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### God-talk in the Book of Job

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## Chapter 6

# Prologue and Epilogue

### 6.1 Introduction

The poetic dialogue is surrounded by the prose of the prologue and epilogue.<sup>1</sup> The prologue introduces the main character, Job, and provides the necessary ingredients that constitute the central issue of the book of Job. It gives the reader insight into the cause of Job's miserable fate. This is not a reward for bad behaviour but a battle of prestige between God and the satan in which God's honour is at stake. The satan discredits Job as well as God. His insinuations lead to a testing of Job's motives for living an ultimately pious life. The prologue presents a case of extremes. While Job is presented as someone who is ultimately righteous, his miserable fate touches truly everything he has and affects even himself. In this way, the reader can not ignore that Job's suffering gives a disproportionate impression and occurs beyond the concept of retribution. With this, the prologue creates the necessary conditions for a debate about innocent suffering.<sup>2</sup> The epilogue reports Job's restoration. God acknowledges that Job has spoken correctly and gives Job twice what he had. The story about the cause of Job's suffering and his final restoration forms the framework of the book of Job.

There has been great debate about the question of how the framework is related to the dialogue.<sup>3</sup> For, both entities differ, for example, in their way of mentioning God, their social setting, and their style of formulating.<sup>4</sup> These differences have produced theses which suppose that the framework and dialogue came into being independently. They vary from assuming the existence of two originally independently written sources<sup>5</sup> or an older chapbook to taking older oral traditions or stories for granted. Furthermore, several scholars also notice a literal growth

<sup>1</sup> Prologue: 1,1-2,13. Epilogue: 42,7-17.

<sup>2</sup> See also Clines, *Job*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview see W.D. Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt. Die Prosatexte des Hiobbuches und ihre Rolle in seiner Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte* (BZAW 336), Berlin- New York 2004, 25-49.

<sup>4</sup> Framework-dialogue: prose-poetry; kind of tale-speeches; patriarchal (pastoral) setting-urban setting; frequent use of divine name (JHWH)-general designation of God (שְׁדָא/אֱלֹהִים) (except 12,9).

<sup>5</sup> In a recent study, Syring e.g. reconstructs two independent sources which are connected and completed by a redaction (Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 151-168).

within the prologue and epilogue.<sup>6</sup> Although it is possible that an older oral or written story lies at the basis of the book of Job, the framework and dialogue are, in my opinion, constructed with reference to each other.<sup>7</sup> The dialogue intends to demonstrate the limits of the concept of retribution by means of which God's actions are understood. This requires the prologue's backing that Job is righteous and does not suffer because of sins.<sup>8</sup> Since the central issue of the book of Job is constructed by the interdependence of prologue and dialogue, it is reasonable to suppose that the same hand created them both.<sup>9</sup>

This sixth chapter deals with the prologue and the epilogue. First, I deal with the embedding of Job's righteousness (6.2.1), the testing of Job's intentions that result in his misfortune (6.2.2), and Job's reaction to his misfortune (6.2.3) in the prologue. Subsequently, I consider God's final words (6.3.1) and Job's restoration (6.3.2) in the epilogue.

## 6.2 The Prologue

### 6.2.1 The Embedding of Job's Righteousness

Job's conviction that he is righteous is an important pillar of Job's protest in the dialogue. Job is of the opinion that God treats him unjustly because God has reserved a miserable fate for him while Job considers himself as blameless. However, such a claim of being innocent is as such disputable because it can not be verified by bystanders. Nobody can fully observe a person's conduct or fathom person's inner thoughts.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Job's claim that he is righteous needs to be confirmed by an independent authority. Otherwise Job's struggle with God and his

<sup>6</sup> See the overview of Syring. While the mention of Job in Ezek.14,14.20 leads to the suspicion that the story of Job has older origins, the representation of the satan is considered as a post-exilic development. Therefore, some scholars regard the parts about the satan (1,6-12;2,1-8) as later additions (e.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 29-32; Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 151-168). On the other hand, among others, Maag thinks that a third heavenly scene, where the satan is said to cease because of his defeat, was deleted when the dialogue was inserted into the story (Maag, *Wandlung und Verarbeitung*, 39-41). However, the problem of such a view is that the assumption of such a missing scene remains speculative.

<sup>7</sup> Clines e.g. thinks that the framework and the dialogue (except Job 28 and 32-37) are written by the same author although the story of Job may be much older (Clines, *Job*, lvii-lx). He calls the impression that the framework is a primitive tale a strategy of false naivety (D.J.A. Clines, "False Naivety in the Prologue to Job", in: Clines, *Postmodern II*, 735-744 [originally published in: *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985) 127-136]).

<sup>8</sup> This relation is also proved by the occurrence of several words and details which the prologue and the dialogue have in common. E.g. several terms for describing Job's righteousness (1,1.8; 2,3): **יָשָׁר**: 9,20-22; **יָשָׁר**: 23,7; **חֹזֶק הַמַּחְזָק**: 27,5-6; the lack of reason/cause: **אֵין** (1,9; 2,3): 9,17; 22,6; Job's children (1,2.4-5.13-15.18-19): 8,4.

<sup>9</sup> See also §2.2.3.

<sup>10</sup> This is one of the reasons that Job's friends do not believe Job's claim that he is blameless is true.

questioning of God's behaviour could lack legitimate grounds. The prologue of the book of Job offers this embedding of Job's righteousness.<sup>11</sup> It informs the reader about Job's irreproachable way of life. The narrator and God both assure that Job is blameless:

1,1.8/2,3...He is blameless and upright, fears God and turns away from evil.

Job's righteousness is described by four different characterizations. The first two words אָמֵן (blameless) and יָשָׁר (upright) are general indications. These roots<sup>12</sup> occur parallel several times.<sup>13</sup> The root אָמֵן can point to one's innocence<sup>14</sup>, is in keeping what God has commanded (1Kgs.9,4), and functions as a characterization of one's heart<sup>15</sup>. צַדִּיקָהּ (righteousness) guards one whose way is irreproachable (אָמֵן; Prov.13,6). So, אָמֵן makes it clear that nothing can be reckoned against Job.<sup>16</sup> The root יָשָׁר can be found parallel to צַדִּיקָהּ (righteous)<sup>17</sup> and is the opposite of רָשָׁע (wicked)<sup>18</sup>. The upright turn away from evil (Prov.16,17) and will be blessed with prosperity (Ps.112,2-4). Job can be rated among this group of upright people. His uprightness is subsequently elaborated upon by the second word pair that describes the attitude of a righteous person. Fearing God refers to a person's respect for God and results in ethical behaviour. It shows wisdom and insight.<sup>19</sup> Those who fear the Lord hate evil (Prov.8,13) and turn away from it (Prov.16,17). A righteous way of life combines respect for God, worship, and ethically pure behaviour. Therefore, רָע (evil) here means neglecting to serve God and performing ethically wrong actions. The prologue portrays Job as one who meets the conditions of an ideal human being according to Wisdom literature's standards. Compared to the narrator, God even increases the uniqueness of Job by stating that

<sup>11</sup> Wierenga points to the reader's 'information superiority' in comparison to Job thanks to the scene in heaven. According to him, the reader can develop compassion and sympathy for the pathetic victim thanks to this lead. At the same time, the reader is also forced to sort out the unpleasant knowledge that Job's trouble has been caused with permission of JHWH (L. Wierenga, <<Job>>: *het leed, het vuil en de laster. De prozasecties van <<Job>> gelezen als routeplanner voor het boek <<Job>>*, Kampen 2004, 110-118).

<sup>12</sup> אָמֵן, אָמֵן, and אָמֵן; יָשָׁר and יָשָׁר.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. 1 Kgs.9,4; Ps.25,21; 37,37; Prov.2,7.21; 28,10.

<sup>14</sup> Gen.20,5; Ps.26,1.11.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Gen.20,5-6; 1 Kgs.9,4; Ps.78,72; 101,2.

<sup>16</sup> Noah, Jacob, and David also receive this qualification (Gen.6,9; 25,27; 2 Sam.22,24.26; Ps.18,24.26). In Ps.15,2, the ones who may dwell on God's holy hill are those who walk irreproachably (אָמֵן), do what is right, and speak the truth of their heart.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Isa.26,7; Ps.33,1; 64,11; 97,11; 140,14; Prov.21,18.

<sup>18</sup> Prov.11,11; 12,6; 14,11.

<sup>19</sup> 28,28; Prov.9,10.

there is no one like Job on earth.<sup>20</sup> So, the reader knows from the very beginning of the book that Job can not be blamed for any transgression.<sup>21</sup>

The narrator illustrates this irreproachable way of life with two examples. Firstly, Job's prosperity is mentioned. He has seven sons and three daughters and possesses an extended stock (1,2f). Although the concept of retribution has not explicitly been mentioned yet, it is already assumed here.<sup>22</sup> Job's wealth is related to his uprightness. In Deut.28,1-14, the one who observes the commandments of the Lord is blessed with prosperity.<sup>23</sup> This implies that upright behaviour can be derived from a person's prosperous state. Equally, the prologue understands Job's prosperity as God's blessing for upright behaviour. Job's wealth proves that he is righteous. Secondly, the narrator provides the reader with insight into Job's religious life. Job's cares for his family to such an extent that he even sacrifices offerings regularly on behalf of his children (1,5). Some scholars regard this as a rigid aspect of Job's piety.<sup>24</sup> One could easily get such an impression. However, this seemingly over the top practice serves to underline unconditional devotion to God. Job takes full responsibility as head of the family. In this way, no reader can deny that Job's exceptionally upright.<sup>25</sup> This is the necessary condition with which the understanding of God's actions according to the concept of retribution can be questioned in the dialogue.

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<sup>20</sup> 1,8; 2,3.

<sup>21</sup> For instance Driver-Gray state that  $\square\eta$  (blameless) does not mean perfect in the sense of absolutely sinless (Driver-Gray, *Job*, 3). But Clines rightly remarks that the issues of the book are posed in simple terms of innocence and guilt, so that a suggestion that  $\square\eta$  would not mean that Job is sinless is rather questionable (Clines, *Job*, 12).

<sup>22</sup> Fohrer and Clines differentiate between blessing and reward. They are of the opinion that it is not a retributive theology of virtue and reward that is at play here but the old idea of God's blessing in which the pious have a share (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 74; Clines, *Job*, 13). However, such a distinction is unlikely in the light of the remainder of the book. Sharing in God's blessings is the logical result of righteousness according to the concept of retribution. The insinuations of the satan in 1,9-11 make it clear that it is seen as a kind of reward. For the satan doubts whether Job remains loyal to God if he loses this reward and receives trouble (compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 24: what befalls one corresponds to a person's actions). Elsewhere, Clines states that Job's offering of sacrifices for his children each morning in case they have offended God (1,5) is a narrative gesture to retributionist theology (D.A.J. Clines, "Job's God", in: E. van Wolde (ed.), *Job's God* (Concilium 2004/4), London 2004, 44).

<sup>23</sup> The satan will question this automatism.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Clines, *Job*, 15. Brenner calls the portrait of Job in the frame story an ironic exaggeration of conventional piety. According to her, it is almost a parody of faith (A. Brenner, "Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book", *JSOT* 43 (1989) 37-45).

<sup>25</sup> See also e.g. Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 63; Hesse, *Hiob*, 26.

### 6.2.2 Testing Job's Intentions for Living a Pious Life

After a general introduction of the leading character of the book, the focus shifts to heaven (1,6-12). There, God receives his heavenly court like a king.<sup>26</sup> The members of this court are the **בני אלהים** (sons of God) who can be considered as heavenly beings in the surroundings of God.<sup>27</sup> God enters into conversation with one of these heavenly beings who is more precisely designated as the *satan*. When God becomes aware that the *satan* has returned from wanderings over the earth, he rather proudly enquires whether the *satan* has taken notice of God's servant Job. This would be worth it because nobody on earth is as upright as Job (1,7f). Apparently, the *satan* is familiar with Job's piety and seizes the opportunity to denounce the nature of this piety.

1,9-11 The *satan* answered the Lord: "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not shielded him, his house, and all that he has from every side? You have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But reach out your hand and touch all that is his, then he will surely curse<sup>28</sup> you in your face."

In the book of Job, the figure of **השטן** (the *satan*) operates within God's sphere of power. The *satan* can only accomplish something on earth with God's permission (1,12). The article makes it clear that the term **שטן** refers to a function instead of a proper name.<sup>29</sup> However, there is the question of what this function exactly includes. The word **שטן** is used for human as well as heavenly beings and basically represents a role of adversary or opponent to God or human beings.<sup>30</sup> Some scholars say that the *satan* fulfils the role of accuser.<sup>31</sup> However, it is unclear whether the word appears in a juridical context elsewhere, so that a semantic basis for this view is lacking.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the *satan*'s words do not bear a full accusation

<sup>26</sup> The representation of a divine court can also be found in 1 Kgs.22,19-22, Dan.7,9-14, and Ps.82,1.

<sup>27</sup> Here, the word **בן** (son) indicates membership of a group and not the relationship of father and son (cf. Clines, *Job*, 19).

<sup>28</sup> Here, the verb **ברך**, which normally means 'to bless', is a euphemism for 'to curse' because the *satan* refers to a negative action against God (so also in 1,5; 2,5,9; 1 Kgs.21,10,13; Ps.10,3).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Horst, *Hiob*, 13; Habel, *Job*, 89; Clines, *Job*, 19-20; Pope, *Job*, 9; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 10. In 1 Chr.21,1, it can be found as a proper name.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Num.22,22,32; Ps.38,21; 71,13; 109,4,20,29.

<sup>31</sup> G. von Rad, art. **δίαβολος** B., ThWNT 2, 71-74; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 87 ('Anklage-Engel'); Van Selms, *Job I*, 21; Driver-Gray, *Job*, 10-11 ('opposing or accusing men before God'); Gordis, *Job*, 14 ('prosecutor'). Partly also Habel, *Job*, 89 ('accuser, adversary, doubter').

<sup>32</sup> Horst, *Hiob*, 14. In Ps.109,6 and Zech.3,1f, a juridical role as accuser is regularly attested to **שטן**. However, a juridical context is not clear at these places. In Zech.3,1f, legal terms and an accusation are lacking. Here, the activity of the *satan* is described with the verb **שטן**

but can better be seen as insinuations which attempt to put Job in a bad light and provoke God. Therefore, here the role of the satan is one of adversary.<sup>33</sup> The satan is Job's adversary in the first place. His opposing behaviour towards Job consists of discrediting Job's piety in front of God which has far-reaching consequences for Job's life. However, the satan functions as an opponent of God too. Although he is under the strict supervision of God, his provoking remarks challenge God and cast doubt on the way God gains worship. Fohrer calls the satan the embodiment of the divine doubt about the disinterestedness of human piety which must be tested.<sup>34</sup> However, such doubt would contravene God's unconditional conviction that Job is blameless within the framework of the story. Why would God be suspicious if he is omniscient and is convinced that Job's piety is motivated by devotion? Moreover, the satan has an ontological status in the story itself. Therefore, the satan is not the embodiment of a dark side of God but functions as an independent member of the divine court. Whereas it is clear that God gives permission to test Job<sup>35</sup>, this permission is inspired by the will to enfeeble the insinuations of the satan rather than God's own doubts about Job's motives.<sup>36</sup> The satan operates as an adversary

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that can mean 'to thwart' or 'to be/act hostile(/ly)' (compare A.S. van der Woude, *Zacharia* (POT), Nijkerk 1984, 62-63; Horst, *Hiob*, 14). In Ps.109,6, the  $\text{יָצַו}$  does not necessarily fulfil an accusing role. There, he can function as an adversary or hostile enemy (cf. Ps.109,4.20.29). Tur-Sinai sees the origin of the satan as an official of the secret police and describes him as the eyes of God (Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 38-45. Compare Pope, *Job*, 10-11). However, the semantic argumentation of this proposal is questionable (see Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83, note 18). Hölscher identifies the satan with an evil spirit that roams about the earth and brings calamity (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 13). This is unlikely because bringing calamity is not a goal as such in the prologue.

<sup>33</sup> Clines, *Job*, 20; Hesse, *Hiob*, 28; Horst, *Hiob*, 13-14; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83 ("Menschenfeind").

<sup>34</sup> Fohrer, *Hiob*, 83. See also Habel, *Job*, 89. Clines makes a distinction between the level of the story and the level of theological reading. While there are two heavenly personalities in uneasy confrontation for the storyteller, the satan is an embodiment of some of God's functions at the level of a theological reading; he raises the question of whether Job's piety is disinterested, and he puts into effect the divine authorization to afflict Job, according to Clines (Clines, *Job*, 22). Spieckermann is also of the opinion that at a theological level the satan represents the drawback of God. According to him, the 'satanization' (Satanisierung) of God in Job's speeches and particularly the use of the verb  $\text{יָצַו}$  in 16,9 show that the poet of the dialogue has also understood the novel in such a way (H. Spieckermann, "Die Satanisierung Gottes. Zur inneren Konkordanz von Novelle, Dialog und Gottesreden im Hiobbuch", in: I. Kottsieper et al. (eds.), "Wer ist wie du, Herr, unter den Göttern?" *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag*, Göttingen 1994, 435.439).

<sup>35</sup> 1,12; 2,6.

<sup>36</sup> However, this does not mean that the Lord already knows that Job will pass the test on the basis of his omniscience. God has confidence in Job because he has carefully observed Job's inner side but does not know what has not happened yet (compare Clines, *Job*, 29).

who tries to sow doubt and suspicion. His approach is somewhat tempting and disturbing. Within his limited sphere, the satan opposes Job as well as God.

The satan's role as adversary finds expression in his question of whether Job fears God without reason (1,9). This question denounces Job's intentions as well as God's credibility. Here, the word **לֵאֵלֶיךָ** (for nothing) refers particularly to the lack of compensation.<sup>37</sup> The satan doubts whether Job's exceptional uprightness is only the result of pure worship. He suggests that Job's efforts to lead a pious life are inspired by the reward Job receives in exchange for his piety rather than by respect for God. God blesses the work of Job's hands and protects<sup>38</sup> Job and his property (1,10). According to the satan, it would become clear that Job's loyalty is not only motivated by devotion, if this prosperity was damaged (1,11). God can reach out his hand (**וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה יָדוֹ**) and touch (**וַיַּעַבְדֵם**) in order to perform blessing as well as destructive deeds.<sup>39</sup> The satan incites God to apply this power destructively and touch everything Job has because the disinterested nature of Job's piety can only come to the surface if Job loses his rewards. God agrees to such an experiment under certain conditions. He forbids the satan to stretch out his hand against Job himself in the first instance (1,12). So, a testing of Job's intentions is born with God's permission.

Whereas the satan explicitly denounces Job's intentions for being upright, his insinuations also refer to God. The satan tries to discredit God's credibility in two different ways. Firstly, God's proud presentation of Job's uprightness would be undermined if Job's piety appeared to be motivated by profit. This would mean that either God's 'omniscience' has failed<sup>40</sup> because God has let himself be dazzled by Job's outward show without taking notice of Job's inner intentions, or God has wilfully given the truth a twist in order to show off in the presence of the satan. Secondly, the nature of God's relationship with human beings is denounced. The satan casts doubt on the way God gains worship. Does a causal relation between a person's actions and what befalls them not mean that God actually procures devotion by rewarding them for their faithfulness?<sup>41</sup> The satan suggests that the reward of protection and blessing could promote righteous behaviour motivated by wrong intentions. One could get the impression that God more or less enforces worship under threat of disaster. It would mean that the motive for having a relationship with God is one of fright or profit rather than respect.<sup>42</sup> So, the question of whether Job fears God for nothing (1,9) also brings into question God's

<sup>37</sup> See also e.g. Gen.29,15; Isa.52,3.

<sup>38</sup> In 3,23, Job understands God's shielding (**וַיִּסְכְּנוֹ**) as a negative deed that limits the prospects of human beings.

<sup>39</sup> Blessing: e.g. Jer.1,9. Destructive: e.g. Amos 9,5.

<sup>40</sup> Fohrer, *Hiob*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> So also Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 71.

<sup>42</sup> Compare Weiser, who states that God would be dethroned and degraded to a guarantee of happiness if the satan gets right (Weiser, *Hiob*, 30).



credibility and honour.<sup>43</sup> It denounces the way in which God gains trust and worship.

If readers take note of these implications of the satan's words (1,9-11), they realize that the satan plays a paradoxical role. Whereas the satan appears as a 'bad guy' within the framework of the story in the prologue, his role is considerably less negative from an overall perspective. To Job and God, the satan appears as an adversary who tries to discredit them. But this adversary voices one of the basic issues that the narrator wants to bring up on the level of the book. The book of Job comments on the concept of retribution. It introduces a case of innocent suffering in order to show the limits of a strict application of this concept. Now, it is a remarkable detail that it is the satan who gives the initial impetus to call some aspects of this concept into question.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, he points to the danger of a *do ut des* mentality in such a theology. A causal relation between upright behaviour and reward with prosperity may lead to wrong intentions for worshipping God. On the other hand, he remarks on God's approach of gaining worship. God seems to force devotion which would decrease his dignity. This would mean that a relation between God and human beings is not fully free. Then the relation between them would not have worship as a starting point but mutual interest, in which both interests do not need to be equal.<sup>45</sup> So, the narrator calls in the figure of the satan in order to initiate his debate about the tenability of the concept of retribution.<sup>46</sup> This debate will be held by questioning in particular some consequences of this concept.

In the second scene in heaven, God meets the satan again (2,1-7a). Here, God establishes with considerable satisfaction that Job has passed the trial after a first round of calamities (1,13-19). Job's misfortune has not caused him to curse God, even though it is not a punishment for wrong behaviour and, therefore, may be an unjust fate in Job's perception. God underlines that sinning is not the reason for this suffering.

2,3 "...He still persists in his integrity, although you have incited me against him in order to destroy him without reason."

Job's attitude towards God has not altered despite his miserable fate. Job still persists in his integrity. In the dialogue, Job uses the same terms in order to stress that he will not put away his integrity (יָצַד; 27,5) and persists (יָצַד) in his righteousness (27,6). Job's wife urges him to cease persisting in his integrity (2,9)

<sup>43</sup> Fohrer, *Hiob*, 85; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 87-88.

<sup>44</sup> See also Habel, who states that the satan also challenges the entire doctrine of reward and retribution with the expression יָצַד (Habel, *Job*, 85)

<sup>45</sup> See also §8.5.4.

<sup>46</sup> Compare Clines, *Job*, 27.

but Job will not compromise on this. The opposition between God and Job has come into being as a result of the trouble that the satan has brought about. The verb **סוּר** (to incite) expresses the action of opposing one to another.<sup>47</sup> The satan has incited God against Job, whereas a legitimate reason is lacking in light of the concept of retribution. God designates the satan's actions as **בְּיָדָא**. Some scholars think that here it means 'without result' and refers to the fact that the supposed effect of Job's calamities fails to occur.<sup>48</sup> However, here it is more likely that God points to the lack of a legitimate reason for Job's misery if one takes the concept of retribution as a starting point. In this way, the basic problem of the dialogue, that Job suffers innocently, is mentioned here. In 9,17, Job states that God multiplies his wounds without reason (**בְּיָדָא**).<sup>49</sup> There, he reasons according to the concept of retribution and concludes that God's actions towards him lack legitimate grounds. A similar intention can be found in 2,3. The word **בְּיָדָא** does not express a complete absence of reasons for Job's fate because a matter of prestige between God and the satan has led to it. But the destruction of Job does not have a legitimate grounds according to the concept of retribution.<sup>50</sup> So, God confirms that Job's wounds are multiplied without reason and explicitly declares that the concept of retribution has been broken in Job's case. He admits that he may have given a hostile impression to Job, even though it was not his intention.

### 6.2.3 Job's Reaction on His Miserable Fate

Job reacts to the loss of his possessions and children (1,13-19) and the infliction of loathsome sores (2,7) with an attitude of acceptance. He does not reproach God for acting wrongly (1,22) nor curse him (2,10)<sup>51</sup> but accepts God's divine right to give

<sup>47</sup> 1 Sam.26,19; 2 Sam.24,1; Jer.43,3.

<sup>48</sup> Horst, *Hiob*, 23-24; Habel, *Job*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> See for the meaning 'for no reason' also e.g. Ps.35,7.19; 69,5. A reason for hostility is also lacking.

<sup>50</sup> 2,3 alludes to the question of the satan in 1,9 where **בְּיָדָא** refers to the disinterested nature of Job's piety. Ebach describes the basic meaning of **בְּיָדָא** as 'ohne Äquivalenz'. According to him, 'without reason' and 'without result' are both meant in 2,3 (J. Ebach, ">>Ist es >umsonst<, daß Hiob gottesfürchtig ist?<< Lexikographische und methodologische Marginalien zu **בְּיָדָא** in Hi 1,9", in: J. Ebach, *Hiobs Post. Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Hiobbuch zu Themen biblischer Theologie und zur Methodik der Exegese*, Nuekirchen-Vluyn 1995, 15-31; particularly 19). In 10,8, Job states that God destroys (**בִּלְעֵד**) him even though he is God's creature.

<sup>51</sup> In 2,10, sinning with Job's lips refers particularly to the prediction of the satan that Job would curse God if he lost his prosperity. Pope states that it was apparently not regarded as culpable for Job's thoughts if they remained unexpressed in word of deed (Pope, *Job*, 23). However, such a distinction between thoughts and words is unlikely here because, first of all, the entire story of the prologue serves to demonstrate the imperturbability of Job's loyalty to God and secondly a person's mouth expresses one's inner life (compare 15,5).

and take. This reaction in particular consists of more or less existing formulas.<sup>52</sup> After the messengers informed Job about the catastrophes that had affected his children and all he has (1,13-19), he plunges himself into mourning and says:

1,21 Naked I came<sup>53</sup> from my mother's womb  
and naked I shall return there.  
The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away;  
blessed be the name of the Lord.

This reaction depicts Job's current situation and proves that his loyalty to God does not end despite his innocent suffering. The first half of this verse can be found almost word for word in Eccl.5,14. There, this saying illustrates the state of a wealthy person who has lost all his riches: he does not obtain anything from his toil and dies as naked as he was born. So, naked (עָרַב) refers to the loss of all possessions. Job indicates the relativity of being wealthy with this saying. Riches do not belong to the vital elements of life because they are temporal phenomena and do not give profit at the moment of one's death.<sup>54</sup> This implies a parrying of the insinuation that Job's piety is inspired by the reward with prosperity. Job makes it clear that riches as such are not his goal in life. There is debate about the word אֲרָבָה (there) because a return to the mother's womb when one dies seems strange. In Ps.139,15, the depths of the earth are depicted as the place where the poet has been made. There, they stand parallel to the womb of a mother (Ps.139,13). It is likely that such a representation of the earth's inner parts is also the background of 1,21.<sup>55</sup> Job is deprived of all his properties and thus 'naked'. His prospect at this moment is living his life in a destitute state until he dies. Nevertheless, Job indicates that he is not stuck with riches because they can not be taken along into death. Some tension could be seen between this kind of resignation and the idea that wealth is the result of a pious life.<sup>56</sup> It is a proper illustration of the fact that the motivation for Job's loyalty to God goes further than the reward he receives.

The second half of 1,21 identifies God as the origin of Job's misfortune as well as his prosperity.<sup>57</sup> From Job's perception, God has brought his suffering about because he is the one who gives and takes. Both the good and the bad are accomplished by God. Nowhere in the book of Job is this basic thought questioned. All speakers presuppose that God gives and takes. However, the issue at stake is

<sup>52</sup> Among other things, the use of the divine name JHWH by the non-Israelite Job points to this assumption (Habel, *Job*, 94; Clines, *Job*, 39; Gordis, *Job*, 18; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 89).

<sup>53</sup> Reading Qere.

<sup>54</sup> Fohrer, *Hiob*, 93; Hesse, *Hiob*, 35.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Clines, *Job*, 37. See also Pope, *Job*, 16. Some scholars understand אֲרָבָה as a (covert) reference to the underworld (e.g. Budde, *Hiob*, 6; Hesse, *Hiob*, 35).

<sup>56</sup> See also Clines, *Job*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> In 42,11, God is also mentioned as the origin of Job's calamities (עָרַב=evil).

whether God does it in a proper way. This will be doubted by Job in the dialogue. Job's blessing of God's name demonstrates that he accepts at this moment that God has taken his prosperity and assesses it as a just or permissible action.<sup>58</sup> The blessing of the Lord's name expresses respect that is attributed to him (Ps.113,2).<sup>59</sup> Ironically, the expectation of the satan comes true, though differently from how he intended it to.<sup>60</sup> While the satan used the word בָּרַךְ euphemistically in order to predict that Job would curse God (1,11), Job now uses this verb to express his continuing loyalty to God. Job accepts that God has taken away the prosperity, which God had earlier given him, and he does not blame God for it (1,22).

After the satan had inflicted Job with loathsome sores in a second round of testing (2,7) and Job's wife urged him to leave his loyalty and curse God (2,9), Job explicitly declares that he accepts both good and bad from God.

2,10 ...Would we then receive the good from God  
and not receive the bad?...

Job maintains a certain kind of balance.<sup>61</sup> Someone who enjoys the blessings, with which God provides one, should also be prepared to accept the bad from God's sight. The contrast between good and bad refers to the blessing with prosperity on the one hand and the calamities which harm Job on the other.<sup>62</sup> Job demonstrates that a righteous person accepts both good and bad from God's hand. This attitude presupposes that God always acts justly and knows what he is doing.<sup>63</sup> It is proof of true faith if one is able to accept God's actions without questioning them. This almost stoical attitude of acceptance has been assessed differently. Miskotte, for instance, sees it as Job's highest and best moment of flourishing belief that he later loses in the dialogue.<sup>64</sup> Kierkegaard, on the contrary, designates these words as no more than what professional comforters scantily measure out the individual.<sup>65</sup> So, there is the question of whether Job's words of acceptance only express intense faith in God or are also the words of someone who has not registered the real pain of his miserable fate yet and is so paralysed that he can only utter fixed formulas without being fully aware of all their implications. The doubt is then not so much

<sup>58</sup> See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 94.

<sup>59</sup> See for the blessing of God's name also Ps.96,2; 145,21; Neh.9,5.

<sup>60</sup> Habel, *Job*, 83.93; Clines, *Job*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Pace Wierenga, who suggests that one should not read a formal parallelism, so that here evil is not directly attributed to God. According to him, here Job does not give his opinion on the origin of evil (Wierenga, <<*Job*>>, 227-229). However, Job always regards God as the origin of both good and bad in the book of Job.

<sup>62</sup> Here, עָרָא refers to the disasters that have affected Job rather than to moral evil (Habel, *Job*, 96; Clines, *Job*, 54).

<sup>63</sup> Compare Clines, *Job*, 54.

<sup>64</sup> Miskotte, *Antwoord*, 93-94.

<sup>65</sup> Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 197.

concerned with the issue of whether it is true that God gives and takes but more with whether one should accept this fact without protest. Either way, the continuation in the dialogue shows that acceptance is not Job's only and final response. A way of wrestling, complaining, asking, and accusing will follow. Obviously, more needs to be said rather than just patient acceptance.<sup>66</sup>

### 6.3 The Epilogue

#### 6.3.1 God's Final Words

The rejection of Job's words in God's answer is not God's final response to Job's speeches. When God takes the floor in the epilogue once again and addresses Eliphaz, he makes it clear that Job has spoken true things unlike his three friends. Apparently, Job's arguing, accusing, and complaining are not fully rejected after all.

42,7 ..“My anger is kindled against you and your two friends because you have not spoken of<sup>67</sup> me what is true as my servant Job.”..

The friends have kindled God's anger because their words were not true in God's eyes. In 1 Sam.23,23, the verb יָצַד refers to reliable and correct data about the hiding places of David.<sup>68</sup> Contrary to Job, the friends have said things which lack

<sup>66</sup> Newsom remarks that in the prose tale the principle of retribution quite literally has no place in Job's moral imagination (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 64). I would say that at this moment Job does not fully realize yet what it implies with regard to his perception of God that this miserable fate happens to him as a blameless person. Indeed, his faithfulness to God prevails. Later, the problematic side of this event in relation to his concept of God is also getting through to Job.

<sup>67</sup> Some scholars translate לִּי as 'to me', referring to the attitude with which Job and the friends have spoken because the meaning 'of me' can not adequately be explained (Budde, *Hiob*, 254; M. Oeming, “>>Ihr habt nicht recht von mir gereredet wie mein Knecht Hiob<< Gottes Schlusswort als Schlüssel zur Interpretation des Hiobbuches und als kritische Anfrage an die moderne Theologie”, *EvTh* 60 (2000) 103-114). Van Hecke adopts this translation and is of the opinion that, unlike Job, the friends are blamed for not speaking to God (Van Hecke, *Job 12-14*, 425-426.432). However, the issue at stake is how God's actions towards Job should be understood. The debate between Job and his friends concentrated on the question of whether or not God had performed reprehensible actions in Job's case. God now refers to the views which the friends and Job have expressed about this. Moreover, if God meant to blame the friends for not speaking to God at all, the characterization נְכוֹנֵה (what is true/right) is somewhat strange. For, they would not have spoken in a wrong way to God rather they would not have directed themselves to God at all (cf. I. Kottsieper, “>>Thema verfehlt!<< Zur Kritik Gottes an den drei Freunden in Hi 42,7-9”, in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag II* (BZAW 345/II), Berlin-New York 2004, 777; Syring, *Hiob und sein Anwalt*, 108-109; See also Strauß, *Hiob*, 397).

<sup>68</sup> See also Deut.17,4. In Ps.5,10, there is no truth in the mouth of the enemies.

such correctness according to God. The statement that Job has spoken correctly of God is particularly puzzling because God rejects Job's speaking as words without knowledge in God's answer. Therefore, there is the question of which elements in the speeches of Job and his friends God exactly refers to.<sup>69</sup> Since it is likely that the dialogue and the framework were constructed with reference to each other, it does not suffice to explain this apparent contradiction between the dialogue and the epilogue diachronically. It is improbable that God refers to Job's words in the prologue or only to Job's acknowledgement of lacking sufficient insight into God's counsel at the end of the dialogue because God opposes the words of the friends to Job's words.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, since the prologue provides the reader with its own affirmation of Job's correct behaviour, a new one in the epilogue would be unnecessary.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, God's statement in 42,7 can best be considered as concerning all that Job and his friends have said in the dialogue.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> For an overview of the different proposals in the history of research see Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 104-110.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Noort, *Duister duel*, 51. See also Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 106. Several scholars think that Job's final answer (40,4-5; 42,2-6) speaks the truth about God (Hölscher, *Hiob*, 4; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 539; Strauß, *Hiob*, 397). De Wilde selects an element from the dialogue and one from Job's final answer about which Job is right (De Wilde, *Hiob*, 405). However, such an approach is rather arbitrary; God should have specified what is true more precisely.

<sup>71</sup> 1,22; 2,10. In 2,10, the narrator even explicitly mentions Job's speaking.

<sup>72</sup> So Pope, *Job*, 350; Habel, *Job*, 583; Gordis, *Job*, 494; Noort, *Duister duel*, 51. Oeming argues that God does not dismiss the words of the friends because he basically does not say anything new with regard to the content of his answer that the friends have not already said (Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 106). Newsom points out that several elements from the speeches of the friends come true in the epilogue. For her, this is one of the reasons for reading the book of Job polyphonically; because the epilogue displays a different opinion to the dialogue and the divine speeches (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 20-21). However, there is a fundamental difference. Even though Zophar, for example, precludes God's most important point that human beings can not fully see through God's ways (11,7-8), the friends differ in the sense that they do not render account of this insight for their own reasoning. The friends have a fixed idea of how God operates and think that they can observe God's dealings in this world by deducing them from a person's fate. Therefore, God can criticize the words of the friends without undermining his own statements. Köhlmoos thinks that Eliphaz was wrong in not accepting the opportunity to answer God when God spoke to him in the night vision (4,12-21). According to her, Job acted correctly because he answered God after God spoke to him from the whirlwind (Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 349). However, this view is rather unlikely because first it is unclear exactly who delivers the night vision (on the ambiguous character of 4,12-16, see Harding, "Spirit of Deception", 137-166) and secondly the reference to Eliphaz' two friends in 42,7 remains unexplained. Kottsieper thinks that the friends are reproached because they failed to go into the actual theme of Job's complaint; that is why God gives life to human beings if they have to suffer (Kottsieper, "Thema verfehlt!", 781). However, Job's complaint particularly addresses God's unrighteous actions in the dialogue.

If this judgement refers to the complete dialogue, the following two questions have to be answered. What exactly was incorrect in the speeches of the friends and how is God's approval of Job's speaking related to God's former rejection in God's answer? One could argue that Job and his friends do not really differ in their approach. Both understand God's actions according to the concept of retribution. Both are hardly prepared to deviate from this clear-cut picture. However, the application of this fixed concept of God leads to opposite conclusions. On the one hand, Job thinks that God acts unjustly because Job suffers innocently; on the other, the friends conclude that Job must have sinned since misery is a punishment for wrong behaviour. The contrast between Job and his friends lies in this different outcome. The reader knows that the conclusion of the friends is wrong because a trial is the cause of Job's suffering. On the contrary, Job speaks the truth in the sense that he is right in his conviction that God can not have inflicted his suffering because of possible sins.<sup>73</sup> It is true that also Job's conclusion is inadequate. For this, God reproaches Job in his answer. However, Job was right in questioning the legitimacy of God's actions towards him from his perspective with the concept of retribution as the interpretative framework. Therefore, God prefers Job's struggle in order to understand the background of God's actions to the friend's frenetic efforts to save their clear-cut concept of God at the price of false allegations against Job.<sup>74</sup> So, the whole diversity from complaining, asking questions, accusing, and denunciation of God to a trust in God that is never given up is assessed as correct speaking of God. After God's rejection of Job's words in God's answer, a reader might have thought that the friends were right in their conclusion that Job had sinned and that Job had followed their advice to change at the end. However, this source of misunderstanding is eliminated now.<sup>75</sup> Although Job's conclusions were inadequate as such, Job has spoken true things of God within the limited space that his range of interpretative tools allows him, unlike his friends.<sup>76</sup>

### 6.3.2 Job's Restoration

The book of Job ends like a fairy-tale. After a period of intense misery, God alters Job's sad situation. Job is restored and receives even more than he had.

42,10 And the Lord turned Job's fate<sup>77</sup> after he had prayed for his friends.  
And the Lord gave Job twice of all he had.

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<sup>73</sup> Compare Rowley, *Job*, 344.

<sup>74</sup> Compare Gordis, *Job*, 494; Habel, *Job*, 583.

<sup>75</sup> Weiser, *Hiob*, 267; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 538; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 404.

<sup>76</sup> With this, the whole divine speech does not necessarily become ironic if 42,7 is understood to refer to the complete dialogue (pace Oeming, "Nicht recht von mir geredet", 107).

<sup>77</sup> Reading Qere.

The restoration follows Job's mediation on behalf of his friends. Only Job's prayer can stop God's anger at the friends (42,8). The story tells that Job has granted this favour to them (42,10). Subsequently, God restores his former state. The word pair *שוב שבו* indicates a change which God brings in one's fate mostly for the better but sometimes for the worse.<sup>78</sup> It can refer to a return to a previous state.<sup>79</sup> God restores Job's previous prosperity and even gives him double the amount he had. He blesses Job's remaining life with enormous wealth, a new family, and longevity (42,12-17).

There is debate about the nature of Job's restoration. While several scholars understand it as an act of grace<sup>80</sup>, others regard it as a rightful consequence of the recognition that Job was right. If grace is taken as God's favour, which does not depend on a person's deeds, it is questionable whether it is a matter of grace in this context. The conclusion that Job has spoken rightly (42,7) and the mention of Job's prayer on behalf of his friends (42,10) as proof of Job's continuing upright behaviour precede Job's restoration. These indications of Job's righteousness suggest that a certain kind of balance between a person's actions and what befalls them is maintained. The restoration of Job's previous state seems a logical consequence of the fact that Job has passed the test of innocent suffering by remaining faithful to God despite his rebelliousness. Although there could be an element of restitution for suffered damage<sup>81</sup> or of consolation for undergoing an unwarranted trial<sup>82</sup> in this generous restoration<sup>83</sup>, its basis is Job's righteous behaviour during the dialogue for which he receives prosperity again.<sup>84</sup> Noort calls the book of Job a book of the united antithesis because nowhere is the doctrine of retribution attacked in such a way as in this book but almost no book has such a fairy-tale ending in which the relation between a person's actions and what befalls them is fully confirmed.<sup>85</sup> However, if one realizes that God's answer does not fully reject the concept of retribution but in particular criticizes the reducibility of a

<sup>78</sup> For better e.g.: Deut.30,3; Jer.29,14; Hos.6,11; Ps.14,7. For worse e.g.: Ezek.16,53ff.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. Ezek.16,53ff, although it is the return to a bad state here.

<sup>80</sup> Habel, *Job*, 584-585; Weiser, *Hiob*, 269; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 543

<sup>81</sup> Strauß, *Hiob*, 399; Wierenga, <<*Job*>>, 242-248.

<sup>82</sup> Habel, *Job*, 585.

<sup>83</sup> Van de Beek thinks that the double amount includes God's acknowledgement that he has been acting unjustly in the case of Job. He argues that in Ancient Eastern criminal law, double must be given if something has been stolen, according to Exod.22,4 (Van de Beek, *Rechtvaardiger dan Job*, 91-92). However, God can restore (Isa.61,7; Zech.9,12) or punish (Isa.40,2; Jer.16,18; 17,18) someone with a double amount. This is not always connected to an assumption of suffered damage that has to be compensated. In the epilogue, a further indication that God admits guilt is lacking. Therefore, the double amount indicates the abundance with which God restores Job (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 543).

<sup>84</sup> Compare Hesse, *Hiob*, 209. Understanding Job's restoration as only a reward for his willingness to pray for his friends (so Hölscher, *Hiob*, 101) is, therefore, too restricted.

<sup>85</sup> Noort, *Duister duel*, 52.



person's former behaviour by means of it, this fairy-tale ending in the epilogue conflicts less with the previous dialogue than scholars sometimes think.<sup>86</sup> Job's restoration is the confirmation that Job's claim that he is righteous was not vain. Wickedness was not the cause of his severe suffering.

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<sup>86</sup> E.g. Newsom is of the opinion that at the narrative level the prose conclusion introduces a contradiction. She refers in particular to 42,7. For Newsom, this is an important argument for reading the book of Job as a polyphonic text (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 20-21). Clines has argued that the epilogue undermines the foregoing part of the book because it affirms the doctrine of retribution again while the book of Job has tried to demolish it in the foregoing part (D.J.A. Clines, "Deconstructing the Book of Job", in: D.J.A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOT.SS 94), Sheffield 1990, 112-114). Either way, Clines later also proposes a second possible reading of the epilogue in which the epilogue does not affirm the doctrine of retribution at all (Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest", 106).