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God-talk in the Book of Job

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Chapter 4

Between Rebellion and Hope in the Speeches of Job

4.1 Introduction

The central charge in the dialogue is that God perverts justice. Job utters this grave and decisive accusation in Job 9.¹ Even though this allegation is one of the main points of the dialogue, Job's speeches also include other elements. Job holds on to his innocence, keeps his wish to enter into a lawsuit with God, and insists that God treats him unjustly. But he also explores his situation from different perspectives and looks at whether other insights could be helpful in explaining God's involvement in his current blameless suffering. Job considers several possible motives for God's intangible, unintelligible and unjust actions. However, at the same time he also places his hope in this same God. This ambivalent attitude towards God shows how complex the situation of a sufferer is. On the one hand, it looks as if God manifests himself as an opponent. God even brings upon himself the suspicion that he abuses his sovereign position as Creator. Job suggests that God had intentions other than partnership when creating human beings. On the other hand, sufferers can only place their hope in this same God because only God has the power to free them from his hand. Therefore, Job also cautiously hopes that God can force an opening in his immovable case as his witness and redeemer. In this way, Job moves between rebellion and hope in his speeches.

The doubt about God's righteousness remains an important topic in the course of Job's speeches. On the one hand, Job uses his own case in order to demonstrate the unjust nature of God's actions. He holds to his conviction that he is innocent and repeats that God's hand has wrongfully turned against him. After Job 9, Job's wish to plead with God and the impossibility of having a case with God return. On the other hand, Job also casts doubt on God's irreproachable actions by directing the attention to the fate of the wicked. Contrary to his friends, Job observes that the wicked live in prosperity. According to Job, they are not punished with misery as may be expected according to the concept of retribution. So, there are two lines of argument in order to prove that God's dealings are unsound, if it is understood according to this concept: Job's own innocent suffering and the apparent prosperity of the wicked.

¹ See Ch.2.

This fourth chapter explores the different aspects which Job mentions in order to understand his situation and to explain God's involvement in his misery outside Job 9. It elaborates upon how Job perceives God as his opponent and how he searches for motives for God's hostile treatment of him (4.2). Subsequently it maps out in the way in which Job applies the image of the lawsuit in his other speeches outside Job 9. The chapter depicts how Job holds to his conviction that he is blameless until the end and questions whether Job does, nevertheless, admit that he has sinned to some extent (4.3). In order to support his claim that God perverts justice, Job also draws attention to the fate of the wicked. They prosper instead of suffering misery (4.4). Another topic is the matter of why God gives life to those who meet trouble. Thus, the question of the sense of a life in suffering is raised (4.5). Finally, this chapter deals with Job's trust in God in God's role as heavenly witness and redeemer (4.6).

4.2 God as Job's Opponent

4.2.1 God's Hostility towards Job

Job considers his miserable fate to be the result of a hostile attack by God. In Job's eyes, God treats him as if he is God's enemy. God's hostile action towards human beings does not need to be controversial as such. According to the concept of retribution, God legitimately punishes the wicked because of their opposition against him. However, God's action becomes dubious in Job's case because Job insists that he is blameless. Therefore, Job does not deserve to be treated as an evildoer. In Job 9, Job makes it clear that he sees God's treatment of him as perversion of justice.² This implies that each depiction of God's hostility after Job 9 has even more impact; then it not only points out that God is the origin of Job's misfortune, it also has the connotation of unjust action. The images of attack and hostility emphasize the intensity of Job's suffering. This distress is all the more painful because, in Job's eyes, it affects him unjustly.

In the dialogue, Job identifies God as the origin of his misery for the first time in 6,4. Here, he uses the image of the archer in order to depict how God harasses him with trouble. Job reacts to Eliphaz' question of why Job is dejected so and does not trust his fear of God (4,2-6). Job tries to justify his outburst of words by pointing to the weight of his trouble (6,2-3).³ The reason for this intense reaction is that God has afflicted him with severe suffering.

² See Ch.2.

³ The verb *לעע* (to speak uncontrolled) in 6,3 does not mean that Job apologizes for untruthful speaking, since that would undermine his plea in the continuation of the dialogue (see also Van Selms, *Job* I, 63; Clines, *Job*, 170). It characterizes more the sometimes emotional and sharp nature of Job's words. Furthermore, in the words of Job in 6,2-4, a reference could be seen to the remark of Eliphaz in 5,2 that resentment kills the fool. For,

6,4 For the arrows of the Almighty are in me,
 my spirit drinks their poison.⁴
 The terrors of God line up against me.⁵

God's arrows, which have pierced Job, symbolize the anguish and misfortune (6,2) that God has sent to Job. Normally, God's arrows pierce evildoers or opponents and bring disaster.⁶ In Ps.38,2-3, the psalmist characterizes his illness as God's arrows that have stuck in him. He implores God not to discipline him for his iniquities in God's anger. In 6,4, the image of God's arrows similarly evokes the context of the concept of retribution, in which God punishes evildoers. Job attributes the origin of his misfortune to an aggressive act by God. He considers himself as a target of God's hostile actions, with which God normally treats his opponents. Within the image, Job's spirit drinks the poison of God's arrows (6,4b). This causes his illness and trouble.⁷ The word רוּחַ (spirit) can express the centre of someone's thinking and feeling. Several times it appears parallel with נֶפֶשׁ (breath of life/someone's inner centre) which indicates the centre of someone's life.⁸ Job indicates that his misfortune has affected his whole being. In the words of a dichotomy with which Job is not familiar: he suffers physically as well as mentally.⁹ A new image occurs in 6,4c. Here, the terrors of God represent Job's trouble. God lines up his terrors before his opponent like a general besieges and attacks an enemy.¹⁰ The images of God's arrows and terrors illustrate the origin of Job's distress, but they also underline the weight of his anguish. God afflicted Job with a miserable fate that God's opponents normally suffer.

One could wonder whether this depiction of God's hostile actions in 6,4 already suggests the feeling that God wrongfully acts in Job's case. This accusation is explicitly heard for the first time in Job 9. It is true that Job casts doubt on the

the word כַּעַשׁ (resentment) in 5,2 returns in 6,2. However, in 6,2, the word כַּעַשׁ has the broader meaning 'anguish' because of the parallel with הֲוֵהָיָה (Qere; my misfortune).

⁴ Hesse considers this line as an addition (Hesse, *Hiob*, 62).

⁵ Fohrer considers this line as a gloss (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 160). Several scholars change יַעֲרֹכּוּנִי (are arrayed) into יַעֲבֹרוּנִי ('disrupt me') (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 160; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 20; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 121; Van Selms, *Job I*, 63). However, the meaning of the Masoretic text is clear and does not need to be changed (see art. עָרַךְ, HAL II, 885).

⁶ Num.24,8; Deut.32,23.42; 2 Sam.22,15; Ps.7,14; 18,15; 64,8; 77,18; 144,6; Zech.9,14.

⁷ The image of God as archer belongs to the category of God as 'divine warrior'. It can probably be more specifically traced back to the Syrian and Egyptian (18th dynasty) deity Resheph, who sends plagues to people by means of arrows.

⁸ 7,11. See also 16,13, where God affects Job's kidneys.

⁹ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 169; Van Selms, *Job I*, 63.

¹⁰ Compare Ps.88,16-18, where the psalmist understands his miserable and desperate situation as the result of God's terrors which surround and destroy him. He associates God's terrors with God's burning anger.

relation between the extent of his misery and his conviction that he has lived a righteous life in Job 6-7.¹¹ He does not understand why God pays such close attention to insignificant human beings and makes Job his target (Job 7). Job also mentions his righteous way of life.¹² However, Job does not draw any conclusion from these considerations and leaves the question of God's injustice open in Job 6-7. The images of God's arrows and terrors show the origin and severity of Job's anguish. They explain Job's tempestuous reaction. But Job has not yet suggested in Job 6-7 that divine injustice is at the basis of his fate.¹³

In the course of the dialogue, the images of archer and target return. Job then uses even more extensive military images in order to express his feeling that God harasses him. The image of God as archer returns in 16,12-14. Job complains that God afflicts and crushes him. God has set Job up as his target and his projectiles¹⁴ surround him (16,12c-13a). These projectiles hit the vital parts of a human being. God pierces Job's kidneys without pity (16,13b/c). The kidneys as well as the liver symbolize the vital core of human life.¹⁵ God's hostile attack affects Job's vigour and mental state. In Job 9, Job has charged God with unjust actions because he is convinced that he is blameless.¹⁶ In this light, the depictions of God's attack with a great display of power demonstrate the lack of proportion in God's actions in relation to Job's case.¹⁷ They now represent God's unjust actions in the Creation. Job is a defenceless victim of God's hostile and unjust show of strength towards him.

The depiction of God's hostility in 16,12-14 concludes with images from the battlefield. Job compares God's attack to a combatant who breaches through the wall of a besieged city.¹⁸ In Job's view, God acts like a warrior on the battlefield.

16,14 He breaches me breach after breach,
he rushes against me like a warrior.

¹¹ 6,30; 7,12.20-21.

¹² 6,10c (some scholars delete this line (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 161; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 22; Hesse, *Hiob*, 62) or are unsure of its originality (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 61; Pope, *Job*, 52)); 6,29b.

¹³ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 171.

¹⁴ In Jer.50,29, the word **קַשָּׁת** means 'archer' because of the parallel with **קַשָּׁת** (those who bend the bow). Therefore, several scholars also read 'archer' in 16,13. They see God as a commander directing his archers to the target (Clines, *Job*, 371; Pope, *Job*, 122; Habel, *Job*, 273). However, the meaning 'projectile' is more probable in 16,13 because God is the subject in 16,12-14. God personally attacks Job in these verses (so Hölscher, *Hiob*, 40; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 278; Horst, *Hiob*, 250; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 189.192; Hesse, *Hiob*, 113; Van Selms, *Job I*, 145).

¹⁵ Compare Lam.3,12-13 and Prov.7,23.

¹⁶ Job repeats this conviction in 16,17.

¹⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 287; Clines, *Job*, 383-384.

¹⁸ See also 30,14.

These two images express the gravity of God's attack. According to Job, he has become an enemy in God's eyes. The image of God breaching walls suggests that God has turned away from a person or his people and left them in the hands of opponents. Normally, the reason for this attitude is God's disappointment in their way of life.¹⁹ Apparently, Job belongs to this category. The breaches in the wall could refer to the blows, which Job experiences in his life. These actions by God are compared to those of a warrior assaulting a city (16,14b). In Isa.42,13, God goes to war against his enemies as a warrior in order to bring deliverance to his own people.²⁰ This bellicose attitude has also turned against Job. While Eliphaz depicted the wicked as those who rush against God (15,26), Job now describes God as the one who rushes against him. God besieges Job like a warrior besieges a hostile city. In this way, Job attributes the initiative for hostility and attack solely to God.²¹

These military images are further extended in 19,8.12. There, God sends his troops like a commander would in order to besiege Job's tent (19,12). These more or less military images attribute Job's misfortune to violent characteristics of God. Job still supposes that God acts according to a close relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. Therefore, these aggressive measures against Job illustrate the disproportionate and unjust character of God's treatment of Job because Job is convinced that he is innocent. God treats Job unjustly as an evildoer or enemy. Job is obviously an opponent and an enemy in God's eyes.

19,11 He has kindled²² his anger against me
and counts me as his enemy²³.

God's perception of Job has apparently changed in comparison to the beginning of the book of Job. Job's former prosperous state indicated that God considered Job to be a righteous man (1,1-5). His current misery can only be a sign that God has changed his mind. Job understands his fate as an outburst of God's anger.²⁴ This is usually turned on evildoers and opponents and brings calamity.²⁵ God only sends

¹⁹ Isa.5,5; Ps.80,13; 89,41.

²⁰ See also Jer.20,11; Sef.3,17; Ps.78,65. In Ps.24,8, God is called גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה (mighty in battle).

²¹ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 288; Clines, *Job*, 385.

²² Changing the vocalization of קָרָה (to kindle) into qal (so Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 123; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 308; Strauß, *Hiob*, 3) is not necessary because the line expresses the active action of kindling God's anger (cf. Clines, *Job*, 429.444).

²³ Reading a singular כִּצְרוּ (cf. LXX) is more probable because in 13,24 and 33,10, the comparison is also in singular. Moreover, the line refers to Job.

²⁴ See also 14,13; 16,9.

²⁵ 4,9; 20,23.28; 21,17.

such grave misery if he judges Job to be an evildoer. Therefore, Job can only derive from his misfortune that God now counts him as his enemy.

While God considers Job as his enemy, according to Job, there is the question of whether or not Job also sees God as his enemy because of his currently unjust miserable state. Job calls God his adversary in law (9,15) and depicts his suffering as hostile assaults by God. However, do these images suggest that God has become Job's enemy? Possible proof for the view that Job also calls God his enemy is 16,9c, in which Job states that his enemy sharpens his eyes against him. 16,9c would also refer to God and call God an enemy, if it is taken as a third colon parallel to 16,9ab, where Job describes that God has torn him in God's anger and gnashes his teeth at him like an animal.²⁶ However, it is preferable to read 16,9c parallel with 16,10a because of the parallelism between sharpening the eyes (16,9c) and opening the mouths wide (16,10a).²⁷ Thus, אֹיְבֵי (my enemy) refers to the group of pursuers that is mentioned in 16,10a and not to God.²⁸ Whereas Job takes arms up against God, calls God his adversary in law, and charges God with perverting justice, he does not go to battle against God as if God is his enemy. Instead of a frontal counterattack, Job chooses the way of the lawsuit in order to denounce God's hostile attitude towards him.²⁹

Job also mentions other images in order to depict God's hostility. He characterizes his miserable state as a situation of captivity and persecution. God has put Job's feet in stocks (13,27),³⁰ has thrown his net over Job (19,6),³¹ breaks

²⁶ So Horst, *Hiob*, 248-249; Clines, *Job*, 382.

²⁷ In this way, a regularly composed poem by means of distiches comes into being (16,12-13 can also be read as three distiches).

²⁸ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 280; Hesse, *Hiob*, 112.118; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 40; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 145; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 192; Pope, *Job*, 123. Except for Pope, these scholars consider 16,9c-11 as a later interpolation that interrupts the coherence of the speech, since 16,9ab and 16,12-14 deal with God, while 16,9c-11 deals with a group of human adversaries. Because of the relation with 16,10a, they mostly change the vocalization of אֹיְבֵי into אֹיְבֵי (my enemies), which has been changed in order to adapt 16,9c to 16,9ab.

²⁹ Within the context of Job 16, this keeps open the possibility of making an appeal to God as Job's witness. This would hardly have been possible if Job had called God his enemy.

³⁰ Elihu refers to this passage in 33,11. Fohrer changes בַּסֵּר (in the stocks) into בַּסִּיד (with lime) cf. Tg., since the footprints in 13,27c suppose freedom of movement and not being kept in stocks (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 238). However, the change is not necessary because the three cola in 13,27 can be read as separate depictions of God who is restricting Job's freedom of movement (compare Clines, *Job*, 321-323).

³¹ Some scholars derive מַצֹּדוֹ (his net) from מַצֹּדָה (fortress) because the image of laying siege to a city is more appropriate in the light of 19,7-12. They also take the verb חָקַר (to surround) as an indication of this interpretation (Clines, *Job*, 428; Gordis, *Job*, 201; Habel, *Job*, 291). However, the content of 19,7-12 is not exclusively military. Moreover, iconographic evidence shows that throwing a net can be a more or less military image. Enemies or prisoners are caught in a net (J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures. Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd edition with supplements, Princeton 1969, 94.98).

him down on every site (19,10), and persecutes him (19,12). Job experiences God's hostility personally. God terrifies Job with dreams and visions (7,14) and Job has the feeling that God hides his face from him (13,24). Hiding God's face can be an expression of his anger³² which has been caused by transgressions, turning to other gods, or a lack of faithfulness.³³ It puts into words Job's feeling that God refuses to be concerned with somebody's distressing situation.³⁴ In Job's eyes, God has turned away from him and considers him as an opponent. This impression is summarized in 30,20-22 in which Job complains that God does not answer his cry for help and has become cruel.

4.2.2 The Hand of God and Its Effect

In an appeal to his friends for mercy, Job also expresses the origin of his misery in a different way. He describes his suffering as an action of the hand of God.

19,21 Have pity on me, have pity on me, you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me.

The image of the hand of God touching Job attributes the origin of Job's trouble and disasters to actions by God. The hand of God (יָד) represents God's power over all living things.³⁵ The hand of God effectuates positive as well as negative things. It creates and it heals³⁶, but it can also cause calamity. Job identifies God's terrors with the working of the hand of God (יָדָא).³⁷ The words יָד and נָגַע (to touch) in 19,21b are also used by the satan in the prologue when he challenges God to stretch out his hand against Job in order to touch Job's wealth and body.³⁸ In this way, a bitter irony appears. For, the reader knows that Job's analysis is right but the reason for God's touch is something other than wickedness. The satan's challenge is at the basis of God's permission to touch the pious Job. In 30,21, Job mentions the activity of God's mighty hand parallel to God becoming cruel. So the touch of

Therefore, this image is not incongruous here (see also 18,8-10). Cf. C.L. Seow, "Job's *gō`ēl*, again", in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 692.

³² Deut.31,17; Isa.64,6; Ps.27,9.

³³ Deut.31,17-18; 32,20; Isa.59,2; 64,6; Jer.33,5; Ezek.39,23-24; Mic.3,4. See for the expression also 34,29.

³⁴ Ps.30,8; 69,18; 102,3. See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 252; Clines, *Job*, 319.

³⁵ 10,7; 12,10.

³⁶ 5,18; 10,3 (יָדָא); 14,15.

³⁷ 13,21. See also 6,9.

³⁸ 1,11; 2,5. Compare e.g. Ruth 1,13.

God's hand not only expresses the origin of Job's fate, but also indicates some of the aggressive and hostile nature of God's actions.³⁹

The results of Job's afflictions affect Job in the social sphere. Job has lost his honourable state and has been an outcast from the moment his misfortune befell him. Job's former social status and prosperity were connected to his righteousness. His wealth showed that he was righteous in God's eyes because God blesses the righteous (1,1-3). Job's sensible and high moral behaviour demonstrated his upright nature and made him an esteemed person in society. Job helped the weak, people listened to his advice, he was respected (Job 29), and offered burning-offers for his children in case they had sinned (1,5). However, those around Job conclude from his current miserable state that Job must have sinned before. Apparently, such a conclusion is reason enough for placing someone in social isolation. Job has lost his prominent position and is cast out by his relatives. Young and humble people mock and reject him.⁴⁰ Job blames God for causing this alienation from his surroundings. God has stripped Job's honour from him (19,9) and has made him a byword of the people (17,6). In this way, Job's misfortune not only affects his own body and life, but also deprives him of his honour and places him in an isolated position in society.

4.2.3 The Search for Motives for God's (Unjust) Actions

The experience of such grave and unjust suffering makes Job wonder what motives could be at the bottom of God's hostile treatment of him. Since punishment for wickedness can not be the reason because of Job's innocence, Job has to explore other possible reasons for God's puzzling behaviour. Job first focuses on God's perception of human beings. In Job 7, he wonders whether God's hostile treatment of human beings and intensive concern with them maybe follows from an overestimation of the significance of human beings. The disproportion of God's suspicious treatment of humankind and the imbalance of God's grotesque measures against people with their actual offences and real threat are important issues in this speech. Job tries to find reasons for this divine behaviour towards human beings. Job complains that God even harasses him in his sleep (7,14). He appeals to God to

³⁹ In 12,9, Job also attributes his misery to an act of the hand of God. However, this verse is controversial. Several scholars consider it as part of a later insertion, partly because the divine name *יהוה* is used in this verse and does not occur in the rest of dialogue (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 114; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 33; Horst, *Hiob*, 184; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 166; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 244; Hesse, *Hiob*, 93). Clines reads 12,7-12 as Job paraphrasing the way in which the friends address him (Clines, *Job*, 292. Van Hecke adopts this view (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 151)). Tur-Sinai thinks that here the writer gives the customary version of the story in Israel (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 210-211).

⁴⁰ 19,13-19; 30,1.9-10

leave him alone (7,16). Then Job asks why God pays such close attention to human beings.

- 7,17 What is a human being that you make so much of him⁴¹
and that you fix your attention on him,
7,18 that you inspect him every morning
and test him every moment?

These verses are a parody on Ps.8,5ff.⁴² Job hints at the prominent position of human beings in the Creation and God's particular care for them of which the psalmist here sings. In Ps.8,5f, the psalmist is surprised at God's high esteem of human beings. God is well-disposed to humble mortals and looks after them according to the psalmist. However, this prominent position of human beings and God's care are placed in a bad light within the context of Job 7. The significant position of humankind seems to be a reason for continuously observing and harassing them. Whereas פקד (to be concerned with) has a positive meaning standing parallel to זכר (to be mindful) in Ps.8,5, this verb is coloured negatively because of its parallel to בחן (to test) in 7,18. God's attention now becomes an examining interest. God tests (בחן) the heart and the kidneys of people in order to evaluate their way of life.⁴³ He tests both righteous and wicked (Ps.11,5) and gives to them according to the result of this test (Jer.17,10). Job connects this privileged position with God's observing and suspicious attention. He bitterly wonders why God values mortals⁴⁴ so highly that God harasses them with his inspecting and testing attention each moment. Is such concern not disproportional and an overestimation of the real significance of perishable human beings in comparison to God?

This general question is applied to Job's own case in the rest of Job 7. The significance of human beings as well as the nature of God's attention is further specified. Job mentions the significance of human beings in two ways. On the one hand, he suggests that God considers him as a larger threat than he actually is. Job asks whether he is the sea or a sea-monster (7,12). The ים (sea) and the תנין (sea-monster) refer to powers of chaos which God has suppressed.⁴⁵ In 38,8, God shuts

⁴¹ Pope and Fohrer translate לולד (Pi) with 'to rear' or 'to bring up' (Pope, *Job*, 58; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 164. Horst gives this interpretation in his comment (Horst, *Hiob*, 120)). However, Job does not ask here why God creates human beings but why he attributes so much significance to them.

⁴² Compare also Ps.144,3.

⁴³ Jer.11,20; 17,10; 20,12; Ps.7,10; 17,3; 26,2; Prov.17,3; 1 Chr.29,17. In 23,10, Job states that he would be as good if God tested him.

⁴⁴ See the description in 7,1-10.

⁴⁵ תנין: 51,9 (parallel to Rahab); Ps.74,13. ים represents the mythological and dangerous sea-god Yam, who is the adversary of Baal.

the sea in with doors. God seems to treat Job as if he is a power of chaos that threatens God's order.⁴⁶ However, this would be an overestimation of the importance of the mortal Job and his threat to God. Job's suggestion is that God's measures against him which come up in his suffering are not in proportion with his position as a perishable mortal.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Job wonders to what extent God's 'well-being' depends on right behaviour by humble mortals.⁴⁸ He asks what he does to God if he has sinned (7,20a).⁴⁹ According to Clines, Job means that every sin he may have committed is hardly worth retribution since in any case he will be dead soon.⁵⁰ However, Job does not mention retribution in 7,20a, but suggests that the sin of a humble mortal does not harm the exalted God.⁵¹ Therefore, God's well-being can not be a reason for examining human behaviour so intensively. For, it does not depend on human actions.⁵² The following questions assume the same view: why does God make Job a target, why has Job become a burden to God, and why does God not overlook Job's sin?⁵³ Job plays with the significance of humble mortals in his search for a motive for God's treatment. Does God not overestimate the power of human beings if he considers Job as a threatening force of chaos? Moreover, is it not true that human behaviour does not affect God? God would undermine the fundamental difference between creatures and Creator if he considered Job as a serious threat.

The nature of God's attention is elaborated upon in different ways. First, Job describes the negative nature of God's attention as continuous harassment. Even when Job tries to find rest in his sleep, God terrifies him with dreams (7,14). Job is not able to swallow his spittle as long as God looks at him (7,19) and it is his express wish that God leave him alone (7,16). Secondly, Job uses the image of watcher in order to illustrate God's observing attitude. He calls God a נֹצֵר הָאָדָם (watcher of humanity; 7,20). Furthermore, he uses the root שָׁמַר (to watch over) in order to express that God set a guard over him (7,12) and watches him in order to punish any iniquity (10,14). Whereas the verbs נֹצֵר and שָׁמַר mostly express that

⁴⁶ Habel, *Job*, 162; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 179; Clines, *Job*, 188.

⁴⁷ Clines, *Job*, 188-189; Hesse, *Hiob*, 70-71.

⁴⁸ See also the remarks of Eliphaz and Elihu on this topic: §3.2.3.

⁴⁹ Several scholars consider 7,20ab as a gloss (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 164; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 24; Hesse, *Hiob*, 64). Pope only deletes הַטְּאִוְרִי (Pope, *Job*, 62). Even if 7,20ab is a gloss, the following questions bear the same view.

⁵⁰ Clines, *Job*, 194. He thinks that Elihu comes closer to the position that the sins of mere human beings are so trivial as to be unworthy of God's consideration (35,5-8).

⁵¹ Horst, *Hiob*, 121; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 130; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 74; Weiser, *Hiob*, 64. The same idea can be found in 22,2-3 and 35,6-8.

⁵² The question of whether God profits from having a case with Job (10,3) hints at the same idea that God's well-being or enjoyment does not depend on human behaviour.

⁵³ 7,20cd-21ab. עָלַי (to me) in 7,20d is one of the *tiqqe sopherim* and has to be read as עָלֶיךָ (to you) (cf. LXX). On the relation between 7,21ab and Job's conviction that he is blameless, see §4.3.2.

God preserves people from evil or threats,⁵⁴ these verbs have an observing and examining meaning in Job's mouth. God's watching serves to inspect and test in the light of 7,18.⁵⁵ Thus, God's watching is a negative activity in Job's eyes. God pursues Job constantly in order to test and prosecute him.

After Job charged God with unjust actions in Job 9, the focus of Job's search for a motive for God's actions changes. While Job concentrated on God's perception on human beings in Job 7, he considers God's own nature and being in Job 10. Now the wicked nature of God's actions has been determined (Job 9), Job openly casts doubt on God's upright motivations and suggests that God had false intentions for creating human beings (Job 10). Several possible motives are considered. God might benefit from playing with human beings or he might lack some divine characteristics; what we would label omniscience and immortality. The second half of Job's first answer to Bildad (Job 9-10) opens with Job's question of why God contends with him (10,2). As in 9,3, Job understands his misfortune as God's charge against him.⁵⁶ While Job draws the conclusion that God treats him unjustly in Job 9, he asks for reasons for this hostile behaviour towards him in Job 10.

Three rhetorical questions place some possible motives before God (10,3-7). The questions are constructed with the interrogative particle **וְ** and followed by a conclusion introduced with **כִּי** (that). The first one concerns God's benefit.

10,3 Does it benefit you to oppress,
to reject the work of your hands,
and shine on the plan of the wicked?⁵⁷

While the dependence of God's 'well-being' on human actions has already been mentioned implicitly in 7,20, Job now explicitly wonders whether God's unjust treatment of him gives God any benefit.⁵⁸ The combination **טוֹב לְךָ** (good for you) expresses the benefit someone has from something.⁵⁹ Could it be that God oppresses human beings in order to obtain some advantage for himself instead of rewarding them for some wrong? This oppression and rejection refer to God's cruel treatment of Job. Whereas Bildad stated that God does not reject (**מֵאַסֵּה**) the upright (8,20), the innocently suffering Job now suggests that God rejects the work of his

⁵⁴ **שָׁמַר**: e.g. Ps.121,7; 140,5; 141,9; 145,20. **נִצַּח**: e.g. Deut.32,10; Isa.27,3; Ps.64,2; 140,2.

⁵⁵ See also 13,27; 14,16. Elihu refers to it in 33,11. In Prov.24,12, God is the one who keeps watch over (**נִצַּח**) the soul and examines the heart.

⁵⁶ See §2.2.2.2.

⁵⁷ Several scholars regard 10,3c as a gloss (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 30; Hesse, *Hiob*, 80; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 151; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 98 (maybe a gloss)).

⁵⁸ See also the remarks of Eliphaz and Elihu on this topic: §3.2.3.

⁵⁹ Pace HAL, who takes it as 'is it all right with you' (art. **טוֹב**, in: HAL II, 371, nr.4). Terrien explains the nature of the benefit as 'pleasure' (Terrien, *Job*, 101).

hands in general. The combination **יגיע כפיך** (the work of your hands) expresses the result of someone's labour which has been accomplished with effort.⁶⁰ It refers to Job within this context.⁶¹ This expression sharpens the poignant character of the question because it would be a harrowing conclusion that God rejects what he himself has created with labour and care.⁶² Does it offer God any pleasure or benefit when he harasses what he himself has created?

The status of 10,3c remains unclear because the verb **יפע** (to shine) can have a positive as well as a negative meaning. This verb describes God's manifestation among human beings. God appears in order to bless and deliver or in order to judge the wicked.⁶³ Negatively understood, 10,3c would mean that God critically stands in relation to the plan of the wicked and condemns their actions.⁶⁴ Understanding **יפע** positively, it would mean that God favours the plan of the wicked according to Job.⁶⁵ 10,3c only has sense in Job's mouth if it is understood in the latter way. For, then it fits with Job's charge that God perverts justice. 10,3c contrasts with 10,3b and serves as an illustration of the unjust character of God's actions.⁶⁶ While the righteous are rejected and oppressed by God, God benefits the wicked.⁶⁷ Does such perversion of justice benefit God in any way? Did God actually create human beings in order to have playthings which he can punish arbitrarily instead of having a relationship with them which is based on respect and care? However, it would be strange, if God benefited from 'playing' with his creation as he has everything at his disposal. It would be questionable whether God is worth worshipping any longer if this was the case.

Job further explores an example of a possible benefit in 10,8-17. Here, he contrasts God's meticulous creation of Job and his careful providence with God's hidden purpose to watch and persecute Job. God is confronted with the fact that he has created Job but now destroys him (10,8-9). Job expounds how God constructed his body and provided him with care and loyalty (10,10-12). But he must conclude

⁶⁰ Gen.31,42; Hag.1,11.

⁶¹ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 245.

⁶² See also 10,8-12. Terrien understands the benefit for God as 'pleasure' and states that God would be a kind of masochist if he enjoys damaging what he created (Terrien, *Job*, 101-102). However, this way of dealing does not necessarily suppose a masochistic nature. It can, in Job's eyes, also point to an evil purpose in creating human beings as is further explored in 10,8-17.

⁶³ Blessing and delivering: Deut.33,2; Ps.80,2. Judging: Ps.94,1.

⁶⁴ See also 5,13; 18,7. Obviously, Fohrer and Hesse understand 10,3c in this way since they think that 10,3c is a gloss that attempts to restrict God intervening with the wicked (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200; Hesse, *Hiob*, 80). So, God's shining is an elaboration of God's oppression and rejection and is attributed only to the wicked in their view.

⁶⁵ So Clines, *Job*, 245; Habel, *Job*, 198; Horst, *Hiob*, 154.

⁶⁶ Although the lack of an introducing **כ** could be an argument for taking 10,3c as a gloss.

⁶⁷ Compare 9,23-24.

from his current miserable situation that God's motive for this concern was something other than a partnership between God and human beings.

10,13 But this you hid in your heart,
 I know that this was your purpose:
 10,14 if I sinned, you would watch me⁶⁸
 and would not acquit me from my iniquity.

Job suggests that God's hidden aim for creating human beings was apparently to raise them in order to be able to observe them intensively and to punish them if they make a slip. The words **לֹא** (this) and **אִם** (this) in 10,13 refer to 10,14, where the image of God as watcher (Job 7) returns. A wordplay with this root **שׁמַר** (to watch) makes clear the contrast between the expected and hidden real purpose of God's providence. Whereas in 10,12 God's watching is characterized as loyal and caring, it is understood as God hunting for sinning people in 10,14. God's seeming preservation now turns out to be an investigating and observing activity. The verb **חַטָּאתִי** (I sinned) expresses a hypothetical case because of the conjunction **אִם** (if). Therefore, Job does not admit that he has sinned. Also, he does not charge God with punishing slight sins either.⁶⁹ Nor does he restrict this hypothetical case to sins stemming from natural human weakness.⁷⁰ For, the verb **חָטָא** (to sin) is not restricted to a specific field of sins.⁷¹ In 10,13-14, Job denounces God's obsessive desire to catch Job out. Apparently, God created him in order to make him into a target which God could hunt. Thus, Job does not criticize the fact that God would discipline him if he sinned. However, he reproaches God for God's obsessive behaviour which goes beyond the limit of fair treatment. In Job's eyes, being righteous or guilty does not matter anymore: in both cases, Job is weighted down by his misery.⁷²

The second and third rhetorical questions that suggest a possible motive for God's current treatment of Job⁷³ compare God's being and actions with human being and actions. Job wonders whether a limited ability of perception or a restricted lifetime is the cause of God's hostile behaviour towards him. While

⁶⁸ Fohrer and Hesse translate the verb **שׁמַר** with 'to imprison' (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 218; Hesse, *Hiob*, 80). However, 10,14 refers to the image of God as watcher and therefore the verb has to be translated with 'to watch'.

⁶⁹ Pace Rowley, *Job*, 103.

⁷⁰ Pace Fohrer, *Hiob*, 218.

⁷¹ In the prologue as well as in Job 31, the verb **חַטָּאתִי** refers to conscious and rather serious sins. In the prologue, the narrator assures that Job does not sin (1,22; 2,10) and in 31,30, Job says that he did not permit his mouth to sin by wishing his enemies dead by a curse. In 7,20, such a hypothetical case is also supposed.

⁷² 10,15. Cf. 9,22.29.

⁷³ The first is 10,3.

God's answer will later confront Job with the fact that Job does not possess divine attributes (40,8-14), Job ponders whether God has human characteristics.

- 10,4 Do you have eyes of flesh
 or do you see as a human sees,
 10,5 are your days like the days of a mortal
 or your years like the years of a man,
 10,6 that you seek out my iniquity
 and search for my sin,
 10,7 although⁷⁴ you know that I am not guilty
 and nobody can deliver out of your hand?

Job's second question touches on –what we would call– God's omniscience (10,4).⁷⁵ Job considers the possibility that God's observation is limited. Could it be that God misjudges Job's way of life because he lacks the ability to oversee all Job has done? The word בָּשָׂר (flesh) refers to the human body. The eyes of flesh refer to human perception. Human beings are unable to survey the coherence of everything that happens in the world.⁷⁶ Does God's perception of what happens in the Creation go no further than that of human beings? In Isa.31,3, the divine is distinguished from creatures by the fact that the divine is spirit (רוּחַ) instead of flesh (בָּשָׂר). This makes it clear that this consideration can not be true. God is not flesh. His perception goes beyond a person's outward appearance and looks upon the heart.⁷⁷ Human ways are under his gaze and his eyes range throughout the entire earth.⁷⁸ Thus, God would deviate from his divine characteristics if he perceived in the same limited way as human beings do. The third question (10,5) proposes that a restricted lifetime forces God to act rashly and with such close attention.⁷⁹ This might harm the caution of God's judgement. However, God is everlasting (Ps.102,28). Therefore, he does not need to quicken the process of observation and examination by risking careless actions. In this way, Job confronts God with the possibility that he lacks some divine characteristics. Limited perception or inaccurate judgement might be the reason for the unjust treatment of Job. However, at the same time it is clear that these considerations are not correct.

The content of God's actions, for which Job is looking for explanations, is elaborated upon in 10,6-7. The conjunction כִּי (that) in 10,6 connects these verses with the two preceding ones. It is the paradox in God's dealings that puzzles Job.

⁷⁴ For the same meaning of עַל, see 16,7; 34,6.

⁷⁵ De Wilde, *Hiob*, 151.

⁷⁶ This will be an important argument in God's answer.

⁷⁷ 1 Sam.16,7. See also 31,4; 34,21.

⁷⁸ Prov.5,21; 2 Chr.16,9.

⁷⁹ Thus, 10,5 introduces a second element separate from 10,4. Pace Horst, who interprets 10,5 as a close parallel to 10,4 that reinforces 10,4 (Horst, *Hiob*, 155).

On the one hand, God closely examines Job in order to find sins (10,6). With the verbs **בִּקֵּשׁ** (to seek) and **דָּרַשׁ** (to search), the issue of intensive inspection (7,17-18) returns in 10,6. While Eliphaz incites Job to seek (**דָּרַשׁ**) God, here God is the one who searches for sins. On the other hand, God must be familiar with the fact that Job is innocent (10,7a). Therefore, such persistent and intensive observation seems a pointless undertaking. What is more, if God is inspecting Job so intensively, he must have noticed Job's integrity. The tragedy of Job's situation is that a human being is not able to escape from God's power or to prevent what God wants to do.⁸⁰ Nobody can deliver him from the misfortune with which God afflicts him (10,7b). Thus, two important elements from Job 9 return in 10,7: Job's conviction that he is blameless (10,7a) and his impotence to contest or evade his unjust suffering (10,7b). In this way, an accusation can be heard in 10,6-7. It smacks of abuse of power because God ceaselessly examines Job and looks for iniquities, even though he knows that Job is innocent and God's actions can not be stopped by human beings. It was this dubious and incomprehensible action by God that forced Job to examine what motives might be at the root of this.

4.2.4 The Irresistibility of God's Actions

There is a different notion in the speeches of Job that strengthens the impression that Job finds himself in strained circumstances. This is the awareness that human beings will not succeed in influencing God's actions. According to Job, God executes what he has planned to do. Human requests do not change these activities. This notion can be found in 9,12-13 where Job asks who can resist God, if he snatches away. He concludes that God's anger is fixed; God does not withdraw it.⁸¹ The idea that God's actions are irresistible returns in Job 23. Here, Job explores the possibility of bringing his case before God. He determines that God is untraceable (23,3.8-9) and assures that he kept God's way and did not turn aside (23,10-12). Then he says about God:

23,13 But he chooses⁸² and who can resist him?

⁸⁰ Deut.32.39; Isa.43.13.

⁸¹ See §2.2.2.2. In 10,7b, this notion returns in a veiled way; nobody can deliver out of the hand of God.

⁸² Reading **בָּחַר** (to choose) cf. LXX (Budde, *Hiob*, 132; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 363; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 203; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 58; Hesse, *Hiob*, 145; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 243; Pope, *Job*, 172-173). The verbs **בָּחַר** (to choose) and **יָשָׁה** (to wish) also occur parallel in Ps.132,13. Furthermore, the lack of a verb in the first half of 23,13a, also compared to 9,12 and 11,10, can be mentioned as an additional argument for changing (Driver-Gray, *Job*, phil. notes, 162; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 363). Several scholars maintain **בָּחַר** (in one) and understand the **ב** as a beth-essentiae (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, §119i; Habel, *Job*, 346; Strauß, *Hiob*, 73; A. van Selms, *Job II* (POT), Nijkerk 1983, 24; Gordis, *Job*, 262). They explain it as an expression that God is unchangeable, sovereign or unique. However, changing **בָּחַר**

What he wishes, he does.

The notion that nobody can resist God or influence what he does is connected with Job's feeling of impotence. Challenging God's actions is as such already impossible because of God's superior power and because God is untraceable and imperceptible. However, it would not make any sense at all since nobody can change God's mind or influence his way of dealing. Job's question *מי ישיבנו* (who can resist him) in 9,12 returns here. Job connects God's wish or choice to do something with human impotence to change this. The question *מי שובנה* occurs elsewhere parallel to the question who can annul (*פרר*) what God has planned and the statement that nobody can deliver from the hand of God.⁸³ God works and who can hinder it (Isa.43,13)? So no human being is able to change or resist what God is doing or what he has planned to do. In 23,13, God's decisions and wishes can not be influenced, therefore, each protest or attempt to challenge God's dealings in a lawsuit will not change God's treatment of Job. If God wanted to 'play' with his creatures or treat them unjustly, no human being would be able to stop God or alter his conduct towards them. Thus, the notion of the irresistible nature of God's actions underlines the fact that God has a powerful position which he could also misuse unhindered. It stresses Job's impotence to influence God's treatment of him or alter his miserable fate in any way.⁸⁴

The question *מי ישיבנו* (who can resist him) is also asked by Zophar in his first speech (11,10). This speech takes up several elements from Job 9. Zophar explicitly declares Job guilty (11,6) and asks whether Job can find the depths (*חקר*) of God (11,7). With questions that call to mind God's answer, he confronts Job with his own lack of power and knowledge (11,8-9). Then Zophar asks who can resist God, if God passes through, imprisons, and summons (11,10). Job mentioned the inscrutability of God's ways and the irresistible nature of his actions as arguments for his charge that God misuses this sovereign position and perverts justice (Job 9). On the contrary, Zophar connects these elements with God's righteous actions. He explains the impossibility of resisting God's actions with the fact that God is aware of the worthless people and sees injustice (11,11).⁸⁵ Job referred to the notion of the irresistibility of God's actions in order to show that he powerless before God and can not influence any possible abuse of divine power by God. Zophar, on the other hand, makes it clear that nobody can resist God's dealings because they are righteous rather than arbitrary actions.⁸⁶ In other words, it is not necessary to affect

into *בחר* is preferable since the sense of the idea that God is one remains unclear within the context. For, it is questionable to what extent this means that God is unchangeable or expresses sovereignty. Reading *בחר* gives a better parallel with 23,13b and expresses the fact that God's plans can not be influenced in a clearer way.

⁸³ Isa.14,27 (compare with 40,8); Isa.43,13 (see also 10,7b).

⁸⁴ This notion of the irresistible nature of God's actions also occurs in 12,14-15.

⁸⁵ This statement also refers to 10,4, where Job wonders whether God has eyes of flesh.

⁸⁶ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 228. See also Clines, *Job*, 264.

God's actions since God is doing right according to Zophar. It would even be overconfident if human beings were to think that God's actions needed to be influenced or criticized.

4.3 The Image of the Lawsuit: Job's Innocence and God's Wickedness

4.3.1 The Lawsuit between Job and God

The image of the lawsuit plays an important role in the book of Job. It channels Job's struggle with God with regard to the issue of whether his misfortune is justified and it puts Job's charge against God into words.⁸⁷ This image is introduced in Job 9. There, the dispute between Job and God has a mutual character. On the one hand, Job understands his misfortune as God's trial with him.⁸⁸ On the other hand, Job wants to enter into a case with God in order to call God to account for what is, in Job's eyes, unjust suffering. Hence, God and Job are both plaintiff and defender in the book of Job. Job's wish for having a legal case with God is overshadowed by the awareness that litigation with God is impossible (9,32-33). Each time Job mentions his intention to challenge God's treatment of him and to defend his blameless way of life again, it echoes the fact that a proper case between God and human beings is impossible because of God's powerful position and the observation that God is untraceable. So, the image of the lawsuit expresses Job's impotence in relation to God but, at the same time, it also communicates that Job does not reconcile himself to his miserable destiny. Job perseveres in his attempts to be proved right on his conviction that he suffers unjustly. He holds on to his wish to bring his case before God. In this way, one could say that Job is moving between wish and awareness of real proportions during the dialogue.

Some scholars consider the image of the lawsuit as the basic and organizing image of the book of Job or even regard the genre of the book as such as a legal action.⁸⁹ However, the speeches of Job and his friends contain too diverse and too many non-legal elements to be characterized as speeches in a legal case, even

⁸⁷ Compare Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 151.155. She states that "the notion of the trial provides a powerful means by which Job can reconfigure the nature of his situation, including roles, norms, and values that govern his relationship with God. At the same time, it enables him to expose the problematic assumptions by which the friends have defined his situation." (155). In my opinion, the second element in particular takes place in Job 9. There, the understanding of God's actions according to the concept of retribution, which is also starting point of the thinking of the friends, leads to a concept in which God acts unjustly (see §2.2.2.5).

⁸⁸ Therefore, the subject of **יְהוָה** in 9,3 is God (see §2.2.2.2). See also a remark of Clines in his commentary on 13,22: "God has already effectively taken the plaintiff's role by initiating punishment against Job" (Clines, *Job*, 317).

⁸⁹ Habel, *Job*, 54-57; Richter, *Studien zu Hiob*, 17.59-132; B. Gemser, "The *RĪB*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality" (SVT 3), Leiden 1955, 134-135.

though some parts do have formally legal elements (e.g. Job 29-31).⁹⁰ Therefore, the image of the lawsuit can better be described as a pattern within the book of Job through which Job's conviction that he is blameless and his charge that God perverts justice are brought up and elaborated upon. It puts into words Job's impotence as well as his drive to challenge his miserable fate.

After its introduction in Job 9, the image of the lawsuit returns in Job 13. In Job 9, Job particularly concentrates on the question of whether he would be able to answer God and to defend his case before God. This defensive position changes in Job 13 where he adopts the attitude of a plaintiff. He makes clear to his friends that he also knows the insights they presented him with (13,2). Job is familiar with their perception that misery generally points to wrongdoing in the past. Nevertheless, he wants to address God.

13,3 But I would speak to the Almighty
and I desire to argue with God.

Job utters his wish to call God to account. The verb **יָבִחַ** (to argue) with the preposition **אֵל** (with) in 13,3b refers to the dispute with God that Job wants to initiate. Some scholars think that Job wants to defend himself before God.⁹¹ However, the questions in 13,23-25 show that the nature of Job's arguing is rather accusative than defensive in this speech. Job challenges God to reveal reasons for God's hostile attitude towards him (13,24) and to list his sins (13,23). Therefore, the verb **יָבִחַ** articulates the act of denouncing God's attitude towards Job in 13,3.⁹² According to Van Hecke, "Job's aim is not primarily to engage in a lawsuit, but rather, in a reciprocal conversation with God, with the aim not of winning a dispute, but of restoring the relation between himself and God. According to him, a lawsuit is simply envisaged by Job as the best form to achieve the goal of such a conversation."⁹³ Although it is true that Job desires to enter into conversation with God, it is unclear whether or not conversation and a legal case can be thought separately in such a way in 13,3.⁹⁴ The fact that God has been declared guilty (Job

⁹⁰ See also Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 150-151.

⁹¹ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 247; H.J. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament* (WMANT 14), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964, 46.

⁹² However, in 13,15 this same expression **אֵל יָבִחַ** has the meaning of defence due to the object **דַּרְכַּי** (my ways). Here, Job wants to defend his way of life.

⁹³ Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 410. He suggests that the preposition **אֵל** might indicate the directedness towards God of the conversation (410). In line with this, he understands **דַּבֵּר** in 13,3a as to speak or have a conversation with God (415). According to him, Job uses straightforward juridical language from 13,18 onwards (410). Van Hecke here refers to Clines, *Job*, 305 and Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 150-161.

⁹⁴ Van Hecke does admit that it is hard to imagine that the verb **יָבִחַ** *hifil* would not have any legal connotations in 13,3.15 (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 410).

9) makes it likely that Job does not see normal conversation as an option anymore. While God apparently considers Job as guilty, Job has determined that God perverts justice. In order to solve this impasse, a legal case seems appropriate. The subsequent verses contain forensic terms. The roots יָכַח and רָיַב occur parallel in 13,6. In 13,7, the speaking (דָּבַר) of the friends gets forensic connotations because in Job's eyes they plead (רָיַב) the case for God (13,8). This forensic context makes it reasonable to suppose that a legal case is unavoidable for Job at this stage of the dialogue. Job's aim is to denounce God's actions and to defend his way of life. Whereas Job is aware that doing this in a legal case with God is impossible (9,32), he does not give up and engages in 'battle' with God. This feeling is expressed in Job's desire to argue with God (13,3). Job does want to win the dispute at this stage of the dialogue because God has done wrong to him. Depicting Job's basic desire as 'conversation' does not do enough justice to the harm and anger that Job feels towards God at this moment. Being proved right is the only way to regain confidence in the goodness of God. Because of the parallelism with יָכַח, the verb דָּבַר (to speak) means speaking within a legal context in 13,3a. This ultimate wish to call God to account in a legal case, despite the awareness that it is actually impossible, demonstrates the fact that Job is not going to reconcile himself to his unjust suffering. Job challenges God to specify the legitimate grounds for punishing him. Thus, the image of the lawsuit serves to portray Job's objection against to what is, in his eyes, unjust destiny. At this point, Job particularly takes the role of plaintiff. However, the mutual character of the image of the lawsuit also occurs in Job 13. For, Job leaves the possibility open that God opens a legal dispute and questions him (13,22).

This desire to enter into a legal case with God (Job 13) seems to contradict Job's earlier conclusion that this is impossible. Therefore, Horst thinks that Job's opinion in 13,3 differs from 9,32f. According to Horst, Job now considers it possible to bring his desire for justice before God.⁹⁵ However, the question remains to what extent Job's view on the feasibility of a lawsuit with God has changed in 13,3. It is possible that a person keeps arguing against their better judgement because of their own sense of justice or a final gleam of hope. Moreover, it would be understood as an admission of guilt if Job had resigned himself in his current misery. Therefore, Job pursues his efforts to bring his case before God although they are overshadowed by the awareness that it is impossible to bring a case with God or to be proved right before him. Job's attempts to be proved right before God

⁹⁵ Horst, *Hiob*, 198. Clines observes a different kind of shift. According to Clines, Job has now abandoned the idea of 'legally' compelling God to vindicate him and instead invites God to accuse him. Clines values this new position as less strident and thinks that it leads more naturally into a hope for a renewed dialogue with God (Clines, *Job*, 305). However, the questions in 13,23-25 still imply a charge against God's actions, even though the nature of Job's approach has changed. Job is now denouncing God's unjust treatment of him by asking for an explanation of God's behaviour.

serve to support the credibility of his claim that he is blameless in his debate with his friends. Job states that nobody will be able to refute his claim of being blameless.⁹⁶ The ceaseless wish to prove this innocence in a legal case supports the persuasiveness of this conviction.

Job's awareness that a legal case with God is impossible (Job 9) and his desire to enter into such a case (Job 13) are integrated into Job 23. Here, the wish for having a case with God goes together with doubts about whether it is possible to realize this. Job 23 objects to the accusation of Eliphaz that Job has committed serious sins and therefore suffers justly (22,5-9). Job replies that God would see and admit that Job is righteous, if he only found God in order to be able to expound his case.

- 23,3 Oh, if I only knew how to find him,
that I might come to his dwelling.
23,4 I would lay my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments...

The fact that Job is unable to find God is the obstacle for entering into a lawsuit with God. Job does not know where God resides. While Zophar uses the verb מֵצֵא (to find) in order to pose the rhetorical question of whether or not Job is able to find and see through the depths of God (11,7), Job utters the wish to find God in 23,3.⁹⁷ However, it appears that Zophar has been right until now. For, Job has not found God yet. This issue of discovering God is reminiscent of 9,11 in which Job states that he does not perceive God if God passes by. Since God is so intangible, Job is unable to grab God and call him to account. What is more, God has the possibility to abuse his intangible position.⁹⁸ In Job 23, Job connects God's intractability with his desire to lay his case before God. Breaking through God's intractability and entering into his dwelling place is the condition for making progress in Job's struggle to be proved right. In systematic theological terms, this means that the condition for a successful legal case with God is undoing God's transcendence. But as long as God's ways are hidden, a lawsuit with God will not take place.⁹⁹ So the elusiveness of God frustrates Job's attempts to prove his right before him.

⁹⁶ 13,18-19. Because of the consequences mentioned in 13,19b, the verb נִבַּח (to contend) in 13,19a refers to a successful disproof of Job's claim that he is right. If someone entered into a lawsuit with Job and was able to prove that Job had sinned, Job would stop objecting and die.

⁹⁷ Elihu will react in 37,23 that we can not find the Almighty. Zophar draws a similar conclusion (11,8ff).

⁹⁸ §2.2.2.2.

⁹⁹ The motif of 23,3 is further elaborated upon in 23,8-9. Job says that he does not perceive God in any of the four points of the compass. However, the originality of these two verses

From 23,4, the progress of a possible lawsuit with God is explored. Job would take the role of plaintiff and be anxious to learn what God would answer to his plea (23,5). The expression **עֲרַכְךָ מִשְׁפָּט** (to lay (my) case) in 23,4 can also be found in 13,18. Here, Job expresses his resolution to expose his case because he knows that he is right (**צַדִּיק**). The same conviction lies at the basis of Job's wish to argue with God in Job 23.¹⁰⁰ Whereas Job earlier feared that his mouth would not be able to put his situation correctly into words (9,20), he now wants to fill his mouth with arguments (23,4). Job is confident that God would see his integrity, if God would only pay attention to his case. Job considers the consequences of such an encounter with God in 23,6.¹⁰¹ He wonders whether God would contend with him with superior power (23,6a), as he feared in Job 9.¹⁰² But relying on his integrity, Job thinks that God could not ignore his case any longer and would give heed to his situation (23,6b).¹⁰³ Nevertheless, such an encounter has not yet taken place since God has been untraceable until now.

is subject to debate and several scholars consider them as a gloss that interrupts the close connection between 23,7 and 23,10 (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 363; Budde, *Hiob*, 131; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 242-243; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 58; Hesse, *Hiob*, 145; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 202 (perhaps)). However, according to Gordis the argument of interruption (also) represents here an illegitimate application of Western standards of logical relevance to Oriental composition, which is based upon the association of ideas (Gordis, *Job*, 261; compare Strauß, *Hiob*, 74-75). However, it is not at all clear to what extent the interruption of the connection between 23,7 and 23,10 is insurmountable. If in 23,10, **כִּי** is read as expressing a contradiction with the preceding verses, 23,8-9 fits rather well within the context. Then the conviction that an upright person would plead with God (23,7) is followed by the rather leading issue of this speech that God's elusiveness hinders such a plea (see also Habel, *Job*, 349-350). Then Job's situation becomes even more harrowing because even God knows that Job has lived a blameless life (23,10).

¹⁰⁰ 23,7.10-12.

¹⁰¹ Gordis, *Job*, 260.

¹⁰² Some scholars take **רַב־כֹּחַ** in 23,6a as 'plenipotentiary' since, according to them, 23,6a does not fit into the response in 23,6b with the translation 'superior power' (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 354; Pope, *Job*, 172; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 242). Others think that now Job again fears that God would not be willing to take notice of Job's evidence, even if Job appeared before him (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 365; Hesse, *Hiob*, 148). However, in 23,6, some confidence is apparent (compare 13,16). Job is convinced that God can not ignore him when God takes notice of his integrity. Therefore, God will heed him instead of overwhelming him with superior power and frustrating litigation. Compared to Job 9, where Job feared that God's power would obstruct his right, Job's confidence in being right and having integrity seems to dominate somewhat more in Job 23, though Job is not free of fear here either (23,13-17) (cf. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 201).

¹⁰³ The verb **שִׁים לִבְךָ** (pay attention to). Fohrer and Habel take the imperfect **שִׁים** as a necessity and translate with 'must heed' (Habel, *Job*, 344; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 362). However, Job expresses an expectation instead of a necessity.

The notion of being untraceable and hidden is applied to wisdom in the later-added Song of Wisdom in Job 28.¹⁰⁴ While valuable metals and stones can be found in and mined from deep in the earth (28,1-11), wisdom remains hidden to human beings (28,12-22). In Job 28, חכמה (wisdom) is an entity that is independent from God. God knows its dwelling place, established it, and fathoms it (28,23-27). In this Song, wisdom stands parallel to בינה (understanding; 28,12.20). Since this understanding goes beyond insights found by human observation, here wisdom refers to coherences or insights which only God observes. In 11,6, Zophar speaks of hidden wisdom where it is connected with God's dealings. On the one hand, in Job 28 wisdom is not divine thinking in itself, but on the other hand it is not beyond God's range of influence. For, God has established wisdom and fathoms it (28,27). Therefore, wisdom does somehow refer to the order in the Creation or the course of things which came into being with creating the earth. With the notion of being hidden, the Song of Wisdom anticipates what will be one of the central topics in God's answer. This is the idea that the order of the Creation and the considerations behind God's actions surpass human observation; Job lacks understanding of God's counsel (38,2). Whereas wisdom is something independent from God in Job 28, the similarity between Job 28 and God's answer is that both expound the view that human beings are unable to grasp completely how the Creation functions and in what way God exactly deals in it. Parts of this are hidden and can not be fathomed by human beings.¹⁰⁵

Job concludes his speeches in the dialogue with an urgent appeal to God in order to force God to respond to his questions and accusations. In a monologue, Job expresses his desire to return to his former prosperous state (29,2), depicts his current miserable state (Job 30), and exposes his blameless way of life in an oath of innocence (Job 31). This oath has the characteristics of a defence.¹⁰⁶ Job interprets his misfortune as God's accusation against him. Against this charge, he defends himself by swearing that he has lived a righteous life and has always kept sincere intentions. This oath is ended with an appeal to God to answer this defence:¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ For Job 28, see among others, E. van Wolde (ed.), *Job 28. Cognition in Context* (Biblical Interpretation Series 64), Leiden-Boston 2003.

¹⁰⁵ In 28,28, the content of wisdom is fear of the Lord. This is a different view in comparison to the preceding description of wisdom in Job 28. Therefore, 28,28 is regularly held as a later addition to the Song. For instance, Van Oorschot's contrary view does not see this tension as problematic. According to him, the reader is invited to grant a theocentrically founded scepticism and the fear of God is offered as 'his' wisdom to him (J. van Oorschot, "Hiob 28. Die verborgene Weisheit und die Furcht Gottes als Überwindung einer generalisierten חכמה", in: W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BETL CXIV), Leuven 1994, 200).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Dick, "Legal Metaphor", 45-49.

¹⁰⁷ 31,38-40 seems to be moved from another place or later added, since this last sin breaks through the conclusion with Job's final appeal in 38,35-37 (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 424-425.428; Hölscher, *Job*, 76; Pope, *Job*, 230; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 303; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 261; Van Selms, *Job II*, 98; Hesse, *Hiob*, 174; Gordis, *Job*, 354).

- 31,35 Oh, if only someone would listen to me!
 Here, is my sign¹⁰⁸! Let the Almighty answer me!
 And the document, which my adversary at law has written,¹⁰⁹
 31,36 truly, I would wear it on my shoulder,
 I would bind it to me as a crown....

The terms ענה (to answer) and אִישׁ רִיב (adversary at law) in 31,35 place the oath of innocence (Job 31) within a forensic context. Job challenges God to reply to the passionate defence of his integrity that he has expounded in this speech. Job opens this final section of his oath with the expression of his ultimate wish that someone will take notice of his plea (31,35a). Some scholars think that Job hopes that a third party like an arbiter or judge will listen (שמע) to him within this legal context.¹¹⁰ However, the participle שמע can only refer to God, who is incited to react in 31,35b because it is Job's first concern that God goes into his declaration of innocence and admits that Job is blameless.¹¹¹ For, God has caused his misery. A written dispute seems to be assumed because of the mention of a sign and the request for a counter document. The term תּוֹ is used for signs on the forehead of men in Ezek.9,4.6. Job uses this word in order to enforce the claims of his oath by subscribing it with a personal sign (31,35b). In Job 31, Job makes a final effort to confront God with the contradiction between his miserable fate and his blameless state. Job agrees that misfortune is the legitimate heritage of evildoers (31,2-3) but he argues that he does not belong to this group because of his blameless way of

¹⁰⁸ De Wilde reads תּוֹ אֲשׁוּרָה (this is my wish) cf. Vulg. (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 304).

¹⁰⁹ Several scholars assume that a line preceding this line got lost. According to them, 31,35c requires some kind of further demand because it now floats in the air (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 274; Hölscher, *Job*, 77; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 427; Hesse, *Hiob*, 170). Witte reads 31,35c parallel to 31,35b and identifies the sign (תּוֹ) of 31,35b with the סִפּוּר that Job's opponent has written. According to him, there is an amulet hidden with the Decalogue or a part of the Decalogue under the sign that expresses Job's loyalty to God (M. Witte, "Hiobs >>Zeichen<< (Hiob 31,35-37)", in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 727-737). While I am not sure whether a reference to the Decalogue would be so obvious here, the place of the call 'Let the Almighty answer me!' seems problematic to me in this interpretation. For, whereas the whole section deals with Job wearing this sign, this call is directed at God and summons God to answer in this explanation. In my view, it is more probable that this change of direction is continued in 31,35c. Then the document is related to God's answer. 31,35c can then be read with 31,36ab and forms a tricolon with them. So, it is not necessary to suppose something that is not available anymore. Habel translates the perfect כָּתַב (to write) as cohortative: 'let my adversary at law draft a document' (Habel, *Job*, 425). However, it is more likely that Job refers to a document that is available because earlier this perfect points to a result or something in the past.

¹¹⁰ Habel, *Job*, 438; Dick, "Legal Metaphor", 47-49.

¹¹¹ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 443.

living and his sincere intentions.¹¹² This plea ends in a final call on God to take notice of Job's situation and explain why he treats Job in such an obscure and unjust way. It is a final attempt to force God to react to Job's case and to give shape to any form of legal process with God.

Job considers the result of God's reaction in 31,35c-36. His adversary at law will reply in a written document. The expression אִישׁ רִיבִי (my adversary at law) refers to the one who contends with Job. It can only be God who is addressed here in 31,35b.¹¹³ The nature of this document is not fully clear. In 19,23, Job wishes that his words are recorded in a document (סֵפֶר) in order to prevent his complaint about his innocent suffering would getting lost if he passes away. Several scholars think that the document in 31,35c is the written accusation, on the basis of which God has judged Job and which Job has taken the edge off with his oath of innocence, but with which Job is not familiar. According to them, binding this document as a diadem (31,36) demonstrates Job's awareness that he is blameless and his feeling of triumph before God's charge.¹¹⁴ However, it is more probable that an acquittal is meant here because of Job's conviction that he is blameless and the public presentation of this document as a triumph.¹¹⁵ Job enforces his ultimate desire that God take notice of his declaration of innocence (31,35ab) by already anticipating what is, in his eyes, the inevitable result of such attention. If God faces up to the facts of this oath, he will not be able to ignore Job's blamelessness any longer. Therefore, God's response can only include an acquittal of guilt. So, Job concludes his speeches with a final call on God to react to the fact that he suffers innocently. He is prepared to give an account of his way of living (31,36) because he fully trusts his blameless state. After this final plea of innocence, it is now God's move.

4.3.2 Job's Innocence

4.3.2.1 Job's Conviction that He Is Innocent

The main pillar of Job's rebellion against God is his belief that he is blameless. Job is convinced that God's treatment of him is disproportionate, if God's dealings are

¹¹² 31,1.5-34.38-40.

¹¹³ In Judg.12,2, Jephthah and the people are those who have a conflict (אִישׁ רִיבִי) with the Ammonites. In the dialogue of the book of Job, God or Job's friends on behalf of God are each time those who contend (verb רִיב) with Job (§ 2.2.2.2).

¹¹⁴ So, Fohrer, *Hiob*, 443-444; Hesse, *Hiob*, 175; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 275-276; Van Selms, *Job II*, 97-98. Richter sees an allusion to Egyptian legal procedures where each process was introduced by a written charge (Richter, *Studien zu Hiob*, 109; so also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 443).

¹¹⁵ So Pope, *Job*, 238; Habel adopts a middle course by taking the document as the official written counterpart of the adversary at law to Job's oath. However, according to him Job is convinced that this document will mean his public vindication because the document will be a writ of release or because the charges will appear to be false (Habel, *Job*, 439).

directed by the concept of retribution. This belief in Job's integrity leads to doubts about God's righteousness. In Job's eyes, God is overreacting and treats him unjustly. This conclusion is uttered in Job 9. Here, Job sees only one way out. Since he is blameless, it can only be that God perverts justice. God has afflicted him with misery like a wicked person, but Job would have expected prosperity because of his blameless way of life. Thus, Job's case questions some implications of the concept of retribution. Job himself assumes this concept in his thinking. But the contrast between his severe suffering and his blameless way of life makes it hard to maintain that sinful behaviour is the reason for this fate. Readers can not ignore the legitimacy of Job's claim that he is blameless because of the relation between the dialogue and the prologue. They know that the narrator and God have already confirmed Job's conviction that he is righteous.¹¹⁶ So, it turns out that it becomes problematic when a person's previous behaviour is derived from one's fate according to the concept of retribution. There is no place for innocent suffering in this scheme. During the dialogue, Job maintains his righteousness. He is not prepared to let himself be convinced by the words of his friends.

Job mentions his integrity in the dialogue several times again as an argument in the presence of God or his friends. He mentions it for the first time in 6,29. In this speech, Job expresses the fact that the words of his friends are imputing and he blames them for reproaching him wrongfully (6,25-27). Then there follows an appeal to the friends to change their point of view. Job motivates this appeal with the argument that his integrity is still intact (6,29).¹¹⁷ Here, Job's integrity is expressed by the substantive צַדִּיק. This word is used in 29,14 in order to state that righteousness (צַדִּיק) clothed Job.¹¹⁸ Job rejects the reproaches of his friends by pointing out his conviction that he is blameless. This integrity is also raised in Job's debate with God from Job 9. In 9,21-24, the appeal to Job's integrity (אִם) leads to the charge that God perverts justice in his case. After this decisive charge, Job enforces his charge by the assurance that God is well acquainted with his innocence. In 10,7, he asks about God's motives for oppressing him even though God knows that Job is not wicked (רָשָׁע).¹¹⁹ While Job first concludes that he has

¹¹⁶ 1,1.8; 2,3. See §2.2.2.3 and §2.2.3.

¹¹⁷ Translation of 6,29 cf. Clines, *Job*, 156. In the context of Job 6, this appeal to Job's integrity is initially uttered in the presence of his friends. Here, אִם (in it) does not as much refer to Job's lament (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 174-175), but expresses the fact that Job still holds on to his own integrity (cf. Clines, *Job*, 182; Gordis, *Job*, 78). Even though his misery could point to a different conclusion because of the concept of retribution, Job makes clear that his friends should not reprove him, since he still believes in his innocence.

¹¹⁸ Here, it occurs parallel to מִשְׁפָּט (justice) (see also 8,3).

¹¹⁹ Clines thinks that a less strained reading can be gained by taking 10,7 as an independent sentence and rendering עַל as 'because' (Clines, *Job*, 246-247). But עַל expresses a contradiction between God's treatment of Job and his knowledge of Job's innocent state (cf. 16,17).

to be guilty (רשע) beyond his influence (9,29), he now points to the fact that God knows that he is not guilty.¹²⁰ This sharpens Job's accusation against God. God wilfully perverts justice. In this way, Job's friends as well as God are familiar with Job's conviction that he suffers innocently.

Job's belief in his integrity is an important motive in sustaining his wish to challenge God's treatment of him in a legal case. This motivation can be found in both speeches where the image of the lawsuit plays an important role.¹²¹ In 13,18, Job declares that he dares to lay his case before God because he knows that he is right. The verb צדק (to be right) has a forensic meaning because of the legal context here. Whereas Job earlier made it clear that he will not succeed in proving himself right before God¹²², his conviction that he is blameless forces him to go on making efforts to enter into a lawsuit with God.¹²³ The same basis for Job's striving for having a lawsuit with God can be found in Job 23. In 23,7, Job maintains that an upright person (ישר) would argue with God. Again the prologue supports this claim; nobody is as upright (ישר) as Job.¹²⁴ Job is convinced that he would be proved pure if God tested him. He guarantees that he has not departed from God's commandment.¹²⁵ Therefore, Job longs to discuss his situation in a legal case with God.

Elsewhere Job also mentions more concrete examples of his righteousness. He has not committed any violent deed and his prayer has been pure (16,17). He swears that he has not spoken any deceit or falsehood.¹²⁶ What is more, Job assures that he will not depart from his integrity.¹²⁷ So, integrity consists of an honest, devote, and non-violent way of life. Job assures that he will not alter this attitude to life.

Job's efforts to prove his innocence culminate in an oath of innocence with which he concludes his speaking for the time being (Job 31). Job tries to convince God of his innocence by showing his blameless way of acting in several areas of

¹²⁰ Clines calls this verse a milestone because for the first time Job now asserts that *God also* knows that he is innocent (Clines, *Job*, 247).

¹²¹ Job 13 and 23.

¹²² 9,2.15.20.

¹²³ In 13,18b, Job does not say that he will be acquitted if he has the opportunity to present his case (so Habel, *Job*, 231; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 124; Pope, *Job*, 97), but expresses his conviction that he is innocent (cf. Clines, *Job*, 315).

¹²⁴ 1,1.8; 2,3.

¹²⁵ 23,10-12. The same idea of testing can be found in 14,16.

¹²⁶ 27,4. Compare 13,7, where Job asks his friends whether they are willing to utter deceits (רמיה) and falsehoods (עולה) in favour of God. In 6,30 Job asks in a rhetorical question whether there is falsehood (עולה) on his tongue.

¹²⁷ 27,3-6. In the prologue, God uses the word רמה (integrity) when he points out to the satan that Job has persisted in his integrity after experiencing such extended misery (2,3). Job's wife asks whether Job still persists in his integrity (2,9). The reader realizes again that Job's claim of innocence has already been confirmed in the prologue. See also 31,6.

life. The oaths are formulated with אִם (if). Job accompanies them with a condemnation of himself if he were guilty of such an offence. God is challenged to prove that the opposite is true.¹²⁸ The concept of retribution is still the basis of Job's thinking in Job 31. For, the portion of the unrighteous is calamity (31,2-3). In Job's opinion, God has treated him wrongfully so long as no lapse in Job's life or thoughts can be identified.

Job opens his declaration of innocence with a covenant that he has entered into with his eyes. This verse deviates from the remainder of this chapter because the structure of an oath is lacking.

31,1 I have made a covenant with my eyes,
how then would I look out for a virgin?

Although this verse concentrates on a specific issue, it is an exemplary expression of Job's general attitude. Job has imposed restrictions on himself in order to avoid each possible temptation to lapse. In 31,1, the expression כָּרַת בְּרִית (make a covenant) refers to an obligation that is imposed one-sidedly. Job has restrained his eyes from watching other women. Because of this agreement, he excludes the option that he would look out for a virgin (31,1b). So, the oath of innocence starts with a depiction of Job's own conscious choice and his efforts to live a blameless way of life. Job subsequently lists a catalogue with oaths concerning different kinds of lapse in this speech (31,5ff). He mentions falsehood, adultery, ignoring the rights of slaves, heartlessness towards the poor, the widow, and the orphan, trust in riches, superstition, joy in the fall of one who hated him, being inhospitable, hiding sins, and exploitation of the land. Several oaths are accompanied by a sanction in case God observes a transgression at one of these fields. So, it appears that Job has placed high demands on his own integrity. He wants to force God to react to his reproach that God has punished him unjustly by means of this oath. The onus of proof of whether or not Job correctly claims that he is blameless falls now on God.

4.3.2.2 *Did Job Nevertheless Sin?*

Whereas Job maintains his belief that he is blameless, some sayings seem to undermine this conviction. In a few places, Job could give the impression that he has committed some iniquities. For he mentions forgiveness (7,21; 14,17) and sins of his youth (13,26b). Furthermore, Job's statement that nobody can be brought forward purely (14,4) seems to imply that Job is also blameworthy to a certain extent. A strict way of reasoning may raise the question of how these remarks are

¹²⁸ Fohrer and Dick point out that these elements stem from Wisdom teaching (G. Fohrer, "The Righteous Man in Job 31", in: J.L. Crenshaw-J.T. Willis (eds.), *Essays in Old Testament Ethics*, New York, 1974, 9-19; M.B. Dick, "The Oath of Innocence, and the Sage", *ZAW* 95 (1983) 50-52).

related to Job's conviction that he is innocent. Does Job nevertheless admit that he has sinned in some way? Job explores several possibilities. In his attempting to find an explanation for his suffering and to denounce God's treatment of him, he considers different aspects. There is no question that Job's misery is out of proportion to his way of life. Nevertheless, Job also explores a different side. Why is such punishment necessary and does God not simply forgive sin? Moreover, if God is rewarding possible transgressions of Job's youth, is he then not acting unreasonably?

In 7,21, Job mentions the issue of forgiveness and asks God:

- 7,21a Why do you not pardon my transgression
 b and do you not overlook my iniquity?
 ...

This question could suggest that Job has sinned because a blameless person does not need to ask for forgiveness. The verbs נָשָׂא and עָבַר are rather common terms for God removing someone's transgressions.¹²⁹ This notion of forgiveness in Job's mouth has been understood in two different ways. First, several scholars make a distinction in the character of transgressions. For instance, Fohrer distinguishes consciously committed sins from sins that stem from human weakness because of the fact that they are creatures. According to Fohrer, Job refers here to the second kind of sin which does not justify his suffering.¹³⁰ However, the problem of this view is that this distinction is not supported by the terms that are used for sin. It would, for example, mean that פָּשַׁע refers to a lapse stemming from the fact that human beings are imperfect creatures in 7,21, while it would refer to a consciously committed transgression in 8,4.¹³¹ The context of 7,21 does not provide any reason for such a distinction in meaning. Moreover, the different terms for iniquity – פָּשַׁע, עוֹן, and חַטָּאת – do not really differ in nature and weight in the book of Job because they are used parallel and alternately.¹³² Therefore, Job's question about forgiveness can not be reconciled with Job's conviction of innocence by letting it only refer to sins stemming from human nature.

¹²⁹ E.g. עָבַר עוֹן: 2 Sam.24,10; 1 Chr.21,8. נָשָׂא with פָּשַׁע, עוֹן, and/or חַטָּאת(ה): Exod.34,7; No.14,18; Ps.32,1.5; Mic.7,18.

¹³⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 181-182. Scherer favours a similar kind of distinction and speaks of relative righteousness and absolute perfection (Scherer, "Relative Gerechtigkeit", 89-99). They apply the same distinction to the motif of human imperfection (see §3.4.1).

¹³¹ It seems reasonable to assume that there Bildad supposes consciously committed transgressions.

¹³² 7,21; 10,6; 13,23; 14,16-17; 33,9.

The second –in my opinion– preferable view takes 7,21 as a hypothetical consideration in the shadow of 7,20. In 7,20, Job assumes that he has sinned.¹³³ Job wonders how he would affect God if he committed an iniquity. This question is the background to Job's request for forgiveness in 7,21. The thought is that it would not touch God himself, if God reacted to an evildoer with forgiveness instead of punishment. Therefore, Job wonders why God could not pardon his hypothetical lapses instead of besieging him as a target according to the concept of retribution. So, Job suggests that God would consider not deviating from this concept. Even if Job had committed a transgression, God could have pardoned this sin instead of punishing it with misery because it does not make any difference to God himself. God could have chosen this different approach. This suggestion also implies the request to be treated differently now. If God considers Job as wicked –as God apparently does considering Job's misery–, why does God not choose to forgive his transgressions?¹³⁴ Here, Job mentions an unconditional forgiveness.¹³⁵ Even if God regards him as wicked, there is no need to punish him so severely.

The option of forgiveness returns in Job 14. Here, Job wonders whether God could hide him in the underworld for a while until God's anger is past (14,13-14). In 14,15ff, Job imagines how the situation would be when God's anger had ceased.¹³⁶ God would then call Job and not observe a single sin (14,15-16).

14,17 My transgression would be sealed in a bundle
and you would cover over my sin.

The act of sealing and covering has been understood in two different ways. On the one hand, it is explained as an act of keeping. According to Fohrer, God neither

¹³³ In 7,20, the perfect **חטאתי** (I have sinned) expresses an *irrealis* without a participle. Several scholars consider the first line of 7,20 (**חטאתי...האדם**) as a gloss (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 164; Hölscher, *Job*, 24; Hesse, *Hiob*, 64) or delete **חטאתי** (I have sinned) in 7,20 (so Pope, *Job*, 62) because of *metri causa* or the content. However, these are not convincing grounds for deleting it. Considering the situation that Job would have sinned fits within the context of Job's speeches, where on the one hand he defends his innocence and on the other hand explores several perspectives and options in order to understand God's treatment of him. Therefore, taking 7,21 also as a hypothetical consideration is plausible.

¹³⁴ Compare Clines, *Job*, 194. According to Clines, Job means by 'my sin' my sin as God reckons it, for God must have something against Job to make him suffer as he does.

¹³⁵ See also 11,6 (§3.3.2).

¹³⁶ 14,16f refers to the future situation after God's anger has ceased. For, the depiction that God sees that Job is blameless (14,16) contradicts Job's current situation in which God apparently regards him as wicked considering his misery. Therefore, **כי־עתה** refers to the future situation and means 'for then' (cf. Clines, *Job*, 333; Habel, *Job*, 235; Horst, *Hiob*, 211; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 176-177. Pace Fohrer, *Hiob*, 259; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 130; Van Selms, *Job I*, 122; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 36. The last group reads 14,16f as a description of Job's current situation (some of them change **הַזְמִינֵנִי** in 14,16b into **הַזְעִבֵנִי** (to pass)).

forgives Job's sins nor considers them as being reconciled by his suffering, but saves them in order to be able to let the suffering continue.¹³⁷ On the other hand, it is taken as removal of or hiding Job's sins, so that they can not be used as evidence against him.¹³⁸ Although the verb סָתַם (to seal) is used for sealing wrong behaviour in treasuries until the day of God's anger (Deut.32,34), this meaning of saving does not fit within the context of 14,17. Since God will not desecrate any sin in the future situation when God's anger has ceased (14,16), the verb סָתַם expresses an action through which Job's transgressions are no longer visible or existing.¹³⁹ The verb טָפַל (to cover) is used for plastering with lies (13,4), meaning covering the truth. In 14,17b, God covers over Job's sin. Job is imagining a situation, in which God's anger has ceased. Possible transgressions would not be effective anymore because they have been sealed in a bundle. God would remove possible sins. However, this does not directly imply that Job admits that he has sinned. Job reasons from God's point of view. God obviously considers him guilty. Now Job imagines how God would approach him differently in a situation where God's anger has come to an end. Then God would cover Job's hypothetical sins instead of punishing them.

Since Job can not recall any transgression in the past, he explores a different explanation of his misery. Perhaps God blames Job for possible sins of his youth. In 13,24-25, Job asks why God considers him as an enemy and wants to frighten him. He explains God's treatment by referring to lapses in his youth.

13,26b And you make me inherit the sins of my youth.

It might be possible that God punishes Job for the sins of his youth. In Ps.25,7, the psalmist prays for God not to remember the sins of his youth. Obviously, youthful naïveté can be put forward in mitigation for blaming somebody for sins that are committed in their youth. In 13,26b, Job mentions the possibility of youthful lapses. One could interpret this as a contradiction of Job's belief that he is blameless.¹⁴⁰ However, the main point here is not that Job admits a transgression, but the disproportion between a possible sin in Job's youth and his serious suffering now.¹⁴¹ The preceding verse supports this opinion because there Job characterizes God's treatment as frightening a windblown leaf (13,25). This comparison of Job to a windblown leaf expresses the disproportion of God's

¹³⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 260. So also Hesse, *Hiob*, 102-103. Driver-Gray, *Job*, 130. Fohrer points among others to Deut.32,34f and Hos.13,12.

¹³⁸ Clines, *Job*, 334; Habel, *Job*, 244.

¹³⁹ Compare De Wilde, *Hiob*, 177.

¹⁴⁰ Fohrer again considers this sin as a sin stemming from human nature (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 253). De Wilde does not exclude that a copyist has later added this passage in order to weaken Job's accusation (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 171).

¹⁴¹ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 321; Hesse, *Hiob*, 101.

dealings with Job. Even if Job left open the possibility that he sinned when he was a boy, his belief that he is innocent and suffers unjustly would not be undermined. For, his current misery is disproportionate to any possible sins from his youth because God should turn a blind eye to such small transgressions.

A different approach to Job's situation can be found in 14,4. Here, Job mentions the motif of human imperfection. This suggests that nobody is fully pure.¹⁴² It would imply that Job argues that he is not able to be fully righteous too. Thus, –strictly reasoning– Job would admit that he is also guilty to a certain extent. In this speech, Job mentions the brevity of a human life (14,1-2) and establishes with some astonishment that God even contends with such an insignificant being as he is (14,3). Then Job wonders:

14,4 Who can bring what is pure from the impure?
No one can.

Job denies the possibility that anything righteous would stem from the unrighteous. Whereas the terms טהור (pure) and טמא (impure) are mainly used in cultic settings, in 14,4, they function within the wider context of Job's plea that he has lived a blameless life. Therefore, being pure here means displaying a correct moral behaviour.¹⁴³ Wondering why God brings human beings¹⁴⁴ to judgement even though their life is short (14,3), Job adds the argument that the expectation of fully blameless conduct as such is an illusion, since impure does not produce pure. Several scholars delete or bracket 14,4 because they are of the opinion that the motif of human imperfection is a topic of the friends and does not fit to the context of Job 14, where the brevity of life has been raised.¹⁴⁵ However, the reference to the motif of human imperfection can serve to intensify Job's reproach that God's treatment of mortals bears no relation to their weak position. For, God himself has attributed this weak position to them (14,5). One could value it as unjust, if God blames human beings for lapses, while he has created them in such a way that they can not actually avoid doing wrong.

The question then remains of whether Job states that all human beings as such are impure. According to Fohrer, 14,4 refers to all human beings since the fate of

¹⁴² This motif is mainly brought up by Job's friends: 4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6. See §3.4.

¹⁴³ Pace J.K. Zink, "Uncleanness and Sin. A Study of Job XIV 4 and Psalm LI 7", VT 17 (1967) 360.

¹⁴⁴ Reading הִמָּן (him) instead of אֲנִי (me) in 14,3b cf. LXX.

¹⁴⁵ Driver-Gray, *Job*, 127. phil. notes 89; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 173; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 37; Pope, *Job*, 106-107. Horst speaks of a dogmatic correction (Horst, *Hiob*, 207). Hesse does not delete the verse but notes that there is some tension with the context (Hesse, *Hiob*, 101). Gordis takes it as a virtual quotation of the idea expressed by Eliphaz which Job counters in 14,5 (Gordis, *Job*, 147). Furthermore, the brevity of the second line is brought up as an argument against its originality.

death implies that nobody is completely pure.¹⁴⁶ However, in 14,1ff, Job does not connect the mortality of human beings with the fact that creatures will always commit some sins because of their being a creature. Job only mentions the brevity of life in order to contradict God's intensive observation and judgement of humanity's way of life. Therefore, the fate of death as such does not reveal human impurity. Job 'only' notes that what is pure can not be brought forward by the impure. Apparently, only the pure produce the pure.

However, does Job believe that being pure is impossible? If Job did, it would seem that he undermines his conviction that he is blameless. The answer to this issue depends on the interpretation of the expression *לֵלֵד מֵאִשָּׁה* (born of a woman) in 14,1. Some scholars think that this expression means that a human being is weak by nature¹⁴⁷ or impure because childbirth is regarded as unclean¹⁴⁸. This would imply that being pure is impossible for human beings. However, *לֵלֵד מֵאִשָּׁה* occurs parallel to *בְּחַיֵּי אָדָם* and means mortal in the first instance.¹⁴⁹ Whereas Job's friends conclude that each person born of a woman is to a certain extent unrighteous before God¹⁵⁰, Job does not explicitly draw this conclusion. Job brings forward that something really pure can hardly be found because the impure do not produce anything pure.¹⁵¹ In this way, the choice is made to question God's treatment of Job from a different approach. The chance that human beings lapse is rather considerable. Therefore, it is unreasonable that God observes and judges human beings so intensively. Job does not explicitly exclude the possibility that someone is pure although it might be possible that he believes that nobody is completely pure as his friends also believe. The particular point here is the question of whether God's 'hunt' for the wrongdoing of human beings is or is not out of proportion because the chance that they do wrong is rather significant.

4.3.3 God Withholding Justice from Job

The central charge of Job in the dialogue is that God treats him unjustly. Thus, God's righteousness is at stake. This conclusion is drawn in Job 9. Although God's unjust actions towards Job is assumed in the remainder of the dialogue – for instance, Job goes on depicting how God besieges him–, the accusation that God

¹⁴⁶ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 255. See also Hesse, *Hiob*, 101; Weiser, *Hiob*, 102.

¹⁴⁷ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 254; Van Selms, *Job I*, 119.

¹⁴⁸ Rowley, *Job*, 127-128 (he refers to Ps.51,7); Van Selms, *Job I*, 120; Zink, "Uncleanness and Sin", 359-361. Tur-Sinai thinks that it refers to the unclean state of a woman in childbirth and even in conception (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 232).

¹⁴⁹ 15,14; 25,4. Cf. De Wilde, *Hiob*, 173. Also Sir.10,18.

¹⁵⁰ 15,14-16; 25,4-6.

¹⁵¹ According to Clines, it has to do with the potential sinfulness of humankind here (Clines, *Job*, 326).

perverts justice has not been uttered by means of an explicit charge until Job 27. Here, Job repeats his actual charge.¹⁵²

27,2 As God lives who has taken away my right,
and the Almighty, who has embittered my life.

This verse is the opening of an oath. Job swears by the living God that neither his lips will speak falsehood nor he will give God right (27,4-5). The character of this God is further depicted in 27,2. In Job's eyes, God treats Job unjustly and spoils his life.¹⁵³ Taking away Job's right is placed parallel to embittering his life. This embittering of Job's life refers to the misery with which God has afflicted him. God's treatment of Job is unjust because it breaks the concept of retribution. The word *גִּזְפוּת* (right) refers to the legal right to which someone has the right according to this concept.¹⁵⁴ God has taken away Job's right by letting him suffer innocently. God has the power to take away (*סָרַף*, hifil) things from human beings.¹⁵⁵ Job opposes God's actions to his own. Whereas God has taken away his justice (27,2), he swears that he will not take away (*סָרַף*, hifil) his integrity from him (27,5). A bitter irony appears in this verse. For, the God to whom Job is appealing in his oath is the same God who is treating him wrongly.¹⁵⁶ It becomes clear in what discord Job finds himself. On the one hand, Job charges God with withholding his legal right to him and ruining his life for no reason. On the other hand, this same God is the only one who could possibly provide Job with a way out.

4.4 The Prosperity of the Wicked

Besides his own situation, Job mentions a second 'piece of evidence' in order to demonstrate that God deals unrighteously. Job calls attention to the fact that there are evildoers who live a prosperous life without calamity or setbacks. Job's friends base their view that the wicked will meet misfortune according to the concept of retribution on their own experience and the wisdom of the forefathers.¹⁵⁷ To this opinion, Job opposes his observation that the wicked are doing well. This objection is first mentioned casually in 12,6. There, Job remarks that the tents of robbers are left in peace.¹⁵⁸ Job elaborates upon this topic in more detail further on in the

¹⁵² Egger-Wenzel considers 27,2 as the second climax of the dialogue after 9,22-24 (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit Gottes*, 290).

¹⁵³ See also 9,18; 13,26. Elihu summarizes this charge in 34,5.

¹⁵⁴ Pace Habel, *Job*, 376.

¹⁵⁵ 9,34; 12,20.24; 19,9.

¹⁵⁶ Gordis, *Job*, 287; Habel, *Job*, 379-380.

¹⁵⁷ E.g. 15,17-18.

¹⁵⁸ There is a debate about 12,6c because here the subject changes from plural to singular. Clines reads *אֱלֹהִים* (God) as the subject because of the singular here and explains that God

dialogue (Job 21). After the friends each exposed the miserable destiny of the wicked in their speeches, Job replies:

21,7 Why do the wicked stay alive,
do they become old and even grow in power?

In Job 21, Job counters the conviction of his friends that the wicked are always rewarded with bad for their wrongdoing. He alludes to several elements in their depictions of the fate of evildoers. While the friends maintain that the wicked (עשׂה) live their life with continuous fear, enjoy their delight only for a short time, and die a premature death,¹⁵⁹ Job objects to the fact that they stay alive and become old. While Zophar claims that evildoers lose their (unjustly) obtained possessions (20,15.18), Job has observed that their wealth even increases in the course of their lives. The substantive כח (power) can refer to property and wealth (20,18). Job wonders why the wicked are not treated according to the retributive scheme, but live a prosperous life and attain a great age. On what exactly does Job cast doubt with this? Does he want to demonstrate the lack of the viability of the concept of retribution¹⁶⁰ or to show that God indeed acts unjustly? Probably, both elements play a role here. One could doubt whether a conclusion from someone's misfortune that one has sinned is reliable because a considerable number of evildoers apparently do not meet such a miserable fate. But what is more, Job keeps taking the concept of retribution as point of departure for his reasoning during the dialogue. Therefore, the examples of the prosperity of evildoers foremost illustrate God's perversion of justice. Job's case is not simply an incident, but God generally fails to act justly and benefits the wicked wrongfully.¹⁶¹

Job elaborates upon the prosperity of the wicked with concrete examples. They spend their days safely and in prosperity, they are happy, and their offspring are able to grow up carefree (21,8-13). They refuse to serve God (21,14-15). The excuse that the children of evildoers will pay for the sins of their parents is not a sufficient explanation for the failure of their misfortune in Job's eyes. God should repay the wicked themselves before they die, so that they suffer the consequences of their deeds (21,19-21). But, as it stands, there is no difference between the fate

does nothing about evildoers, although they are in his power (Clines, *Job*, 291). Even though this suggestion is attractive, it would require a modal meaning of the verb חיל (hifil) and therefore an imperfect. For, the perfect describes the situation of being in God's power and this is not the fact cf. 12,6ab. Therefore, it is better to take the evildoer as subject. The evildoer thinks that he is controlling God (compare Habel, *Job*, 218-219).

¹⁵⁹ 15,20, 20,5, 8,22; 18,5.

¹⁶⁰ So Habel, *Job*, 326; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 339. According to Fohrer, Job emphasizes this observation because Job's misfortune is proof that he is not a wicked person if the end of the wicked is happiness, success, and honour.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Job's charge in 9,22-24.

of righteous and that of evildoers. Both die an equal death and the wicked do not have to give account after they passed away.¹⁶² Thus, Job places his own case in a broader perspective. God's treatment of Job fits into a more general tendency in which God does not treat human beings according to the concept of retribution. Hence someone's fate might not be as indicative for one's former behaviour anymore as some might think that it is.

4.5 Doubt on the Sense of a Laborious Life

The debate in the dialogue particularly concentrates on the issue whether Job's suffering can be justified. However, Job's reaction to his hopeless situation of distress also contains a different aspect. This is the question of what the meaning of life full of misery is. Job opens the dialogue by cursing the day of his birth. He wonders why God did not let him die when he was born, so that he would have been spared his current trouble.¹⁶³ Furthermore, Job more generally characterizes a human life as the hard service of a labourer and compares its brevity with a breath.¹⁶⁴ These observations lead to the question of why God gives life to a human being, if such a life mainly exists of trouble and hard service.¹⁶⁵

After Job has uttered his complaint about the fact that he exists (Job 3), he asks more in general:

- 3,20 Why does he give light to the troubled
and life to the bitter ones¹⁶⁶,
...
3,23 to one whose way is hidden
and whom God has fenced in.

After Job has cursed the day of his birth and has asked why he did not die when he came into the world (3,3-19), he places the difficulty of his existence in its current state within a broader perspective. In 3,20, Job more generally raises the matter of the sense of a troubled life. Although God has not explicitly been mentioned until now, the subject of יתן (he gives) can only be God.¹⁶⁷ For, God is the origin of life. אור (light) stands equally with life, also because of the parallel with חיים (lifetime).¹⁶⁸ Twice, Job uses the combination מר נפשי (bitterness of my inner

¹⁶² 21,23-26.31-33.

¹⁶³ 3,1-19. See also 10,18-19.

¹⁶⁴ 7,1-2.7.16; 14,1-2.

¹⁶⁵ In 10,3.13-14, this question even leads to the suggestion that God might have created human beings for his own benefit; namely as a toy that he can prosecute if they sin.

¹⁶⁶ Literally: those with a bitter inner self.

¹⁶⁷ Pace Gordis, *Job*, 38; LXX, Vulg., Tg..

¹⁶⁸ For אור in this sense: 3,16; 18,5-6. In 33,30: באור החיים (light of life).

self) in order to express his distressful situation.¹⁶⁹ In 3,20, the bitter ones refers to those who meet trouble and anxiety in their life.¹⁷⁰ Clines thinks that Job wishes that he could cease life.¹⁷¹ However, this view reads too much into the final part of Job 3. Although the desire for death is mentioned as characteristic of the troubled (3,21-22), it is not meant as a description of Job's own wish here. The central issue is what reason God might have to make a troubled existence possible. If one is unable to enjoy life, it seems to lack all sense.¹⁷² So, Job does not raise the question about the meaning of life in general, but asks about the intentions for giving life to human beings, who meet trouble and therefore desire to pass away during their laborious life.

The uncertainty and lack of prospect of the troubled is further emphasized in 3,23. The change from a plural in 3,20b-22 into a singular in 3,23 makes it clear that Job explicitly includes his own situation with those who are in depressed circumstances. The word *נַרְרָךְ* refers to a person's way of life. Job makes it clear that people in trouble do not know whether there will be any change in their miserable fate and how their life will further work out.¹⁷³ Job places the origin of this situation with God. God has fenced in the person in trouble. In 1,10, the satan suggests that Job fears God because God has put a fence around Job (*שָׂכַח בְּעַדוֹ*), about his house, and all that he has. There, it concerns a blessed protection by God. But in 3,23, God hinders each perspective by hiding the road ahead.¹⁷⁴ This situation of misery is experienced as a kind of imprisonment caused by God.¹⁷⁵ Hesse understands this description as an accusation because God first calls a human being absurdly to life, only to cut off all possibilities of life subsequently.¹⁷⁶ However, Job only describes the reality of a troubled person here.¹⁷⁷ Such persons do not see any perspective because God has fenced them in. Job struggles with the question of whether creating human beings, who are suffering to a great extent, has any sense.

¹⁶⁹ 7,11; 10,1.

¹⁷⁰ The plural of *נַרְרָךְ* (bitter ones) means that this question is put in general and does not refer to Job's case only.

¹⁷¹ Clines, *Job*, 98. He mentions this theme for 3,20-26.

¹⁷² In this way, one could say that Job raises the question of the meaning of a life of misery and affliction (so Habel, *Job*, 111; Horst, *Hiob*, 54).

¹⁷³ Compare Driver-Gray, *Job*, 39; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 126. See also 19,8; Thr.3,7-9. Clines understands God's hedging as keeping someone alive (Clines, *Job*, 101). However, the issue is that the troubled do not know whether there will be any change in their fate.

¹⁷⁵ Compare Horst, *Hiob*, 55-56. See also Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 46-47, who calls the term 'to put a hedge' in 1,10 and 3,23 mirror images of each other. She understands it in 3,23 as God withholding good for Job.

¹⁷⁶ Hesse, *Hiob*, 49. According to Fohrer, some of Job's later reproach can be found here (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 126).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 101-102.

4.6 Job's Trust in His Heavenly Witness and Redeemer

4.6.1 General

Despite his desperate situation, Job does not lose all hope. He wishes that permanent registration of his bitter fate keeps his accusation against God alive, even if he has passed away, and he places his hope in a heavenly witness and redeemer.¹⁷⁸ Some cautious traces of hope have already appeared before these rather famous passages. In 13,15, Job states that he will hope in God, even if God may slay him soon.¹⁷⁹ Job relies on his innocence and expects that a defence of his conduct to God's face will be his salvation (13,15-16). In 14,13ff, Job wonders whether it would be possible for God to hide Job in the underworld until God's anger has passed. Such a prospect would make Job's current service endurable because there would be some prospect for better times. Thus, Job maintains some hope for relief and outcome at several places in the dialogue.

After these first cautious traces of hope, a new turn can be found in Job's speeches, when Job speaks of his trust in a heavenly witness (Job 16) and redeemer (Job 19). The structure of these two speeches is nearly equal. Both speeches open with some critical remarks on the misjudgement of Job's situation by the friends. Job subsequently exposes how God has turned against him and besieges him. He pictures elements of his misery, makes an attempt to keep his charge going in case he dies prematurely and finally expresses his trust in a heavenly witness and redeemer.¹⁸⁰ This equal structure makes it plausible to suppose that the witness and

¹⁷⁸ 16,18-22; 17,3; 19,23-27.

¹⁷⁹ As in several Psalms, the verb **יחל** (to wait) means hope on God, who brings good (Ps.31,25; 33,18.22; 71,14; 130,7; 147,11). In 13,15a, several scholars prefer to read the Kethib **ל** (not) instead of the Qere **לו** (for him) (Clines, *Job*, 312-313; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 123; Habel, *Job*, 225; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 238; Van Selms, *Job I*, 116; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 36). Clines argues that a reading according to the Qere is not appropriate because the context stresses no hope on Job's part, but rather the futility and danger that surrounds his approach to God. According to Clines, the expectation that God would vindicate Job in an afterlife would be out of step with Israelite thinking (Clines, *Job*, 312). Others think that Job expects to die because of the appearance in the sight of God in order to expose his case (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 251; Horst, *Hiob*, 201). However, some hope in vindication can be found in Job's wish to enter into a case with God. Moreover, even if God's current hostile attitude towards Job may lead to Job's death, Job can only hope that God will be moved by the exposition of his righteousness. For, God is the only one who is able to release Job from his misery. As long as Job keeps on arguing with his friends and God, Job must have this hope. Otherwise, his struggle for vindication would be senseless. Therefore, Job expresses some faith in a good outcome here.

¹⁸⁰ The speech of Job 16 is followed by a second part (Job 17), in which Job complains about his current miserable situation, among other things.

the redeemer both refer to the same being.¹⁸¹ However, the identity of the witness and the redeemer is a hotly debated issue. On the one hand, they are identified as God. On the other hand, several scholars argue that the witness and redeemer refer to a third party besides Job and God. Habel, for instance, argues that Job's depiction of God as his attacker, enemy, adversary at law, hunter, and as an intimidating terror can not be united with the role of advocate, saviour, or impartial judge.¹⁸² In this section, I will argue for the first option. Since the whole struggle with divine justice and the concept of retribution in the book of Job is concerned with the problem that all power is vested with God, only an appeal to God can be an effective gesture in order to change Job's miserable situation. God apparently fulfils different roles for human beings at the same time.

4.6.2 The Heavenly Witness

The final part of Job 16 can be read within the context of the image of the lawsuit. The cry of Job's blood and the witness both serve to move Job's cause in the hope that his innocence will be acknowledged, even if he has already died. After Job has exposed how God besieges him (16,7-14) despite his integrity (16,17), he states:

- 16,18 Earth, do not cover my blood,
and let there be no place for my cry.
16,19 Even now, see, my witness is in heaven,
and he who testifies for me on high.
16,20 My spokesmen are my friends,
my eye waits sleeplessly¹⁸³ for God.
16,21 That he pleads on behalf of a man with God,
as a human being does for his neighbour.
16,22 For a few years will come,
and I will go the way without returning.

The reason for Job's appeal to the earth and a heavenly witness is that only a limited lifetime seems to be left before he dies (16,22). This reference to his short lifespan would imply that Job makes an attempt to be vindicated before his death in 16,18-21.¹⁸⁴ However, the image of 16,18 can not refer to an action during Job's life. The blood of one who died innocently cries out to God for vengeance, as long as it remains uncovered.¹⁸⁵ Such an image supposes that Job's blood has been shed.

¹⁸¹ Compare Clines, *Job*, 459.

¹⁸² Habel, *Job*, 306.

¹⁸³ As in Ps.119,28, the verb דלף can be derived from the Akkadic root *dalāpu* (be sleepless) (cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 281; Horst, *Hiob*, 254-255; Clines, *Job*, 372).

¹⁸⁴ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 290; Habel, *Job*, 274.

¹⁸⁵ Gen.4,10; 37,26; Isa.26,21. In Ezek.24,7-8, the blood is placed on a bare rock in order to rouse God's anger and take vengeance.

Therefore, 16,18 can only refer to an action after Job's death.¹⁸⁶ However, the insights of Barth put this into a different perspective. Barth makes it clear that death does not always refer to one's physical death in the Hebrew bible. For instance, disease or loneliness can mean that someone dwells in the realm of death according to him.¹⁸⁷ This entails that the statement of 16,18 may also refer to Job's current miserable situation. For, that is a form of death.

The earth (אֶרֶץ) discloses the blood shed on it and does not any longer cover its defeated in Isa.26,21. In 16,18, the earth is equally the acting entity in Job's appeal. Job addresses the earth with the request not to cover his blood. Because of the parallel with דָּמִי (my blood), זַעֲקָה (cry) is the cry for vengeance that comes forward from the uncovered blood. The word מְקוֹם (place) can be a fixed place or a dwelling place.¹⁸⁸ Giving the cry a dwelling place stands parallel to covering Job's blood. It means silencing the cry for vengeance for Job's innocent physical death or innocent dwelling in a situation of misery. Job tries to assure in 16,18 that his charge against God does not fall silent if he dies or is silenced without being vindicated. If he is unable to speak, his blood may make an appeal to God to be his avenger of blood. Thus, Job actually makes an advance at 16,21, where God is incited against God. For, the blood calls on God to take his case up against God, who has let him die innocently.¹⁸⁹ Job is not willing to let God get away with his case if he dies. Even then, God has to be forced to account for his treatment of the innocent Job. Job's short lifespan makes him utter this appeal to the earth.

After this attempt to prevent his accusation falling silent if he dies without vindication, Job turns to a perhaps more appropriate option in the short run (16,19). גַּם־עַתָּה (even now) expresses a certain contrast to 16,18.¹⁹⁰ Job switches over to the short term and expresses his trust in a heavenly witness before his death. The identity and task of this heavenly witness depends on the interpretation of 16,20-21. The verb כָּחַל in 16,21a describes the activity of the witness. In general, this verb is understood in two different ways. On the one hand, it is translated as 'to mediate'. In this case, an arbitrating role between mortal and God is attributed to the witness.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, it is translated as 'to plead'. Then the task of the witness is to argue man's cause with God.¹⁹² Since it is Job's aim to convince God

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 388. See also Driver-Gray, *Job*, 147-148; Horst, *Hiob*, 251-252. This view is supported by 19,23-24, where Job also makes an attempt to let his accusation be permanent after his death.

¹⁸⁷ Barth, *Erretung vom Tode*, 72-97.

¹⁸⁸ 7,10; 14,18; 18,4; 28,12.20.

¹⁸⁹ Pace Clines, *Job*, 389.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Horst, *Hiob*, 252. See also 1 Sam.12,16; Joel 2,12.

¹⁹¹ This meaning of כָּחַל can also be found in 9,33 (מְוַכֵּחַ). In this case, לְ in 16,21a means 'between' (compare Isa.2,4; Mic.4,3).

¹⁹² For this meaning of כָּחַל see 13,3; 23,7. In this case, כָּחַל is read with עַם in 16,21a (cf. 23,7; Mic.6,2 (hitp.)). The witness pleads with God. לְ then means 'on behalf of'.

of his innocence, this second option is preferable. Job hopes that a heavenly witness will plead with God on his behalf. Because of this understanding of 16,21a, 16,21b can best be read as a comparison.¹⁹³ In this way, לְרַעְהוּ (for his neighbour) in 16,21b stands parallel with לְגַבַּר (on behalf of man) in 16,21a. Furthermore, וְיִוְכַח (16,21a) is assumed in 16,21b. The actions of the heavenly witness on behalf of man is comparable with how someone would act on behalf of another.¹⁹⁴

Who or what is this heavenly witness? The witness is generally identified with God or with a third party between Job and God.¹⁹⁵ For considering the witness as a third party, several arguments arise. First, the existence of a third party in the figure of the satan in the prologue does not provide any logical reason why such a third party could not be found in the dialogue. The figure of the witness could be seen as a counterpart to the satan.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, Elihu also accepts the idea of an angel figure (מַלְאֲכֵי) in heaven (33,23). Some also point to 9,33, where an arbitrator (מוֹכִיחַ) is mentioned as third party. Thirdly, some difficulty with a concept of God in which God has two sides or is split also plays a role.¹⁹⁷ However, there is the question of whether the *opus alienum* and *opus proprium* are incompatible within God. Firstly, such a combination has already been implied in 16,18. Job's call to the earth not to cover his blood means that Job makes an appeal to God to act as an avenger of blood against God, who is prosecuting him. In this way, Job assumes that it is possible that God acts favourably towards him. Secondly, Job has excluded the possibility of the existence of an independent intermediary between him and God (9,33). Job's whole problem consists of the fact that different roles come together in God. God has a sovereign position and is Job's adversary as well as his judge. Nobody can stop God or call him to account for what he is doing

¹⁹³ ו in 16,21b then expresses a comparison. Cf. Tg., Vulg., and Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, §161a. So Clines, *Job*, 391; Habel, *Job*, 263; Van Selms, *Job I*, 148. Some Masoretic versions read וּבֵין (and between) instead of וְ. However, the text does not need to be changed if 16,21b is taken as a comparison.

¹⁹⁴ Some scholars understand רֵעַ (friend) as an opponent in a lawsuit in this legal context (so e.g. S. Mowinckel, "Hiobs gō'ēl und Zeuge im Himmel", BZAW 41, Gießen 1925, 211). However, this interpretation is not satisfactory if 16,21b is taken as a comparison.

¹⁹⁵ For this third party, several options are mentioned: an arbiter or advocate (Habel, *Job*, 275-276); an intermediary, intercessor (Pope, *Job*, 125); a guardian angel (cf. 33,23) or tutelary deity (Mowinckel, "Hiobs gō'ēl", 209); a personal private deity who is distinct from the high God (J.B. Curtis, "On Job's Witness in Heaven", *JBL* 102 (1983) 549-562). The opinion of a third party is also defended by Terrien, *Job*, 133-134; Van Selms, *Job I*, 147-148; Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 241 (however, she takes the אֵל in 19,25 as referring to JHWH (277)).

¹⁹⁶ Habel, *Job*, 275; Horst, *Hiob*, 256.

¹⁹⁷ Habel e.g. says that Job is not contemplating the good side of a schizophrenic deity (Habel, *Job*, 275).

(9,12). Therefore, Job has no other possibly effective option than putting his hope in a different side of this same God.¹⁹⁸

God can be עֵד (witness) on behalf of or against human beings.¹⁹⁹ Job addresses God's in this role of witness. A second witness is necessary in order to make a case sustainable (Deut.19,15). Job wishes that God fulfil this task and affirm before God that Job's conviction that he is blameless is true. So, a new twist can be found in Job 16. Despite his feeling that God treats him unjustly, now Job also expresses a certain trust in this same God. This step actually contains two aspects. On the one hand, Job does not have any other option than to appeal to God for a way out. For, nothing outside God can release Job from God's hand. On the other hand, this appeal to God puts some pressure on God to respond somehow in Job's case. If God helps human beings in despair, this is the moment to put this attribute into operation.

Clines excludes both options –God and a third party– and thinks that Job's own protests of innocence are the witness in heaven. He argues that the witness can neither be God, because God himself has no interest in Job's case or in the question of Job's righteousness, nor a heavenly mediator or umpire since Job has excluded this possibility in 9,33.²⁰⁰ However, the images of witness, spokesman, and redeemer (19,25) in heaven are too marked to be mere personifications of Job's cry of protest. Moreover, the nature of the task of these figures is assisting someone else in a legal procedure or an anxious situation. For example, the witness is called in order to support and confirm the testimony of an accused. It is implausible that Job's own protestation or claim of innocence fulfils this role of witness or redeemer because then a second testimony is still lacking.

How can 16,20 be understood within this context? The meaning of מַלְיָצִי and רַעִי (16,20a) in particular is rather unclear.²⁰¹ The word מַלְיָצִי can be derived from two different roots. It can be taken as a participle hifil of לַיִץ (to scorn) or as

¹⁹⁸ Gordis mentions 27,2 as a decisive refutation of the view that Job has been appealing to an unnamed third party because there the God to whom Job is appealing is identical to the God who has wronged him (Gordis, *Job*, 287). Hölscher states that it matters to Job that he really finds God, namely a God who is not only angry and demonic, but a God of love and loyalty, a friend and a protector of all upright people. According to Hölscher, this conviction breaks through in 16.18-19.21 (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 43; also cited in De Wilde, *Hiob*, 194). In general, I think that it would deserve more emphasis that Job is also forced to appeal to God because only God can provide Job with a way out of his misery. There is no hope beyond God.

¹⁹⁹ 1 Sam.12,5; Mic.1,2; Jer.29,23; Mal.3,5.

²⁰⁰ Clines, *Job*, 389-390 (Clines also identifies the גִּבּוֹר (champion/redeemer) in 19,25 as Job's cry for innocence (459)). So also C. Gross, "Notes on the Meaning of Job 16,20", *The Bible Translator* 43 (1992) 239-240.

²⁰¹ For an overview of a considerable number of different translations and emendations see Curtis, "On Job's Witness", 552-553, note 7.

the substantive מַלְיָן (interpreter/spokesman).²⁰² In the former case, Job describes his friends as those who scorn him. This would be the reason for turning to God with his plea or complaint.²⁰³ In the latter, Job characterizes his friends or the heavenly witness as his intermediary or spokesman.²⁰⁴ While the participle qal of מַלְיָן meaning ‘mocker’ occurs in the Hebrew bible several times, a participle hifil would be unique. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to understand מַלְיָן as the substantive מַלְיָן (spokesman).²⁰⁵

However, to whom or what does this spokesman refer? On a textual level, it can be a further characterization of the heavenly witness (16,19) or be taken with רַעִי (16,20a). However, the word רַע is not univocal and has been read in different ways. Most scholars take רַעִי from רַע II (friend) and read a plural or singular.²⁰⁶ In the plural, Job’s friends would be called his spokesmen. However, such a characterization can hardly be intended seriously because Job earlier qualified the comfort of the friends as worthless (16,2-5). Therefore, this reading is only possible if it is taken ironically or as a question.²⁰⁷ As a singular, both רַעִי and מַלְיָן would refer to the heavenly witness (16,19), who is called Job’s spokesman and friend.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, רַעִי can be taken from רַע I (cry) or רַע III (thought/intention).²⁰⁹ Then Job’s cry or attempt at vindication would be representing him. Since the heavenly witness has been identified with God, it is unlikely that the spokesman and the friend refer to the witness. For, Job would not call God his friend in his current situation.²¹⁰ It is less plausible that spokesman

²⁰² Furthermore, several emendations are suggested. Among other things: מַצַּא לִי (Duhm, *Hiob*, 90; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 281); מַלְבִּי צַא (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 194).

²⁰³ So Budde, *Hiob*, 86; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 148; Terrien, *Job*, 134.

²⁰⁴ The word מַלְיָן can be found in Gen.42,23; Isa.43,27; 2 Chr.32,31; Job 33,23.

²⁰⁵ Duhm mentions this fact as a reason to exclude the first option (Duhm, *Hiob*, 90). This view is supported by Tg.

²⁰⁶ In the singular, the vocalization of the suffix of both מַלְיָן and רַעִי is changed into יָ.

²⁰⁷ So Gordis, *Job*, 170.179. He actually gives different options. He translates 16,20a as a question: “Alas! Are my intercessors my friends?” (170). He states that the Masoretic text can be defended. Then one can read: “Oh, my intercessors, my friends!”, where a bitter irony can be heard according to Gordis. Besides this option, Gordis proposes to add אֱלֹהִים (God) after רַעִי: “My intercessors are God’s friends”, by which ‘God’s friends’ is an ironic epithet (179).

²⁰⁸ So Habel, *Job*, 263.266; Horst, *Hiob*, 254; Van Selms, *Job I*, 147-148; Mowinckel, “Hiobs gō`ēl”, 210.

²⁰⁹ Pope, *Job*, 122: ‘thoughts’. Clines takes up Pope’s suggestion and explains it as equivalent to רַעוּת (longing/striving) from the same root רַע III. Though he calls Dhorme’s translation ‘clamour’ (רַע I) almost as attractive (Clines, *Job*, 371). It is striking that Clines’ commentary on 16,20 seems to tend more to a derivation from רַע I (see Clines, *Job*, 390.459). Hölscher, *Hiob*, 42: ‘cry’. Curtis reads rō`î (my shepherd) (Curtis, “On Job’s Witness”, 552-554).

²¹⁰ Moreover, nowhere is God called friend in the Hebrew bible. Only in Exod.33,11, a comparison of God with רַע can be found: Moses speaks with God as one with his

refers to Job's cry or his striving because the task of intercession is attributed to a helping entity which is different from Job himself in 16,19-21. Therefore, עֵרֵךְ can best be read as a plural referring to Job's friends, who are ironically called Job's spokesmen.

So, Job depicts his current situation in parenthesis with bitter irony (16,20) between his utterances about his heavenly witness (16,19,21). Job has been dependent on his friends as his spokesmen until now. However, their words have been qualified as idle at the beginning of this speech (16,3). Job has sleeplessly been waiting for any response by God to his request for a reason for his suffering and to his claim that he is blameless. Since this current situation does not progress Job any further, Job now takes the next step by appealing to God as his witness. In this way, Job calls God up against God. Despite God's hostile attitude towards him, now Job also puts some trust and hope in this same God. He hopes and wishes that God will plead as his witness with God, who apparently holds him guilty. Maybe this witness can confirm Job's integrity and convince God that Job's conviction that he suffers innocently is valid.²¹¹ In 17,3, Job makes a similar appeal to God. There, Job asks God to set a pledge for him with God himself because nobody else appears to be prepared to accept this task.²¹² Providing such a security would make it possible to release Job from his current trouble. In this way, Job chooses new openings in the course of the dialogue in order to evade his miserable fate and to be proved right. He appeals to God in God's role as witness and protector.

4.6.3 Job's Redeemer

In one of the most famous verses of the book of Job, Job places his hope in a redeemer. He states that he knows that his redeemer lives (19,25). As in Job 16, this affirmation is preceded by an attempt to let Job's case go on after a possibly premature death. Job wishes that his conviction that he is blameless and suffers unjustly is written down, so that his charge against God will not cease if he dies (19,23-24).²¹³ Subsequently, Job assures:

friend/neighbour. Though Fohrer thinks it possible that God is called friend here (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 291).

²¹¹ Are the readers again confronted with bitter irony because they know that God has confirmed Job's integrity in the presence of the satan (1,8; 2,3)?

²¹² Reading עֵרֵךְ as object of שִׁמָּה. Objects can serve as pledge (e.g. Gen.38,17f.20) or persons can be surety for someone else (Prov.6,1; 11,15; 17,18; 22,26).

²¹³ Several scholars are of the opinion that these written words are addressed to posterity. According to Fohrer, Job wants to prevent his friends' slander remaining unchallenged if he dies (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 316; so also Habel, *Job*, 303; Hesse, *Hiob*, 127). However, a human acknowledgement that Job is innocent would not help Job any further. Moreover, this is not Job's real problem. Job's real striving is convincing God that he is innocent and therefore suffers unjustly. Therefore, these written words serve to keep on confronting God with Job's undeserved and unjust suffering even if he has passed away, like in 16,18 (see Clines, *Job*, 455).

- 19,25 But I know that my redeemer²¹⁴ lives,
 he will stand up at last on dust.
 19,26 After my skin has thus been stripped off²¹⁵
 my eyes shall see God from my flesh,
 19,27 whom I myself shall see,
 and my eyes shall see and not another,
 my kidneys long (for it) in my inner self.

There is a major difference between post-mortem and ante-mortem interpretations in the exegetical literature about 19,25-27. The post-mortem position is of the opinion that the redeemer will stand up after Job's death. After Job's death, Job will become aware of his vindication.²¹⁶ The ante mortem position, on the other hand, thinks that Job expects to experience an intervention of the redeemer before he dies. This ante mortem view is favourable because nowhere does Job mention the option of an afterlife or resurrection.²¹⁷ There is, nevertheless, the question of to what extent a distinction between post-mortem and ante-mortem is tenable. The line between life and death is fluid because illness can also mean staying in the area of death;²¹⁸ but resurrection after a physical death is unlikely because the book of Job is not familiar with this perspective. Seeing God (19,26b-27) is only possible in Job's present life.²¹⁹ Moreover, Job's aim each time is to seek an

²¹⁴ For **גֹּאֲלִי** several translations can be found: 'vindicator', 'champion', 'advocate', 'avenger of blood', or the traditional 'redeemer'. In German translations the term 'Löser' is used. Since it is hard to find a translation that corresponds exactly with the role and the different nuances of the **גֹּאֲלִי** here, I choose to use the conventional translation 'redeemer'. In the explanation, the identity and the function of this redeemer will become clear.

²¹⁵ Reading **נִקְרַי־כִּזְאוֹתַי**: the **י** is emended to a **כ**.

²¹⁶ So e.g. Hölscher, *Hiob*, 48-49; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 171-172; Weiser, *Hiob*, 150-151; Habel, *Job*, 307-309; Rowley, *Job*, 173. Terrien, *Job*, 150-154.

²¹⁷ One could argue that Job's request to hide him in the netherworld until God's anger is past (14,13) contains the view of a second life or resurrection. However, here Job explores the option of staying at a place beyond God's influence during a period of his life. This interpretation is supported by Job's remark in 14,14 that he would have had hope if mortals would live again, after they had died. For this remark implies a denial of such an option.

²¹⁸ Barth, *Errettung vom Tode*, 72-97. See also H.J. Hermisson, ">>Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt<< (Hiob 19,23-27)", in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 684.

²¹⁹ Some of the post-mortem views are aware of this problem. Therefore, they do not assume an afterlife or resurrection but think that for a moment Job will become aware of his vindication in a state without body (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 48; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 172, Terrien, *Job*, 153-154). However, such a solution is not convincing because Job has expressed the conviction that death is the ultimate end of human existence (7,9; 10,21; 14,10-12). Therefore, Köhlmoos, among others, thinks that Job does not express any hope at all here.

immediate acknowledgement of his innocence from his friends and God in his other speeches.²²⁰ Therefore, it is likely that Job speaks of an action by his redeemer and of seeing God before he dies. Hence, the ׀ in 19,25a expresses a contrast between Job's attempt to preserve his charge after a premature death (19,23-24) and a possible way out in his current lifespan (19,25f).²²¹ A permanent description of Job's case seems unnecessary because there is a redeemer who can take care of Job's situation now before he dies.²²²

What are the exact identity and task of this redeemer in which Job puts his trust (19,25)? A גֹּאֵל (redeemer) is an avenger of blood who takes revenge for the one who is murdered.²²³ It can also be someone who buys property back on behalf of a relative (Lev.25,25-26) or who marries a related widow in order to give heir to her dead husband²²⁴. In this way, the גֹּאֵל protects and acts on behalf of a weaker relative. God can also have the epithet גֹּאֵל. This is generally translated as 'redeemer'.²²⁵ The redeemer sometimes operates within a legal setting. In Prov.23,11, for instance, a strong גֹּאֵל pleads (רִיב) the cause of the orphans, where it seems to refer to God.²²⁶ The context of the גֹּאֵל in 19,25 also suggests a forensic use of this word. The verb קָם (to stand up) can have a legal connotation. It is used for a witness who rises in order to testify.²²⁷ So, the function of the גֹּאֵל can be understood within the framework of the image of the lawsuit that is an important and constituent element of the book of Job. Just like the witness (16,19), the redeemer stands up and pleads on behalf of Job's cause. Like an advocate, he will denounce the injustice that is done to Job.²²⁸

According to her, Job indicates that his saviour will be too late (Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 277). Habel understands this passage as the expression of Job's radical hope that he will see his divine adversary face to face, even if that happens post mortem (Habel, *Job*, 309).

²²⁰ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 320.

²²¹ An equal contrast can be found between 16,18 and 16,19ff.

²²² Budde, *Hiob*, 101-102.

²²³ Num.35,12.19.21.24-25.27; Deut.19,6,12; Josh.20,3.5.9; 2 Sam.14,11.

²²⁴ Ruth 2,20; 3,9.12-13; 4,3.4.6.8.

²²⁵ Isa.43,14; 44,6.22-24; 47,4; 48,17.20; 49,7.26; 54,5; 60,16; Ps.19,15; 78,35.

²²⁶ So also Jer.50,34 where the גֹּאֵל certainly refers to God. See also Ps.119,154, where the verb גֹּאֵל is used parallel with the verb רִיב.

²²⁷ Deut.19,15-16; Ps.27,12; 35,11. In 16,8, Job's leanness rises up and testifies against him.

²²⁸ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 321. He characterizes the גֹּאֵל as advocate. Kessler understands the function of the גֹּאֵל closer to its social connotation as 'Löser' and avenger of blood. According to Kessler, the גֹּאֵל describes a new basis for the relation with God. He argues that it becomes clear from the divine speeches and the restitution of Job at the end that God acts like a גֹּאֵל (R. Kessler, " 'Ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebet'. Sozialgeschichtlicher Hintergrund und theologische Bedeutung der Löser-Vorstellung in Hiob 19,25", *ZTK* 89 (1992) 139-158).

The identity of this redeemer is matter of debate. Here, a rather similar discussion arises as about the witness (16,19) because the redeemer and the witness are generally held to be the same entity. Likewise three options are suggested. The **לַשֵּׁן** refers to God, a third party, or Job's own protests. For a discussion about the different options, I refer to the discussion about the identity of the witness.²²⁹ There, I argued that it is most likely that Job appeals to God for assistance. Since the term **לַשֵּׁן** is used as epithet for God and can even bring about a juridical action of God, it is likely that the redeemer refers to God in 19,25. Moreover, it is not uncommon that someone puts trust in God for a good outcome, while this same God is seen as the origin of the trouble. In Ps.38, for example, the psalmist expresses his hope in God (Ps.38,16) who, in his anger, has punished him with illness (Ps.38,2-9). Therefore, an apparently complete reversal in the pattern of Job's thoughts is not unthinkable.²³⁰ Job's only chance of a way out of his misery is an appeal to God himself.

The use of the term **לַשֵּׁן** is not coincidental. The fact that being someone's **לַשֵּׁן** was the task of relatives seems to play a role.²³¹ Whereas Job's family has abandoned him and has not provided him with any assistance (19,13-19), a different entity, namely Job's redeemer, takes on the role of helper instead of Job's relatives. This redeemer is characterized as living. The adjective **חַי** (living) can emphasize God's active presence.²³² So, Job opposes the effective assistance of his redeemer to the lack of useful help by his relatives and friends.²³³ Job's redeemer is ready to take up his cause. The redeemer will stand up at last. The word **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** (last) refers within this legal context to the procedure of a lawsuit in which the one who speaks the last deciding argument wins a case.²³⁴ Job is convinced that his redeemer brings a decisive turn in his controversy with God. In comparison to

²²⁹ § 4.6.2.

²³⁰ Hermisson, "Ich weiß", 680-681". Pace Habel, *Job*, 306; Clines, *Job*, 465. Seow remarks that while Job may not have had a sudden reversal of his view of God, he certainly must have had God in mind, albeit *ironically* (my italics), when he speaks of his *gō'ēl*. God is reminded of a role that he is supposed to play but has not done so until now, according to Seow (Seow, "Job's *gō'ēl*", 700-706).

²³¹ Clines, *Job*, 459.

²³² E.g. Josh.3,10; Ps.42,3. In 27,2, **חַי** is used as part of an oath formula.

²³³ Although Job might also mention a contrast between his possibly soon death (19,10) and his redeemer who lives forever (see Clines, *Job*, 460; Habel, *Job*, 307-308), the emphasis lies on the readiness of the redeemer to act on Job's behalf (Clines also mentions this aspect (Clines, *Job*, 460)). It is also proposed that **חַי** (living) and **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** are read as divine epithets or names (so e.g. J. Holman, "Does My Redeemer Live or is My Redeemer the Living God? Some Reflections on the Translation of Job 19,25", in: Beuken, *Job*, 377-381; W.L. Michel, "Confidence and Despair. Job 19,25-27, in the Light of Northwest Semitic Studies", in: Beuken, *Job*, 166-170; Seow, "Job's *gō'ēl*", 702).

²³⁴ Pope derives **אֲחֵרֶיךָ** from the Mishnaic and Talmudic term **אֲשֵׁרֶיךָ** (guarantor) (Pope, *Job*, 146). However, MT can be understood.

16,19, the place of action differs. The word **עֶפֶר** (dust) in the modifier **עַל-עֶפֶר** refers to the face of the earth.²³⁵ While the witness operates in heaven, the redeemer will stand upon the earth. In this way, everybody can hear the redeemer's plea. Job's friends will see that Job's trust was not idle and discover that their insights are wrong. Job is convinced that God in the function of redeemer will successfully look after his interests.²³⁶ His advocate will make his innocence clear and change God's hostile attitude towards him.²³⁷

The result of the intervention of the redeemer is described in 19,26f. Job hopes to encounter the hostile disposed God in a different way. He compares his current miserable state to this new turn in his life. While Job has now been deserted by God and suffers gravely (19,26a), his eyes shall see God after the redeemer's final plea (19,26b-27). Job mentions his misery by referring to his disease. He has been afflicted with sores (2,7). This disease has harmed his skin (**עוֹר**) and flesh (**בָּשָׂר**).²³⁸ Job describes the damage of his skin by means of the verb **נָכַף** I (to strip off). Furthermore, this verb only occurs in Isa.10,34, where it is used for cutting down thickets in a forest. Job's disease has stripped off his skin.²³⁹ After having suffered to such an extent, the intervention of the redeemer will bring change. Experiencing this change is characterized as seeing God (19,26b-27). The verb **רָאָה** (to see) occurs in 23,9, where Job is not able to prove his innocence in a lawsuit because he does not see God. In his final answer, Job describes the observation of God's appearance and speaking as seeing God with his eyes (**עֵינַי רָאִיתִיךָ**; 42,5). So, the experience that God somehow reacts to Job's claims and situation is a fulfilment of seeing God. After the action of the redeemer on his behalf, Job will also learn where God is and see him. The author alludes to Job's final response with this characterization (42,5). Of course, Job can not foresee how God will react. But he is convinced that God, who has turned against him, will take a different attitude towards him thanks to the intervention of his redeemer.

The event of witnessing God is given further details. In 19,26b, Job says that he will see God from his flesh. The expression **מִבְּשָׂרִי** can be translated as 'from my flesh' or 'without my flesh'. The second option is understood as a process of emaciation as a result of Job's disease²⁴⁰ or as a description of Job's situation after

²³⁵ So also in 4,19; 5,6; 14,8; 28,2.

²³⁶ The verb **יָדַע** (to know) expresses a conviction or belief (9,2,28; 10,13; 13,18) (see Habel, *Job*, 303-304).

²³⁷ Clines calls this passage a breakthrough since Job has never said before that he believes that he will in the end be successful in his lawsuit (Clines, *Job*, 458).

²³⁸ 7,5; 30,30.

²³⁹ Some scholars read 19,26a as a description of the destruction of the skin after Job's death (Habel, *Job*, 293; Weiser, *Hiob*, 152). However, such a view is not plausible because its implication that Job would see God after his death is not likely within the context of the book of Job.

²⁴⁰ So Fohrer, *Hiob*, 322; Hesse, *Hiob*, 128.

his death²⁴¹. The word בָּשָׂר (flesh) can refer to the whole body.²⁴² Since an ante-mortem interpretation of 19,25-27 is more plausible and seeing God without flesh in a spiritual form does not fit with Job's desire to be vindicated now, the meaning 'without' is less likely. Job will see God from his body. That means while Job is still alive.²⁴³ There is some contrast between 19,26a and 19,26b. Nevertheless, even though Job's disease has affected him considerably, Job will encounter God before he dies. Job emphasizes with אֲנִי (I) and לִי (for my self) in 19,27a that he will personally experience a change in God's attitude towards him.²⁴⁴ While earlier God hid his face (13,24), Job will then witness God. The accentuation of this personal experience is concluded with לֹא-אֲחֵר (not another) in 19,27b. Driver-Gray understand this expression as a qualification of God who will not be estranged.²⁴⁵ But the emphasis on Job's own observation of God makes it more probable that אֲחֵר refers to someone other than Job.²⁴⁶ Job's deepest inner self longs for this moment of vindication (19,27c).²⁴⁷ After the redeemer has taken action, Job hopes to see God personally.

4.6.4 Conclusions

With the expression of Job's trust in God as his witness, protector, and redeemer, the book of Job reaches a new milestone in the dialogue. It demonstrates the full complexity of Job's situation. As such, Job is powerless. He lacks the ability to do anything about God's arbitrary and hostile actions. Challenging God's actions in a legal case seems impossible because God is of a different order than human beings. The only possible gesture that could be effective is an appeal to God himself. For, only God is of the same order as God and is thus able to interfere with God. Therefore, Job has to turn to God in God's role as witness and redeemer, if he

²⁴¹ So Driver-Gray, *Job*, 174; Hölscher, *Hiob*, 49; Weiser, *Hiob*, 152. This translation can also be found in Pope, *Job*, 139; Strauß, *Hiob*, 3; Terrien, *Job*, 153-154.

²⁴² E.g. 4,15; Qoh,12,12.

²⁴³ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 461. In the Christian tradition during the past centuries, מִבְּשָׂרִי has been interpreted as referring to a bodily resurrection. After Job's death, Job would be resurrected and encounter God thanks to the intervention of the redeemer. It has been made clear here that such a view does not correspond with Job's worldview. For an overview of the history of interpretation of see 19,25-27: J. Speer, "Zur Exegese von Hiob 19,25-27", *ZAW* 25 (1905) 47-140.

²⁴⁴ Several scholars think that לִי expresses that Job will see the redeemer on his side (Budde, *Hiob*, 107; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 174; Rowley, *Job*, 174; Pope, *Job*, 139). But Job's point is here that he will personally encounter God (therefore also the use of אֲנִי and וְעֵינַי) (cf. Clines, *Job*, 434).

²⁴⁵ Driver-Gray, *Job*, 175.

²⁴⁶ Clines, *Job*, 462; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 322.

²⁴⁷ The kidneys are the vital part of a human body (16,13) and can be the seat of emotions (Ps.73,21; Prov.23,16). The verb בָּלַח can express a deep longing of something (with נַפְשׁ: Ps.84,3; 119,81; with יָיָ: Ps.119,82.123).

wants to evade his miserable circumstances. This new step remains within the context of the image of the lawsuit. Since Job had not succeeded in entering into a legal case with God until now, he calls on God to plead as his witness and advocate against God on his behalf at the present.

One could wonder to what extent Job believes that his hope for action by his witness and redeemer comes true. Clines makes a distinction between Job's expectation and his desire. According to him, Job expects his case to be resolved after his death (19,26a), but desires to see God and to see his name cleared while he is still alive (19,26b).²⁴⁸ However, such a distinction is not plausible because 19,25-27 deals entirely with hope for a change during Job's life. Moreover, Job wins little if he is vindicated after his death. Others think that Job does not have any hope at all and only complains that any help will be too late,²⁴⁹ but that is too pessimistic an interpretation. Job presents his hope with a certain measure of conviction. He keeps striving for vindication and conducting a lawsuit with God. This shows that he has not lost all hope. Moreover, the appearance of God at the end of the book makes it plausible that Job assumes that a good outcome is possible. Therefore, Job does display some realistic confidence in an intervention by God as his witness and redeemer. Nevertheless, Job is not one hundred percent sure. The appeal to the earth not to cover his blood (16,18) and Job's desire that his words are written down (19,23-24) also show some doubt. Job moves between hope and despair, between conviction and desire, waiting and hoping for some kind of reaction from God's side.

²⁴⁸ Clines, *Job*, 461. See also D.J.A. Clines, "Belief, Desire and Wish in Job 19.23-27: Clues for the Identity of Job's 'Redeemer'", in: Clines, *Postmodern II*, 762-769 [=BEATAJ 13], Frankfurt 1988, 363-370].

²⁴⁹ J.K. Zink, "Impatient Job. An Interpretation of Job 19,25-27", *JBL* 84 (1965) 149-152. So also Van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job*, 88-89; Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 277.

