

Isagogical Study of the Book of Job

by Paul Peters

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All Old Testament scholars are agreed that “the Book of Job is one of the most remarkable books of the Bible,” that “it occupies a position altogether unique in the entire Sacred Scriptures,” but that it is not read enough or not at all. Professor Fuerbringer in his District convention essay points out “that the story of Job is still remembered from the study of Bible History in the days of youth” and that “this is deemed ample and sufficient.” We all know the Prologue with its heavenly and earthly scenes, we all know the wonderful confession of Job, “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” and we all know the Epilogue with its rehabilitation of Job; but what of the remaining portions of the book? We may still be able to state the gist of the argument of the three friends of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but our difficulty increases when we are to reproduce Job’s argument and line of thought; and the difficulty increases still more when we are called upon to differentiate between the argument of the three friends of Job and that of Elihu, who speaks after the three friends had been silenced. Did he only repeat what the three friends had been saying, as some hold, or did he advance a new line of thought. But most difficult of all it may be for us to state what the nature of God’s revelation and instruction was when He began to question Job.

While we must confess that we in our study of the Scriptures have not done full justice to the Book of Job, we can at least rejoice in the fact that Old Testament scholars of the past and present have not neglected the Book of Job. Going back to Luther we find that the Reformer has a goodly number of valuable comments on Job, especially in his “Preface to the Book of Job”² and in his “Table Talk.”³ Calvin delivered no less than one hundred and fifty-nine sermons on texts from the Book of Job, twenty of which have been selected and translated.⁴ We then turn to Keil and Delitzsch, the old standby’s, whose commentaries have been translated for us into English. We are also fortunate that Prof. Fuerbringer’s convention essay read in 1921 was done into English in 1927 and published in book form.⁵ Prof. Pieper’s three *Quartalschrift* articles of 1908 entitled: *Das Buch Hiob in seiner Bedeutung für Predigt und Seelsorge* will, we have reason to hope, be put into English in the near future. Needless to say, these three articles with their clear and forceful expositions and presentations were of great value to your essayist and cannot be recommended too highly.

Among the most modern writers the commentary by Artur Weiser in the series of Old Testament commentaries, *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, deserves to be mentioned first of all.⁶ His introductory remarks on the meaning of the Book of Job have been followed and used by me at the close of this essay. The publication by Hans Moeller on *Sinn und Aufbau des Buches Hiob*⁷ gives one a good insight into the works of modern German scholars on our book. Of the modern American works I can, on the strength of my own reading, recommend to you: *Job, Poet of Existence*, by Samuel Terrien,⁸ who has also presented us with an *Introduction*

¹ New footnotes have been added since, esp. those in reference to chapter 19:25ff.

² St. Louis Ed. Vol. XIV, 18.

³ Ibid. Vol. XXII, 744, 1770, 1414/5, 1422.

⁴ *Sermons from Job*, by John Calvin. Selected and Translated by Leroy Nixon, Th.M., with an Introductory Essay by Harold Dekker, Th. M., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

⁵ Fuerbringer. *The Book of Job; Its Significance to Ministers and Church Members*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., 1927.

⁶ *Das Buch Hiob* übersetzt und erklärt von Artur Weiser. Göttingen. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1951.

⁷ *Sinn und Aufbau des Buches Hiob* von Pastor Lic. Hans Moeller, herausgegeben im Einvernehmen mit der Evang.-Luth. Freikirche, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Berlin. Cf. *Quartalschrift* 1955, p. 302.

⁸ Published by The Bobbs—Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis, New York, 1957.

and Exegesis of The Book of Job in The Interpreter's Bible.⁹ Terrien, a neo-orthodox theologian, is one of the leading modern American exegetes. His *Psalms and Their Meaning for Today*¹⁰ are also worthy of special mention. We should not overlook his commentaries. He has a wide range of reading knowledge and a deep insight into the cultural trends of our time. Another important commentary on the Book of Job is *The Book of the Ways of God* by Emil G. Kraeling, which is often quoted by modern Old Testament scholars.¹¹

We know that modern commentators excel in the literary criticism of the books of the Bible and in textual criticism. This is especially true of modern commentaries on the Book of Job. Prof. Pieper in his second *Quartalschrift* article deals with the literary critics and their findings, and it must suffice here to call your attention to his defense of the Book of Job as we have it in our Hebrew Bible. At present we are more concerned about the text and its translation. A little volume of the *Torch Bible Commentaries*, *The Book of Job* by Anthony and Miriam Hanson,¹² is characteristic of how modern scholars cope but also deal with the Hebrew text and its meaning. Luther already tells us what difficulties he and Melancthon encountered in working on the text of Job, often spending hours and days on one word. But we may truly say that today much more is known about Hebrew than at Luther's time. Scholars with knowledge of the cognate Semitic languages have applied their knowledge to a renewed and constant study of the text of Job, and their work is basic for the new translations of the book. Prof. Pieper must declare whole portions of Luther's translation as inadequate and the *Torch Bible Commentary* has this to say about the King James Version and the Revised Version: "The AV appears at its worst in the Book of Job. As far as recovering the original sense is concerned, the RV is not as good as one might expect. It has certain advantages over the AV: for one thing it prints the verses as poetry; for another, it does indicate where the rendering is doubtful. The occurrence of one or more marginal alternatives usually indicates that the meaning is uncertain. Hence it is always worthwhile consulting the RV if you have one. But the Book of Job is one of the books in the Bible that most needs a modern translation" (p. 36f).

We today have the Revised Standard Version. There is no doubt that it has advantages over our King James Version. We regret, however, that its rendering of Job 19:25–27 presupposes an interpretation of the text as treating only of Job's temporal salvation and justification. Terrien's translation is much better. Still, we cannot depend on any one translation and therefore must keep in close touch with the text itself. Modern textual critics are afraid that we who regard the text as verbally inspired, "are quite ready to see some mystic or hidden meaning in words" whose meaning is not clear to us. Their opinion of the King James Version, to quote from our *Torch Bible Commentary*, is that "as excellent as was their scholarship in their generation, . . . they could quite contentedly translate a Hebrew text that gave no sense or totally incongruous sense into an English that was almost as meaningless or quite as incongruous." Therefore "we must try," they add, "and decide the meaning even of apparently unimportant passages, as there are those who delight in drawing curious and fantastic exegesis from the text of the OT and we must have our answer ready" (p. 36). We, who hold to the original text as verbally inspired, must also have our answer ready and therefore have every reason to keep an eye on the Hebrew text.

While the Kittel-Kahle Bible with its critical apparatus is the standard work, still for practical purposes *Job with Hebrew Text and English Translation*, i.e. the American Jewish translation of the Scriptures as edited by Dr. A. Cohen in the Soncino Books of the Bible, deserves special mention. We know that a Jewish translation cannot be the final word on the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew text, although Jewish commentators of the past and the present knew and know some Hebrew. But the Soncino text and translation also has a running commentary¹³ including renderings from the various versions of the Bible and quotations from Jewish and Christian commentators, among the former Rashi, whom Luther quotes so often in his Genesis

⁹ *The Interpreter's Bible*, The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction. Exegesis. Exposition for Each Book of the Bible. Vol. III, Abingdon Press, New York, Nashville.

¹⁰ Published by The Bobbs—Merrill Company, Inc., Publishers. Indianapolis, New York, 1952.

¹¹ Dr. Kraeling is assistant professor of Old Testament, Union Theological Seminary, New York. His book was published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, but is now out of print. It can be drawn from Congregational Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

¹² Published by the SCM Press, LTD, London.

¹³ *Commentary* by Rabbi Dr. Victor E. Reichert, B. Litt., D.D. Hindhead, Surrey, The Soncino Press, 1946.

Commentary. The greatest service, however, which the Soncino publication offers the reader of the Hebrew text is that it prints the verses as poetry, in that the two lines of each verse or couplet follow each other down the line, one below the other, so that the reader will never have to cope with more than one line consisting of no more than three or four words. The benefit of thus reading the Book of Job not only in the original but also in its poetical form will soon become apparent to the reader. He will learn to agree with the author of Job, who, as Luther surmised, did not want his book translated at all.

But who is the author of the book? And who is Job about whom he writes? There are those who with the Talmud only regard Job as a “typical figure,” who “never was and never existed.” The Prologue which introduces Job to us is designated by Maimonides as a “parable,” by modern scholars as a piece of “folktale,” while Keil regards the whole Book of Job as “an elaboration of an ancient legend, done with such poetic license that it is no longer possible clearly to distinguish between historical tradition and poetical mixture” (Fuerbringer, p. 15). Artur Weiser in his commentary on Job is more cautious in that he simply says that no historical proof can be adduced for the historicity of Job, while Terrien admits that there is little doubt that “a historical event was at the basis of the tale,” i.e. the folktale. In view of this diversity of opinion we have every reason to acquaint ourselves with the testimony of the Bible as our final and only source.

The *Prologue* speaks of a man who “lived in the land of Uz,” who “was the greatest of all the men of the east,” i.e. of the country east of Canaan. And since Lamentations 4:21 refers to the daughter of Edom as dwelling in Uz, we may regard Edom or the country north or northeast of Edom in the Arabian and Syrian Desert as the home of Job. Luther is not afraid to call him “an Idumean, an uncircumcised heathen, although from the lineage of Abraham.”¹⁴ In other words, he was a non-Israelite, like Melchizedek a worshipper of the true God. Job is mentioned once more in the Old Testament by Ezekiel, chapter 14, verses 14 and 20, together with Noah and Daniel, both historical personages. This association of names permits the conclusion that Job was also an historical personage. In the New Testament, James 5:10, Job is mentioned together with the prophets and with the Lord as “an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.” These passages point to an historical person and to the actual personal experience of a man named Job. This, however, does not permit us to conclude, Luther hastens to add, that Job’s experience occurred exactly as the words describe it, that “Job spoke the very words recorded in his book... People do not speak thus in trial and temptation,” Luther asserts, “yet it so happened in fact and indeed.”¹⁵

While the country and the surrounding peoples, the Sabeans and Chaldeans, marauding bands of the Arabian dessert, are mentioned, we are not told when he lived there. The Septuagint Job 42:17 and the apocryphal Testament of Job identify him with Jobab, king of Edom, mentioned in Genesis 36:33, who is said there to have been a grandson of Esau and consequently much earlier than Moses. Luther in one of his “Table Talk” supposes that Job lived during Solomon’s time.¹⁶ Fuerbringer feels safe in saying that he lived in the era of the patriarchs and that according to Genesis 22:21 he was a descendant of Shem, Uz being designated as the firstborn son of Nahor, the brother of Abraham. Luther,¹⁷ preceded by Jewish tradition, also makes use of this passage in tracing the lineage of Job to Shem. Terrien on the basis of “internal as well as external evidence” suggests that the original story—not the poem—was told as early as the second millennium B.C.; and since he has “little doubt that an historical event was at the basis of the tale,” he finally arrives at the same result as to the time in which Job is supposed to have lived, namely the age of the patriarchs, the second millenium.¹⁸

This again does not permit us to conclude that the Book of Job was written at that time, that Job himself or at least Moses is the author. Here we can only build on internal evidence, which the Book of Job offers us. It contains much wisdom literature and is written in the form of didactic and at times lyric poetry. We may therefore be safe in saying that the poem was written in the time of Solomon or even shortly before Solomon. Again the modern Old Testament scholar Terrien comes to the same conclusion on the basis of “the language

¹⁴ St. Louis Ed., Vol. XXII, 1770.

¹⁵ Ibid. XXII, 810.

¹⁶ Ibid. XXII, 1422.

¹⁷ Ibid. II, 1015.

¹⁸ *Job, Poet of Existence*, p. 28.

and the style” and concludes that the story was at last written down in Hebrew some time between the 11th and 8th centuries B.C., 1000 B.C. finally being the more precise time of his choice.¹⁹ Although the name of the author remains unknown, we have every reason to believe that he was an Israelite, an assumption for which his use of the Tetragrammaton in the Prologue and Epilogue already is sufficient proof. What is more, he was an inspired writer whose book always had canonical status. As such we find a close relation of its doctrinal contents to that of other contemporary writings, the doctrine respecting Wisdom in Job 28 compared with Proverbs 1–9, the doctrine respecting judgment in Job 19:29 compared with Ecclesiastes 12:14, the doctrine respecting death and the grave in Job compared with Psalm 88 and 89, whose authors Heman and Ethan, the Ezrahites, were the contemporaries of Solomon mentioned in I Kings 4:31. Also in the prophets beginning with Obadiah and Joel and continuing with Amos and Isaiah and with Jeremiah and Lamentations, we find distinct traces of familiarity and surprising similarities of expression as pointed out by Delitzsch in his *Commentary on the Book of Job*.²⁰ In the New Testament I Corinthians 3:19: “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness” is a direct quotation from Job 5:13, introduced by the Apostle with the words: “For it is written.” *The Interpreter’s Bible* also calls attention to the fact that “parallels of thought or terminology have been observed in about eighteen other passages of the NT”²¹ Eleven of these passages are listed in the 1953 Nestle *Novum Testamentum Graece*.²² Our *Torch Bible Commentary* has a chapter on *The Book of Job and the New Testament*. After stating that there are only a few direct quotations in the Pauline epistles, one apparently in Matthew’s Gospel, and perhaps two in Luke’s writings, the author continues: “But just because the central theme of the Book of Job is so closely related to the central theme of the NT, there are in fact several remarkable points of correspondence between it and the Book of Job. It is in itself a significant fact that there are almost as many echoes and quotations from Job in Paul’s letters as in the rest of the NT put together; and it is even more significant that seven such echoes occur in the Epistle to the Romans alone. Paul had no thought of expounding the Book of Job, but what he was trying to say to himself was in some respects so similar to the message of Job that the words of the Book of Job come naturally to Paul’s lips. We can sum up these resemblances under the two headings: God’s Unpredictability, and God’s Righteousness” (p. 30).

This leads us to the question concerning the purpose of the Book of Job. According to Luther the book treats the question “whether God causes also the pious to suffer adversity.” Prof. Pieper follows Luther in this and has the Book of Job raise the question as regards the mystery of suffering in this world, especially the suffering of the pious (p. 171). But the book does not only occupy itself with this question; it gives the answer, Prof. Pieper tells us, an answer which does not solve the mystery for our reason, but which is nevertheless apprehended by our faith as a blessed solution. What this solution is we will endeavor to learn from the book itself.

The Prologue gives us the key to Job’s sufferings. God imposes suffering on His servant, “who was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil,” not in order to punish him, as in the case of the ungodly whose sufferings are due to the wrath of God, not only to discipline His servant, a suffering proceeding from the love of God and serving to try, prove, and purify the child of God, but a suffering imposed to prove the purity of Job’s piety and “tending to the glory of God and to the refutation of Satan, the accuser of the pious.”²³ Job did not know this purpose, let alone his friends or Elihu; this purpose is not even revealed to Job by God Himself. This purpose remains hidden to Job during his sufferings, so that God even appears to him as his “enemy.” But Job is to prove the purity of his piety by finally speaking with Asaph: “Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand” (Ps. 73:23). Job spoke thus, not only when he repented and said: “Behold, I am vile” (40:4), but when, after God had questioned him for the second time, he

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 29, footnote 2.

²⁰ *Clark’s Foreign Theological Library*, Fourth Series. Vol. X. Edinburgh, 1881, pp. 24ff. Now published by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich.

²¹ Vol. III, p. 877.

²² They are I Thess. 5:22 (1:1–8; 2:3); James 5:11 (1:21); Apoc. 9:6 (3:21); Luke 1:52 (5:11); I Cor. 3:19 (12:13; 5:13); Luke 1:52 (12:19); Phil. 1:19 (13:16 LXX); Rom. 11:35 (41:3); Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27 (42:2); James 5:11 (42:11?ff).

²³ L. Fuerbringer, *The Book of Job*, p. 20.

said: “I have uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not . . . I have heard of them by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye seeth thee” (42:3, 5). This, only in other words, is saying what Asaph says at the close of the 73rd Psalm, which has been called a miniature book of Job: “But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works” (vs. 28). Thus Asaph’s and Job’s sufferings served to the glory of God.

The Prologue is followed by three cycles of alternate speeches or argumentations between Job and his three friends in chapters 3–31. But these speeches are not merely limited to argument and counter-argument. In these discussions Job is not only arguing or, to use a figurative phrase, wrestling with his three friends, but finally with God Himself, to whom he addresses himself and challenges Him to come forward in a court trial either as accuser or defender: “Then call, i.e. challenge Thou and I will answer, or let me speak and answer Thou me” (13:22). How far Job is carried away in accusing God of injustice, we shall see as we now follow as briefly as possible the development of these dramatic discussions.

We all know that Job opens the discussion by directing a prolonged and passionate curse against the day of his birth, because it shut not up the doors of his mother’s womb nor hid sorrow from his eyes (3:10). Even Sheol, “where the wicked cease from trouble,” and “where the weary are at rest,” would provide him with a better lot than his present life. Job longs for death and the grave, but they do not come. Instead, fear and dread and trouble come (3:25, 26).

Eliphaz, the first of the three friends to answer Job, begins with an almost unconscious consideration for Job’s feelings and his being weary and affrighted (4:5). Then, however, he questions Job’s fear of God and the integrity of his ways and gives the first hint of suggesting that no innocent person has ever been punished (vs. 7). Job should not rage as he has been doing, but should commit his case unto God, who does great things. He should not despise the chastening of God, the Almighty, for happy is the man whom God corrects. God makes sore and binds up, He wounds and His hands make whole. And as to the grave—Job should know that he will come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn comes in his season (vs. 21). This passage, the most beautiful and comforting of all the speeches of the three friends, is not repeated by them, not even by Eliphaz. We do not hear it spoken again until we hear Elihu speak. But even when spoken for the first time, it rings hollow to Job’s ear because of the insinuation that Job cannot be innocent, since no suffering is without a cause. This assumption is no longer a hidden one in the following speeches of Job’s friends.

Bildad, who follows Eliphaz, is more outspoken and maintains firmly the traditional belief in retributive justice. God is just, and the tragic fate of Job’s children was punishment for their sins, God delivering them into the hands of their transgressions (8:4). If Job were pure and upright, surely God would make the habitation of his righteousness prosperous (vs. 6). The godless man will lean upon his house, but it shall not stand (vs. 15). An innocent man God will not cast away (vs. 20).

Zophar can only repeat the arguments of Eliphaz and Bildad. He rebukes Job for his “doctrine” that God punishes the one whom He knows to be innocent (9:3f; 10:6f.). Job should know that God exacts less of him than his iniquity deserves (11:6), but still that God does punish iniquity (11:11). Therefore Job should set his heart aright. If iniquity is in his hand, then he should put it far away and not let unrighteousness dwell in his tents. Thus his friends seek to vindicate God by claiming that He punishes no pious person, that if He punishes, the person must have sinned. And Job’s afflictions are irrefutable proof that God regards him as guilty.

These are the arguments that called forth Job’s asseverations of his innocence and the denial of his guilt. In the beginning Job had only lamented his fate and even in answering Eliphaz for the first time he only speaks of his calamity and of the terrors of God, which are set in array against him (6:4). Even now he has only one request that God would crush him, i.e. put him out of his misery. It is only then that he finally pleads with his friends that they turn from their false judgment of assuming that he is guilty of some gross sin and that he is not able to discern right from wrong (6:30). But he does this only in passing, for now he turns to his God to ask Him: “If I have sinned, what do I unto Thee, O Thou watcher of men?” (7:20), i.e. if for the sake of argument I admit that I have sinned, how does this my act so affect you that you retaliate with such fierceness? And what is this thing that I have done that Thou dost not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? (vs. 21) Thus Job reproaches God for His seeming lack of mercy. Yet God as Job feels Him to be in his present suffering has

not driven out God as he knew Him in the past. Even when he will lay himself down in the dust of death, God will seek him, His devoted servant (vs. 21). Job never lost faith in his God, let alone that he ceased to believe in the existence of God.

In his third speech, chapter 9, Job confesses that no man can be just with God, that if one should desire to contend with God, he could not answer Him one in a thousand questions. But even if I were righteous, Job continues to contend; God would multiply my wounds without cause. It is futile to attempt to challenge God whether in a contest of strength or a suit of law; God would always prove him perverse (9:20), though he is innocent. He destroys the perfect and the wicked alike (vs. 22). He even laughs at the trial of the innocent (vs. 23). Therefore he wants God to show him why He contends with him at all (10:2). His strange dealings with him are irrational and incomprehensible. All that remains for Job to do is to look upon his affliction (10:15) and ask once more: “Wherefore then hast Thou brought me forth out of the womb?” (vs. 18) Let me alone, he pleads, that I may take comfort a little before I go to the land of darkness and the shadow of death (vs. 21).

In his fourth speech, chapters 12–14, Job dwells on the good fortune of the רָשָׁעִים - not “hypocrites” as the LXX and the King James render, but rather the “ungodly,” men who are alienated from God, apostates. They are robbers of men and provokers of God (12:6), but escape misfortune and live securely. God indeed is the Creator, with whom is wisdom and might (12:13), who leads counselors and kings and even priests away stripped (vs. 17–19). He increases the nations and destroys them (vs. 23), thus manifesting Himself as ruler of national and international events. Despite such a display of power and wisdom Job nevertheless desires to reason with God (13:3). His friends contend for God (13:8), but God will surely reprove them (vs. 10). Therefore they should let him alone that he may speak; come on him what will (vs. 13). He will argue his ways before God and this will be his salvation, since one who is alienated from God cannot come before Him (vs. 16). He, Job, will be justified and his innocence will at last be vindicated (vs. 18). His only plea is that God should withdraw His hand from him and make known to him his transgressions and sins (vs. 23) and not consider him to be His enemy any longer (vs. 24). God should exercise clemency towards a creature who is of a few days and full of trouble, especially when He brings him into judgment with Him, for “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.” (14:4). O indeed, there is hope for a tree when it is cut down; it will sprout again (vs. 7), but man dies and wastes away; he lies down and rises not. In this his deepest despair there is no confession of a resurrection—if a man die may he live again? (vs. 14)—but only the hope that God would keep him secret until His wrath were past (vs. 13) and God would then long for him, who is the work of His hands (vs. 15).

After Job has thus pictured God’s cruelty most drastically, God breaking him with breach upon breach, and after he then turned to the earth as his last resort, “O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no resting place” (16:18), he suddenly without any transition turns his gaze to heaven and says: Also now, behold my witness is in heaven and my advocate, my sponsor (not “record” as our King James Version has it) is on high (vs. 19). This advocate is none other but the *Goel* (גֹּאֵל), the Redeemer of chapter 19:25–27 (cf. 9:33; 17:3), who as his witness and vindicator—“there was no difference between advocate and witness in the Hebrew courts”—will proclaim his innocence in heaven, and vouch for him on high.

He is in dire need of this witness and advocate, for the grave is ready for him (17:1) and there is no one else who can stand surety for him (vs. 3), so that his innocence will yet be acknowledged in the future with God. Still as the righteous one Job will hold on his way, and as one who has clean hands will wax stronger and stronger (vs. 9). Nothing shall make him falter in the way of righteousness. Not even his extreme suffering is to draw him away from God to the side of the godless. On the contrary, it drives him to make his communion with God closer and closer. Therefore Delitzsch compares this confession with “a rocket that shoots above the tragic darkness of the book, lighting it up suddenly although only for a short time.” For now Job is again hoping for Sheol, the nether world, as his house and calls it his father and the worm his mother and sister and asks: “Where then is my hope?” (vs. 15) He meets his friends, who rush him with words, with the claim that even God has subverted his cause, i.e. that He has perverted justice and treated him unfairly. There simply is no justice (19:6, 7). Consequently his hope is plucked up like a tree (vs. 10) and God regards him as one of his adversaries (vs. 11). All of his kinsfolk and familiar friends abhor him, for his bone cleaves to his skin and to his flesh, and he is

escaped with the skin of his teeth (19:20). All his flesh has been smitten with leprosy except the gums of his teeth, which are left unattacked by the leprosy. Have pity upon me, he now cries out, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, friends whose words were not motivated by love. In his desperation, Job unexpectedly turns from God to his friends, whom he had blasted with scorn and anger. But his friends fail him and persecute him. And as Job did not want his words to find a resting place in the earth and to be swallowed up by it, so now he wants his words inscribed on a copper scroll (vs. 23),²⁴ even engraven with iron pen and lead in a rock forever, namely the words with which he had repeatedly asserted his innocence, for future generations to read, even for God to hear when they demand the justification of His servant, who, although innocent, has to leave this world persecuted by his friends and by God alike. Here Job is but a step from the depth of final despair and unbelief. And yet despite his strife and conflict with God, Job did not once lose faith. The best proof is Job's confession, which follows immediately after his plea to commit his claim of innocence to writing, a confession with which he reaches the highest expression of his faith.²⁵

And as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth²⁶
 And as the last will he arise over the dust (of my grave)²⁷
 And behind my skin, now thus struck to pieces,²⁸

²⁴ Some commentators want the noun סֵפֶר "scroll," to be understood as a Hebrew equivalent of the Akkadian *siparru*, "brass," "bronze." This brilliant suggestion, Terrien remarks, has found support in the discovery—near the Dead Sea—of two scrolls of copper inscribed with Hebrew characters (*The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. III, p. 1050*).

²⁵ "Whether this passage treats of the resurrection, or of temporal salvation and of Job's justification"—to quote from Prof. Pieper's *Quartalschrift* articles (1908, p. 122), in which he does not want to enter into a discussion of this question—"one thing is very clear," he adds: "It is a word of a truly great faith in God as his Redeemer out of all need. And Job kept faith unto the end."

²⁶ The translation "Redeemer" for לִשְׁמֵר is questioned by many, "since the *goel* is, basically considered, the restorer of the family," who is to restore the honor of Job's family after he has perished (cf. Kraeling, *The Book of the Ways of God*, p. 88). But A. B. Davidson in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, The Book of Job*, is doing more justice to the meaning of this word in pointing out that "the term redeemer (לִשְׁמֵר) is frequently used of God as the deliverer of His people out of captivity, e.g. very often in Isa. 40 seq. (ch. 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8), and also as the deliverer of individuals from distress, Gen. 48:16; Ps. 19:14; 103:4... Thus the idea of *Goel* and Redeemer naturally coincide" (p. 167–168). But who is this Redeemer? He is not God, as many hold, but is to be distinguished from God. Terrien finds in the words **living, last, shall stand, and upon the earth** a reference "to the mysterious being whom Job conceived for a moment as a 'mediator' (9:33), and later recalled to his psychological consciousness not merely as the object of a fleeting fancy but as the heavenly person who vouches for him On high and will maintain the right of man with God (16:19, 21). One can reasonably conjecture that the hero, forsaken of all men and separated from God, may have pinned his hope upon the existence of a heavenly being who would survive his own untimely death and bring about the miracle of a divine-human confrontation." It is in this connection that Terrien in quoting Emil G. Kraeling, *The Book of the Ways of God*, who refers to "a verbal parallel" from Canaanite literature: "And I know that the powerful baal liveth," at least admits that "the time-honored interpretation which took 19:25 as a reference to the resurrection of Christ had in it a grain of truth," and that "Christian interpreters—as well as the innumerable hearers of Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*—have a right to find in this passage a prefiguration of the Christian experience of salvation" (p. 1052–53). It seems as if modern exegetes have to be propelled forward by some pagan parallel before they can find a revealed truth in the Old Testament. The doctrinal premises of revelation and inspiration are sadly missing in their exegesis. We find them in Edward J. Young's *Introduction to the Old Testament*: "This magnificent statement of a bodily resurrection—for that is precisely what it is—raises a question. How did Job come to such a belief? Could he have attained it by mere reflection? I think not. It seems to me that God has given to him a special revelation of consolation, a revelation also which has shown him how false was the principle upon which he had begun to reason. In the light of this revelation, Job now comes to clear reflection" (p. 317).

²⁷ Here Terrien argues well that עָפָר "dust," is not identical with "earth" but with "grave," as it is used in Job 7:21; 17:16; 20:11; 21:26; also 10:9; 34:15; and Ps. 104:29 (*The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 1052). Prof. Pieper also finds this meaning in it: *Und dass er als der Letzte über meinen Staub auftreten wird* (And that as the last he shall arise over my dust (*Quartalschrift*, 1908, p. 121).

²⁸ Verse 26a defies all attempts at a definite and final translation. The above translation is Dr. Heidel's in his *Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*. He interprets the "behind my skin" as meaning: "And surrounded with my skin." This is the meaning Luther also found in our verse and therefore translated: *Und werde darnach mit dieser meiner Haut umgeben werden* (And afterward I shall be surrounded with this my skin). Hans Moeller in *Sinn und Aufbau des Buches Hiob*, whose translation is more literal and grammatical than Luther's, finds the same meaning: *Hernaeh wird dieses mit meiner Haut umgeben werden* (Afterward this will be surrounded with my skin) and adds:

And from out of my flesh,²⁹ I shall behold God,
Whom I, even I, shall see for myself
And my own eyes shall see Him, and not another;
My reins are consumed with longing within me.

Although Job kept this faith and longing unto the end, still he falters again and falls back into his old argument that he is innocent, righteous, pious, while God is unjust, cruel, and merciless. This is the theme which runs through all of his speeches, but these erroneous speeches do not proceed—as Prof. Pieper tells us—out of a malicious heart, but out of his sufferings, are forced out of him by his excruciating pains and his false thinking emanating from his old Adam.³⁰ It will suffice to point out how in the closing chapter of the second cycle of speeches, chapter 21, and in the third cycle of speeches, chapters 22–31, he returns again and again to this insistent claim that he is right and God is unjust. But Job does not only claim that he is innocent; he wants to prove his innocence to God, if he could only find God. Yet nowhere on earth can he discover Him. Still he is certain that after God has tried him, he will come forth as gold (23:10), for he has always treasured up the words of God (vs. 12). He will teach his friends concerning the hand of God (27:11), namely that the hand of God is also laid heavily on the ungodly and that terrors will overtake them like waters (vs. 20). Therefore to fear the Lord is wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding (28:28). Again this is one of the highest of the many high points of the book. For Job does not claim that man on his own can achieve this wisdom. He may explore the hidden treasures of the earth, he may cut out channels among the rocks (vs. 10), but God only knows the place of wisdom and God must reveal it unto man, namely that the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom (vs. 28).

In the three closing speeches Job in sorrowful meditation soliloquizes and speaks first of all of himself as he was in bygone days in the time when God preserved him, when God's lamp shined above his head, and by His light he walked through darkness, when friendly and intimate converse with God was upon his tent and the Almighty was yet with him (29:3–5), when he hoped that he would die with his nest and multiply his days as the phoenix (vs. 18). Then again he finds himself in the midst of his afflictions despised by all men and crying

*Das ist die einfachste und glatteste Uebersetzung des vorhandenen Textes (vol. dazu vor allem Döhler). Sowohl Heilung der von der Krankheit zerfressenen Haut wie Neubekleidung des verwesten Körpers (im Sinn von 2 Kor. 5, 3f) kann damit gemeint sein. [This is the simplest and smoothest translation of the extant text (comp. above all in reference to it, Döhler). Both the healing of the skin corroded by disease and the naked body newly clothed (in the sense of II Cor. 5:3f) can be meant]. Terrien in *Job, Poet of Existence* follows a marginal substitute in the King James Version, which construes עוֹרִי “my skin,” as the construct infinitive of the verb עוֹר, “to awake,” and translates surprisingly enough: “And after I wake up, I shall stand up,” but adds: “Hebrew obscure, text uncertain.” In short, this verse remains a *crux* of the translators and interpreters.*

²⁹ As to the preposition מִן “from,” we have to take two meanings into consideration. It may mean either “from within” or “from without,” both derived from the idea of separation (Kautzsch, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*, par. 119w, p. 382). The King James Version has “in my flesh,” Luther in meinem Fleisch, the Revised Standard Version “without my flesh.” Terrien favors the translation of the King James Version and his whole line of argument is worthy of every consideration (*Interpreter's Bible*, p. 1054). Although he does not find in the text a “belief in a bodily resurrection effecting entrance into eternal life,” still he precedes this denial with the claim that Job “believed that in some way (probably hinted at in the now corrupt vs. 26a) he would receive new flesh for the specific purpose of the divine-human interview” (*Interpreter's Bible*, p. 1055–56). Does not Terrien here contradict himself and all those who cannot find this passage referring to the resurrection? “It is true,” as Calvin already stated, “that he (Job) does not speak here explicitly and simply of the resurrection” (*Sermons from Job* by John Calvin, Selected and Translated by Leroy Nixon, Th.M., p. 123); still he speaks of beholding God from out of his flesh and with his own eyes, he himself beholding God and not another. It is here that Terrien remaining true to Job's own words has this to say: “Job insists that the man who will see God will not be ‘a stranger’ (אֲרֵי), some dead being ‘estranged’ from himself and not identical with his present personality—a mere shade of his present self—but on the contrary, the very same individual who is now passing through the travails of theological parturition. Such an insistence would be superfluous, and indeed incomprehensible, were the hero thinking of an earthly and ante-mortem experience” (*The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 1056–57). On the contrary, “death and corruption are not the end, but beyond the gates of death and decay stands the ever living Redeemer, who as the last ... holds out everything... The day will come when He will appear upon the dust ... to speak the final decisive word, to vindicate Job against his accusers... This He will do ... by resurrecting Job's body and by elevating him to blessed communion with God” (Dr. Heidel in his *Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, pp. 214f).

³⁰ Quartalschrift, 1908, p. 117.

in vain to God who does not answer him (vs. 20), only knowing that God will bring him to death and to the time appointed for all living (vs. 23). His only plea is that he may be weighed in a just balance, that God may know his integrity (31:6). After solemnly affirming that he is conscious of no thought and act whereby he deserves such a visitation of woe as has befallen him, he extends his final challenge to God: “Lo, here is my signature (the signature to his protestations of innocence), let the Almighty answer” (vs. 35).

Since the three friends now ceased to answer Job because he was righteous in his own eyes, i.e. because he justified himself rather than God (32:13), Elihu, a young man, who till now had held back and had been afraid to declare his own opinion, steps in and takes up the argument. He knows how to state Job’s argument in so many words: “I am clean without transgression, I am innocent, neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy” (33:9). He tells Job that he is not right in saying this and that God is too great for man, to defend himself against such accusations (vs. 12). He then states four reasons why God is not unjust.

First of all, God is good and gracious (33:24), even when He visits the pious one with many afflictions. Then God is just and proves it by setting His heart upon man (34:14), i.e. by thinking of all His creatures with a benevolent consideration and by hearing the cry of the afflicted (vs. 28). God is both sovereign and just over nations and individuals alike (vs. 29). Thirdly, there is such a vast distance between God and man that there can be no argument between God and man; there can only be the voice of trust and submission on the part of man, whom God has taught more than the beasts of the earth (chap. 35). Finally, although God is mighty, yet He is mighty in strength of understanding (36:5) to discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. And to those whom He holds in cords of affliction (vs. 8) He declares their transgressions and opens their ear to discipline (vs. 9 and 10), to which Elihu adds the moving words: He delivereth the poor, i.e. the afflicted in his affliction, He openeth their ears in tribulation (vs. 15). Thus God does loftily in His power. Who is a teacher like unto Him? (vs. 22) The Almighty, whom we cannot find out, is excellent in power (37:23) and also in mercy and justice (36:5). Therefore Job can only stand still and consider His wondrous works (37:14). And Job does not answer him, let alone try to contradict him. Elihu has succeeded in contradicting Job’s assertion that God is unjust and cruel and has shown him God’s justice and love. He did not insinuate that Job had made himself guilty of some hidden sin; but he did tell Job that he had spoken without knowledge and that his words were without wisdom, that he had answered like wicked men because he had added rebellion unto his sin and had multiplied his words against God (34:35–37). His purpose in telling Job wherein he had sinned was to humble him, for God does not respect any that are wise of heart (vs. 24). With these words Elihu closes his speeches. And now the Lord answers Job out of the whirlwind, the whirlwind being the setting for God’s appearance, in which He decks Himself with majesty and excellency, and arrays Himself with glory and beauty (40:10). Therefore in the closing chapters we do not have a theodicy—God does not justify Himself—but a theophany—God manifests His glory to Job. He does not appear in order to answer Job’s questions, but demands of Job that he answer the questions He as his God is going to put to him.

The first group of questions, chapter 38, pertains to the wonders of God’s creation, the creation of the earth (vs. 4–7), of the sea (vs. 8–11), of the light (vs. 12–15), of the wide expanse of creation, of the depths of the sea and earth, the source of light and darkness (vs. 11–21), of the forces of creation, snow and hail, light and wind, lightning and rain, dew and frost (22–30), of the heavenly constellations, the Pleiades and Orion, and of the laws which govern the movement of these constellations (vs. 33), as well as that of the clouds and the rain (vs. 34–38). This is not an anthropocentric presentation of God’s creation, as we find it in sundry science articles in *Time*, but a theocentric presentation as we can find it only in the Bible.

A second group of questions, chapters 38:38 to 39:30, pertain to the animals of the earth as objects of God’s loving care (cf. Ps. 104:21), the young lions and the raven (vs. 39–41), the wild goats and the wild ass (41:18), the wild ox and the ostrich (vs. 9–18), the war horse (vs. 10–25), and finally the hawk and the vulture (vs. 26–30).

In answer to these questions Job can only say: “Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer. Yea, twice; but I will proceed no further” (40:4–5).

The third group of questions is introduced by these words of the Lord: “Gird up thy loins now like a man” (40:7–14). The questions pertain to the two largest animals among the animals of the earth, kings over all the proud beasts (41:26), the behemoth or the hippopotamus, and the leviathan or the crocodile, and God asks Job whether he can subdue these monsters. Since no man can, who then is able to stand before God their Creator? Who has given God anything beforehand that God should repay him (vs. 11), representing an indirect rebuke of Job who thought he had reason to assert a claim against God. Now he can only answer: “I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?”³¹ Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:2–6).

God’s questions served a twofold purpose. They served to glorify His wisdom over against Job’s ignorance. And again, they served to glorify God’s omnipotence over against Job’s impotence. Therefore in questioning Job, the Lord asked him: “Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?” and then answers His own question: “He that reproveth God let him answer it” (40:2). The Apostle Paul put these questions into these words: “Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, ‘Why hast thou made me thus?’ (Rom. 9:20)... For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?” (11:34).

No, the mystery of sufferings is not revealed to Job and not to us, namely the why and the wherefore. Job must learn that he cannot comprehend God and that his accusations against God as his enemy have their source in his claim to be in the right, to be innocent. God is in the right whatever He does and His judgments are righteous. “Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” God asks Job (40:8), even after Job had confessed: “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?” (40:3). And only when God questioned Job for the second time and showed him that his own righteousness cannot save him (40:14), then Job repents. He can repent because God also shows him His gracious presence and reveals to him that justice and mercy always accompany His power and might.³² And Job responds to God’s gracious presence by saying: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye seeth thee. ³³Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:5, 6). Certainly, this is a confession of faith. And Job yields by faith to the grace of God, of that God who justifies the sinner. The last act of God was to remove the obstacle which always stands in the way of God’s justification, the “good conscience” of Job, and then to declare him just by saying to his three friends: “Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath” (42:7). Is Artur Weiser³⁴ right in understanding God as not saying here that Job was right in what he said, after God Himself had told him that it was he who had darkened counsel by words without knowledge (38:2; 40:2) and after Job himself had confessed that he had uttered that which he understood not (42:3), but that He, God, imputed this righteousness to him as a gift of grace and not as a reward, and that Job is now called upon to pray and to intercede for his three friends, who have not spoken the thing that is right and that he is therewith being exhorted to make use of that divine grace which he himself has just experienced? Be that as it may, it is the *sola gratia* to which the author of the Book of Job points as to the blessed solution of the divine mystery, the good and gracious will of God, of which Luther makes mention in his explanation of the Third Petition: Thy will be

³¹ Here, according to Terrien, Job “is quoting in a chastened mood the word of God ... repeating to himself the words which God has pronounced and which linger in his subconscious mind as an indicting echo.” Cf. chapter 38, verses 2 and 3.

³² In one of his lectures on the Book of Job Prof. Pieper, according to the notes taken by one of his former students, made the statement: *A Die Schrift bindet die Gerechtigkeit Gottes an seine Erhabenheit, an seine Allmacht* (Scripture links the righteousness of God to His majesty, to His omnipotence). To this may be added another statement made in connection with 41:3: “Humility is the only moral attitude toward God: To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

³³ What it means to “see” God Elihu had already told Job, when he spoke to him of the sufferer who prays unto God and God is favorable unto him, so that he sees God’s face with joy and God restores him his righteousness (33:26). Davidson in the *Cambridge Bible* (p. 169) in reference to Job’s words: “I shall behold God” (19:26) aptly states: “To see God is to see Him reconciled and in peace, for this is implied in seeing Him at all, because He hides His face” (13:24).

³⁴ *Das Alte Testament Deutsch*, Teilband 13: Das Buch Hiob, p. 21.

done on earth as it is in heaven. And God's blessings that He bestowed upon Job are but the visible sign of His grace. Certainly, God's final theophany is Christ, whom Job confessed when he spoke of Him as his Redeemer, whose glory the disciples saw, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, whose voice Paul heard on the way to Damascus, who is the only blameless servant of God, who for us has borne all sorrow and suffering, who has conquered sin and death, and who of God is made unto us righteousness and redemption (I Cor. 1:3). And since this book does not only deal with the suffering of the pious, but culminates in this, as Luther says, that God alone is just, it leads us on "directly to the New Testament" and to the righteousness of God therein revealed.

It should not be too difficult for us to find sermon texts from this book. Calvin found 159.³⁵ But the pericopes of all the territorial churches of Germany only have three texts from the Book of Job. Chapter 5:17–19: "Happy is the man whom God correcteth," 14:1–5: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble," and Job 19:22–27. And concerning the latter the question is asked why so few territorial churches use it as a pericope.³⁶ Even Thomasius has placed it as the second text for Easter Sunday behind Isaiah 53. If we only use those texts that are quoted directly and indirectly in the New Testament together with their contexts, we already have a goodly number of sermon texts. Then there are those texts that point to our Lord as to our surety and redeemer.³⁷ But also the texts that reveal the power and wisdom and justice of God should not be overlooked, as little as those that speak of the afflictions of the pious. No, we do not want to forget chapter 28 with its fear of God as the beginning of all wisdom—these and other texts from the Book of Job "given by inspiration of God" are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16).

³⁵ C. G. Chappell in his *Sermons from Job*, Abingdon Press New York—Nashville, 1957, published 15 sermons. F. H. K. Soll in his *Pericopes and Selections*, 1929, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wis., suggests 14 texts from Job.

³⁶ *Alttestamentliche Perikopen* herausgegeben von W. v. Langsdorff und A. Neuberg, Dresden und Leipzig, 1912, p. 326.

³⁷ Prof. Fuerbringer's remarks on Job 33:23, 24 should be given every consideration when preaching on this and parallel texts.