Job.

In the end Job surrenders the idea of bringing a case against God, and embraces the concept of a belief in God free of retributive theology. In the end Job serves God without reward or even explanation for unjust suffering. In 42:6 Job refuses to accept any longer his integrity as justifiable cause to contend with God over the evil that God has brought into his life.

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