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God-talk in the Book of Job

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Part 1

Chapter 2

The Central Position of Job 9 in the Book of Job

2.1 Introduction

It is the assumption of this study that an important purpose of the book of Job is to question the ‘theology’ that understands God’s actions according to a relation between a person’s actions and what befalls them. This view on God’s actions has been indicated as *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang* and was widely spread in Wisdom literature.¹ It supposes that human acts and their consequences are closely related. Koch is of the opinion that in Wisdom literature this relationship is an inner worldly mechanism where a person’s action brings their fate about without the intervention of God.² According to him, the poet of the dialogue of the book of Job also supposes such an inner worldly mechanism.³ However, this is not the case. Job and his friends consider God as the acting agent.⁴ In their eyes, God rewards the righteous with prosperity and punishes the wicked with misfortune.⁵ The book of Job forcefully questions this concept of retribution. Firstly, the prologue casts doubt on it by pointing out some possible –undesirable– side effects. The motive for devotion could be the reward with prosperity instead of fear of God. At the same time, one could get the impression that God enforces devotion because of the threat of misfortune if one sins.⁶ Secondly, the dialogue demonstrates the limits of the concept of retribution in the case of innocent suffering. This concept becomes problematic in cases where a miserable fate can not be explained by previous wrong behaviour. Then either the righteousness of God’s actions or the tenability of the concept of retribution comes under attack. This happens in the course of the dialogue because, as Job holds to his innocence, he can only draw the conclusion that God perverts justice (i.e. the concept of retribution) by punishing instead of rewarding him. The author of the book of Job questions the concept of retribution by depicting this impasse in the dialogue.

¹ See e.g. the book of Proverbs. In the text I use *the concept of retribution* to mean *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*.

² Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 131-140. He speaks of a ‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’.

³ Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma”, 172.

⁴ See §3.2.1.

⁵ See also Fohrer, *Hiob*, 140.

⁶ See §6.2.2.

In order to come to grips with the book of Job and its leading topic(s), it may be helpful to determine which part(s) of the book play a crucial role. By this, I mean passages which express an important or decisive idea or argument in expounding the leading topic in the course of the book. Different passages have been labelled as a culmination or crucial part of the dialogue or the book as a whole. Job's proclamation that he is sure that God will act as his lawyer at the final decisive moment and thereby bring about the decisive turn in process (19,25-27) is regarded by Hesse as one of the central parts of the dialogue.⁷ According to him, the dialogue's culmination and aim are reached with Job's declaration of innocence (Job 31), since this speech once again serves Job's innocence and demands God to answer.⁸ Laurin attributes a rather central function to the Song of Wisdom (Job 28). According to him, it summarizes what Job had heard –the traditional wisdom doctrine– and prepares the insight that faith finds its basic ground only in a personal encounter with God.⁹ Several other scholars call God's answer the culmination and decisive point of the book of Job.¹⁰ For instance, Weiser regards it as theologically relevant that it is God who finally takes the decision. Here it becomes clear that the solution to Job's question does not occur through some intellectual insight, but through an event in which God takes Job out, according to Weiser.¹¹ Van Wolde calls God's speech a climax because of its poetic beauty and since its poetry is so strongly connected with the preceding speeches that it is a fulfilment of several key passages of the book of Job.¹²

The Song of Wisdom takes a rather deviant stand in comparison with the rest of the book of Job. What is more, the opinion that wisdom is hidden and that fear of the Lord is wisdom does not summarize Job's preceding rebellion and charges against God at all. Therefore, it is not a central moment in the book. Job's final declaration of innocence (Job 31) is an important speech because it confirms that Job has not lost his conviction that he is blameless despite the arguments of his friends. With this, Job's charge that God has been acting unjustly persists. However, Job's innocence is one of the building blocks of the more drastic inference that God is guilty. This charge is decisively brought against God in Job 9. In it, Job draws the conclusion from his innocent suffering that God has been treating him unjustly. This inference questions the concept of retribution

⁷ F. Hesse, *Hiob* (ZBK 14.AT), Zürich 1978, 127-128.

⁸ Hesse, *Hiob*, 170. Clines calls Job 29-31 "the climax to Job's defence of his own innocence and his demand upon God that he explain for what reason he has been tormenting Job" (Clines, *Job*, xlv).

⁹ R. Laurin, "Theological Structure of Job", *ZAW* 84 (1972) 86-89.

¹⁰ E.g. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 536 (he includes Job's turn).

¹¹ A. Weiser, *Das Buch Hiob* (ATD 13) (2th rev. ed.) Göttingen 1956, 241 [1951].

¹² E. van Wolde, *Meneer en mevrouw Job. Job in gesprek met zijn vrouw, zijn vrienden en God*, Baarn 1991(2nd ed.: 1995), 121 [also available in English translation by J. Bowden: *Mr and Mrs Job*, London 1997].

inescapably. For, Job's innocence leads to the observation that God is not fully righteous, if God's actions are understood to be in accordance with the concept of retribution. This conclusion in Job 9 overshadows the further continuation of the dialogue. The situation does not change until God himself takes the floor. He replies to Job's accusation and places Job's observations and conclusions in a different perspective. Since the concept of retribution is decisively questioned in Job 9, this chapter holds a central position in the book of Job.

Job 9 introduces the image of the lawsuit in the book. It calls the concept of retribution into question by means of a reasoning *ad absurdum*.¹³ Job points out his impotent position before God, but holds to his conviction that he is blameless at the same time. Reasoning that according to the concept of retribution, Job can only draw the conclusion that God perverts justice because of his undeserved misery. The tragedy of Job's situation is that he is unable to challenge this injustice after all because he lacks strength before the powerful God. While Job 9 plays a central role in questioning the concept of retribution, it also connects the dialogue with the prologue and forms a bridge to God's answer and Job's reply at the end of the book.¹⁴ The relationship with the prologue intensifies Job's accusation. For, Job's conviction that he is blameless is confirmed by the prologue in which the narrator and God both mention Job's innocence.¹⁵ Different elements from Job 9 return in both God's answer and Job's reply. In each part, God's power as Creator is an important motif. The legal terms of Job 9 return in God's answer. Furthermore, Job foresees his final reply to God (40,4-5) in Job 9. He has already stated in Job 9 that he is unable to answer God because of God's superior power.¹⁶ In this way, Job 9 takes up a key position in the book of Job.¹⁷ It decisively questions the concept of

¹³ Compare H. Richter, *Studien zu Hiob. Der Aufbau de Hiobbuches, dargestellt an den Gattungen des Rechtslebens* (ThA XI), Berlin 1959, 127.

¹⁴ God's answer: 38,1-40,2; 40,6-41,26. Job's reply: 40,3-5; 42,1-6. See Ch.5

¹⁵ Compare E. Noort, *Een duister duel -Over de theologie van het boek Job* (Serie Kamper Cahiers 59), Kampen 1986, 17.

¹⁶ Cf. Noort, *Duister duel*, 15.

¹⁷ Cf. Noort, *Duister duel*, 14-15. See also K. Fullerton, "On Job, Chapters 9 and 10", *JBL* 53 (1934) 344-345. Egger-Wenzel considers Job 9-10 as the central chapters of the book of Job in a similar way (R. Egger-Wenzel, *Von der Freiheit Gottes, anders zu sein. Die zentrale Rolle der Kapitel 9 und 10 für das Ijobbuch* (FzB 83), Würzburg 1998). She mentions the following two elements. First, 9,19-24 is the first culmination in the dialogue, since Job declares God guilty there (the second culmination is in 27,2). Legal terms, which play an important role throughout the book, can be found here in high concentration (7-8). 9,20-24 forms a bridge between prologue and epilogue, since God's opinion about Job corresponds with Job's claim to be righteous and is indirectly confirmed by the denomination 'servant' in the epilogue (292). In 40,8, God adopts these same legal key words and answers Job's charges (117). Secondly, there is a thematic culmination of terms of light and darkness and their interrelated word fields in Job 9-10. These words point out Job's personal life-situation and support the friend's exposition of the 'Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang' in the book of Job (120.149). However, in my opinion, Egger-Wenzel

retribution and connects the debate between Job and his friends with the prologue on the one hand and God's answer and Job's reply on the other.

This second chapter deals with the central position of Job 9 in the book of Job. Firstly, I offer a detailed exegesis of this speech (2.2). Secondly, I indicate how Job 9 connects the dialogue with the prologue (2.3). The relation of Job 9 with God's answer and Job's reply is considered later in this study after I have further elaborated God's answer and Job's reply in Ch.5 (5.4.2).

2.2 Exegesis of Job 9

2.2.1 Translation

- I¹⁸ 9,2 Indeed, I know that this is so,
 but how can a human being be righteous before God?
 9,3 If He¹⁹ wished to contend with him,
 he would not be able to answer Him one in a thousand.
 9,4 Even a wise one of heart and a mighty one in strength²⁰,

does not make clear exactly how Job 9-10 plays 'a bearing role in the book of Job (117)'. Her study does not prove in what way the legal terms constitute the book and how Job 9-10 functions in questioning the concept of retribution. Furthermore, it is unclear why the symbolism of light and darkness is a leading image in the book. Egger-Wenzel, for example, only mentions two words (יָמִים (day) in 9,25; בְּאֵר (pit) in 9,31) for Job 9 in her survey (125). Such a limited number is not really convincing for being a leading image in the book. Köhlmoos calls Job 9 the culmination of the part Job 3-14 and later states that both Job 9 and Job 4-5 are decisive for the whole book of Job (M. Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes. Textstrategie im Hiobbuch* (FAT 25), Tübingen 1999, 150.181). See also C. Westermann, *Der Aufbau des Hiob Buches* (CTM 6), Stuttgart 1977 (2nd ext. ed.) [1956], 75-76; Cox, *Rational Inquiry*, 628.

¹⁸ In a study on the poetic structure of the book of Job, Van der Lugt takes the overall structure of the composition as a starting point. He proceeds from the overall structure to the lower levels of structuring, the strophes, and lines. Van der Lugt distinguishes strophes, canticles, and cantos (P. van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism & the Poetry of the Book of Job* (OTS XXXII), Leiden-New York-Köln 1995, 33-35). However, starting from the overall structure can lead to forced structures. Therefore, I take the smallest unit –the colon– as the starting point. Several lines together form a strophe. Several strophes *can* form a larger unit, mainly based on a relationship with respect to the content (compare the arrangement in larger units of Job 9 by S.L. Terrien, *Job* (CAT 13), Neuchâtel 1963, 93-101; A. van Selms, *Job I* (POT), Nijkerk 1982, 82; Habel, *Job*, 178-180). These larger units are called 'stanzas'. In Job 9, I distinguish three stanzas: 9,2-13, 9,14-24 and 9,25-35. On the poetic structure of Job 9, see also J.P. Fokkerman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible. At the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis. Volume II: 85 Psalms and Job 4-14* (SSN), Assen 2000, 346-352.

¹⁹ The personal pronoun refers to God in this translation if it is written with capital letter.

²⁰ Many scholars read 9,4a as a *casus pendens* to לְיָהוָה (to him) (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 204; F. Horst, *Hiob I* (BKAT 16/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1968, 145; Hesse, *Hiob*, 82; Van Selms, *Job I*, 83; Habel, *Job*, 190; Clines, *Job*, 216; C.A. Newsom, *The Book of Job. A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, Oxford 2003, 152). Fullerton is of the opinion that the description of

who resisted Him and remained undamaged²¹?

- 9,5 Who moves mountains and they do not know it,
He overturns them in his anger.
- 9,6 Who shakes the earth from its place,
and its pillars tremble.
- 9,7 Who speaks²² to the sun and it does not rise,
He seals the stars.
- 9,8 Who alone stretched out the heavens,
and treads on the heights of the sea²³.
- 9,9 Who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south.²⁴
- 9,10 Who does great things that can not be fathomed,
and marvellous things that can not be counted.
- 9,11 If He passes by me, I do not see Him,
and He moves on, I do not perceive Him.

God's omnipotence in 9,5-10 attaches most naturally to 9,4a, if that clause refers to God (K. Fullerton, "Job, Chapters 9 and 10", *AJSL* 55 (1938) 238). However, Job would not call God wise of heart if the first half of the hymn (9,5-7) was taken into account. It is described there that God can act destructively in his anger. This reference to God's power explains why nobody remains undamaged before him (9,4b) and is not an elaboration of a 'wise' action of God. Therefore, 9,4a is a compound modifier of מִי (who) in 9,4b with concessive force (so R. Gordis, *The Book of Job. Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (MorS), New York 1978, 102; Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 180; Terrien, *Job*, 93-94: he also mentions some formal reasons: 9,2-4 and 9,5-7 are two different strophes and חָכִים (wise) and גִּבּוֹרִים (mighty) are not participles with a definite article, which is a formal characteristic of a doxology).

²¹ Cf. LXX.

²² דַּבֵּר (to speak) reminds of the creative power in Gen.1 (same use of דַּבֵּר in Isa.44,26-27; Lam.3,37; Ps.33,4,6; 105,31.34; 107,25).

²³ Some commentaries change יָם (sea) into עָב (cloud) following some Hebrew manuscripts which is reminiscent of Baal who rides on the clouds (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 206; Hesse, *Hiob*, 78; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 141-142). In גִּבּוֹרֵי (height), others see a reference to mythic images in which the back of the god of the sea Yam is trampled by El as a victory against chaos (so M.H. Pope, *Job. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 15), (3rd rev. ed.), Garden City-New York 1973 [1965], 70; Gordis, *Job*, 103; Habel, *Job*, 191; Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 207). However, the mythological notions are being divested in this context of concrete mountains, earthquakes, darkened stars, and a stretched out heaven (cf. J.L. Crenshaw, "W^odōrēk `al-bāmōtê `āreṣ", *CQB* 34 (1972) 47.52).

²⁴ For identification of the stars, see G. Schiaparelli, *Die Astronomie im Alten Testament*, Gießen 1904, 51-55; G.R. Driver, "Two Astronomical Passages in the Old Testament", *JThS NS* 7 (1956) 1-11; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 142-147.

- 9,12 If He snatches away, who can resist Him?
Who will say to Him: “what are You doing?”
- 9,13 God does not withdraw²⁵ his anger,
the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath Him.
- II²⁶9,14 How much less will I answer Him,
will I choose my words before Him,
9,15 if I were right, I would not be able to answer Him;
I can plead for mercy to my adversary²⁷.
- 9,16 If I called and He answered me,
I would not believe that He listened to my voice.
- 9,17 Who crushes me in a tempest²⁸,

²⁵ Fohrer translates ‘does not have to turn his anger’. He thinks that God can freely display his anger because he is so mighty and that he already conquered the forces of chaos at the time of the Creation (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 206-207). However, 9,13 does not express that God can choose whether or not he wants to display his anger, but describes the divine characteristic that God continues his plans.

²⁶ There is debate on the issue of where the first part of the poem ends and the second part begins. For example, Van der Lugt sees a division between 9,12 and 9,13. According to him, there is a parallel construction between 9,13-18 and 9,19-24: (a) 9,13 and 9,19 deal with God’s power; (b) 9,14 and 9,20 contain a statement about Job’s weakness and innocence respectively; (b’) these second themes are elaborated upon in the following lines (9,15-16; 9,21-22); (a’) God’s power is elaborated upon in the final strophes (Van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 121-122). Fokkelman also sees the division in stanzas between 9,12 and 9,13 (Fokkelman, *Major Poems*, 346-349). However, Van der Lugt’s construction b-b’ is artificial. 9,14-16 is a unity around the topic עָנָה. Furthermore, 9,22 is a statement about God and thus should earlier be counted as a’. While 9,13 is formulated in the third person and is a general statement about God, the first person is used from 9,14. Therefore, it is likely that 9,13 belongs to the first stanza and the fourth strophe. In response to 9,12, 9,13 states that God does not turn (שׁוּב). The more general statements of 9,2-13 are applied to Job from 9,14 (so also Van Selms, *Job I*, 82-83).

²⁷ מְשַׁפֵּט means in this legal situation ‘adversary’. God is Job’s adversary at law in this context and not his judge (cf. Habel, *Job*, 182; Van Selms, *Job I*, 86; see also the translations of Pope, Clines, Horst, Fohrer, and Gordis).

²⁸ שַׁעֲרָה is related to סַעֲרָה (tempest) and means ‘tempest’. Changing שׁ into ס is not necessary (see Nah.1,3). Several scholars change the vocalization into בְּשַׁעֲרָה (hair) and take it as a ‘trifle’ parallel to חֲנַם (for no reason) in 9,17b (so Terrien, *Job*, 97; Gordis, *Job*, 106; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148; Pope, *Job*, 72; Clines, *Job*, 235). Tg. translates with בִּינְהָרָה חֲרָטָה (for a hair/trifle). However, the meaning ‘tempest’ does not cause any tension in the context and can therefore be rendered. Some scholars interpret ‘tempest’ as an instrument with which God wounds (Horst, *Hiob*, 148; Habel, *Job*, 179). But in correspondence with 38,1 and 40,6, the tempest is the place in which God acts (cf. Van Selms, *Job I*, 86). Job feels personally attacked by God. Taking the tempest as an instrument makes God too detached.

- and He multiplies my wounds for no reason.
- 9,18 He does not let me take my breath,
for He satisfies me with bitternesses.
- 9,19 If it is a matter of strength, behold Him²⁹,
if it is a matter of justice: “who can summon Me?”³⁰
- 9,20 If I were right, my mouth³¹ would condemn me,
if I were blameless, it would prove me guilty.
- 9,21 I am blameless; I do not know my soul,
I despise my life.
- 9,22 It is all one; therefore I say:
He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.
- 9,23 When a flood³² brings sudden death,
He mocks at the despair³³ of the innocent.
- 9,24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked,
He covers the faces of its judges.
If it is not He, who then is it?³⁴
- III 9,25 My days are swifter than a courier,
they flee away without seeing good.
- 9,26 They go by like skiffs of reed³⁵,
like a vulture³⁶ fluttering³⁷ for his prey.

²⁹ Reading הנהו (see him) cf. Tg. because הנה (see) does not make much sense without a reference (cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199).

³⁰ This verse contains an ellipse. ‘Then he says’ must be thought after אִם־לִּמְשַׁפֵּט (if it is a matter of justice) (cf. Van Selms, *Job I*, 87). So, there is no need to change the suffix of יוֹעִי־דָנִי (summon me) into הֵ- (him) (so Pope, *Job*, 72; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199; Terrien, *Job*, 96; Hesse, *Hiob*, 79; Gordis, *Job*, 107; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148; Clines, *Job*, 218). Nor does יוֹעִי־דָנִי refer to Job (so Horst, *Hiob*, 149; Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 224), since this strophe (9,17-19) deals with God.

³¹ It is not necessary to change פִּי (my mouth) into פִּי (his mouth) (so Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199; Hesse, *Hiob*, 79; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148), since Job expresses his own impotence in answering God in this chapter (9,3.14-15).

³² שׁוֹט means ‘flood’ cf. Isa.28,15.18. Fohrer and De Wilde point out that a suffix (ל-) is required for the meaning ‘scourge’ (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 199; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148). Compare 22,11.

³³ מַסָּת can be derived from מָסַס (to melt). It expresses the despair of the innocent. See also 42,6 (§5.3).

³⁴ LXX reads אִם לֹא הוּא מִי אֲפֹא. The words אֲפֹא (then) and הוּא (he) seem to be confused in MT from a dogmatic point of view in order to tone down a direct accusation against God. I follow the reading of LXX.

³⁵ אַבָּה is probably related to the Akkadian *apu* and the Arabic ‘aba which means ‘reed’.

- 9,27 If I say³⁸: “I forget my lament,
I restore³⁹ my face and am cheerful”,
- 9,28 I am afraid of all my sufferings,
I know that You do acquit me.
- 9,29 I have to be guilty⁴⁰,
why then do I labour in vain?
- 9,30 If I washed myself with snow⁴¹ water,
and cleansed my hands with ley,
- 9,31 You would plunge me into a pit⁴²,
and my clothes would abhor me.
- 9,32 For⁴³, He is not a human being like me; I could answer Him⁴⁴;

³⁶ According to Keel, the bold place on his head mentioned in Mic.1,16 and the attribute of feeding himself with bait (39,29-30) characterizes the נשר as a ‘vulture’ and not as an ‘eagle’. (O. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob –Eine Deutung von Ijob 38-41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (FRLANT 121), Göttingen 1978, 69, note 234).

³⁷ Parallel to הלף (to go by) in 9,26a, the verb טוש expresses a fluttering around looking for food.

³⁸ Reading אמרתִי cf.7,13 instead of אמרי.

³⁹ Dahood reads עזב II (to restore) here, which he derives from the Ugaritic ‘db (arrange) (M. Dahood, “The Root עזב II in Job”, *JBL* 78 (1959) 304). HAL also reads עזב II. However, Williamson doubts whether a derivation from the Ugaritic ‘db is possible (H.G.M. Williamson, “A Reconsideration of ‘zb II in Biblical Hebrew”, *ZAW* 97 (1985) 77). Parallel to שכח (to forget), restoring Job’s face expresses leaving behind his worries.

⁴⁰ The imperfect ארשע (I am guilty) expresses a necessity according to the judgement of another person (E. Kautsch (ed.), *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (transl. and rev. by A.E. Cowley), 2nd ed., Oxford 1910, §107n). Egger-Wenzel states that Job declares himself guilty (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 235). But Job, on the contrary, is convinced that he is blameless (9,21). He argues in Job 9 that he has to be guilty beyond his influence. See also the interpretation (§2.2.2.3).

⁴¹ Preuß reads שלג as an equivalent of the Mishnaic אשלג and the Talmudic שלג, which means ‘soap’ (J. Preuß, *Biblisch-Talmudische Medizin, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Heilkunde und der Kultur überhaupt*, Berlin 1921, 431). Clines, Fohrer, Gordis and De Wilde follow him. They read שלג parallel to בבר (with ley) as ‘soap’. However, snow can be an image for cleanness (Isa.1,18; Ps.51,9; Lam.4,7). Since cleansing is the topic here, ‘snow’ is preferable.

⁴² A pit filled with water and mud is the most likely interpretation of שחת (cf. Van Selms, *Job I*, 89; Clines, *Job*, 220; Gordis, *Job*, 110). Other proposals: 1. The loathsome waters of the netherworld (Pope, *Job*, 75); 2. The netherworld (Habel, *Job*, 196); 3. Changing שחת into שחת, which is equal to סחת (Isa.5,25) and means ‘filth’ (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200; Horst, *Hiob*, 141).

- we could come to a lawsuit together.
 9,33 There is no⁴⁵ arbitrator between us,
 who could lay his hand on us both.
- 9,34 That He removed his rod from me,
 and his terror did not terrify me,
 9,35 I would speak without fear of Him,
 for I⁴⁶ am not so in myself.

2.2.2 Interpretation of Job 9

2.2.2.1 Introduction

The general issue of Job 9 is brought up by means of two central lines interacting with one another. On the one hand, Job mentions his own situation. He assumes that he suffers unjustly because his righteousness should have been rewarded with prosperity according to the concept of retribution. Job introduces the image of the lawsuit. He considers his misfortune as God's charge against him and wonders how a human being can be righteous before God. Job determines that he can not be proved right before God despite his innocence because he is unable to respond God adequately in a legal case. Job has the feeling that he is in the hands of God's

⁴³ Clines reads 9,32-33 as a third attempt to become righteous before God after 9,27-28 and 9,31-32. He translates כִּי (for) with 'if' (Clines, *Job*, 242). But כִּי in 9,32 expresses the reason why any effort to find justification can not succeed. Moreover, while the condition begins with אִם (if) in 9,27 and 9,30 and God is addressed in the second person in 9,28 and 9,31, 9,32 begins with כִּי and God is not addressed in the second person in 9,33. Therefore, 9,32-33 is not a third attempt.

⁴⁴ אֶעֱנֶנּוּ (I could answer him) is not restricted to a prelude for 9,32b, in which 9,32b is the content of the answer and is understood as a challenge to God (so Pope, *Job*, 70; Clines, *Job*, 215.242). It stands parallel to 9,32b. Both express the possibility of answering God in a lawsuit.

⁴⁵ Several scholars read לֹא (would that there were...) instead of אֵין (not). They consider 9,34-35 as a continuation of this wish (so Terrien, *Job*, 99; Pope, *Job*, 76; Gordis, *Job*, 111; Van Selms, *Job I*, 90; Clines, *Job*, 220). Different Hebrew manuscripts also read לֹא and LXX reads ε⇒ψε ±ν. However, 9,33a stands parallel to 9,32a. In both parts, an attribute of God is formulated by means of a negation. Because of this parallelism MT can be maintained. Either way, the argument that the combination אֵין אֵין is not found elsewhere in the Hebrew bible is not really tenable for a poetic text in which a *hapax legoumena* more often appears.

⁴⁶ Fohrer and Gordis change אֵין אֵין (I) into אֵין אֵין (he) and translate כִּי (so) with 'just': 'for he is not honourable/just with me'. According to them, Job concludes that God lets power come first before justice, through which the innocent are treated unjustly (Fohrer, *Hiob*, 200.213; Gordis, *Job*, 111). However, such a correction is radical and the meaning 'just' of כִּי is improbable because there is an inclusion with 9,2 where כִּי means 'so'.

power. Any attempt to evade his misery will not succeed. It seems that he has to be guilty before God beyond his guilt. On the other hand, Job describes God. He depicts God's superior power and sovereignty and describes God's actions as inscrutable. From this, Job infers that God has the opportunity to abuse his sovereign position. The accusation that God indeed does so follows in the course of the speech. God increases wounds for no reason and treats the righteous and the wicked equally. At the same time, God can not be called to account for this injustice because of his sovereignty.

These two lines –Job's own situation and the description of God– expound the main topic of Job 9. Job's innocence and impotence are opposed to God's power and sovereign position. Facing God's power Job is unable to be proved right in a lawsuit with God despite his innocence. This implies that he can not challenge God's unjust treatment of him. As God's actions are inscrutable and because God holds a position in which he has the freedom to abuse his power at the same time as Job is convinced that he is blameless, Job can only conclude one thing. God must be the one who perverts justice. Considering Job's misfortune, God treats Job as a wicked, even though Job is blameless.

2.2.2.2 *Stanza I*

Job's impotent position before God is directly brought up at the beginning of this speech. In 9,2, Job refers to his friends' preceding speeches. כִּי (so) refers the previous speech of Bildad (Job 8). There, Bildad guarantees that God does not pervert justice (8,3) and does not reject the blameless (צַדִּיק) (8,20). The word 'justice' here refers to the concept of retribution.⁴⁷ Job knows this guarantee but doubts whether it is viable. A reference to words of Eliphaz serves to express this doubt. In 4,17, Eliphaz tells of a night vision which asks *whether* a human being can be righteous before God. The further course of the night vision makes clear that this is impossible.⁴⁸ Job addresses this same question in 9,2b, but changes it somewhat and wonders *how* a human being can be righteous before God. The night vision's negative answer can also be heard in Job 9. For, in the course of this chapter, Job draws the conclusion that being righteous before God is impossible despite one's innocence. Even though Job is familiar with Bildad's assurance in 8,3, he will conclude that as a blameless person he can not be righteous before God. Therefore, 9,2a has to be read ironically.⁴⁹ The nature of this 'being righteous' is forensic under the influence of the following verse. In 9,3, the image of the lawsuit is introduced in the book of Job by the word בָּרַח (to contend). The verb עָנָה (to answer) in 9,3b has a juridical meaning in this forensic

⁴⁷ See §3.2.1.

⁴⁸ 4,18-21. For the explanation of this night vision, see §3.4.

⁴⁹ Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 244. Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 203: he also refers to the ironic tone of וַיִּשְׁמַע (indeed) in 12,2.

context and is the opponent's charge or defence.⁵⁰ Whereas, צַדִּיק (to be righteous) has an ethico-religious meaning in 4,17 and expresses a moral and religious state of human beings, next to טָהוֹר (to be pure), this verb means 'to be proved right in a lawsuit' in 9,2.⁵¹ A human being can not be proved right before God because he will not succeed in defending his case in the front of God.

It is unclear who are the subjects in 9,3. Several arguments are in favour of taking a human being as the one who wishes to contend with God (9,3a); just as in 13,3 where Job wants to plead (רָכַח) with God, it could be that a human being is also the subject of יָפִיחַ (to wish) in 9,3.⁵² Furthermore, עִמּוֹ (with him) in 9,3a can be read as עִמ־אֱלֹהִים (before God) in 9,2b, so that 'him' refers to the same person in both 9,3a and 9,2b, namely God.⁵³ Finally, Elihu takes Job as the subject when he asks why Job contends with God, whereas God will not answer (33,13). It could therefore be that in 9,3, God would not answer Job if God was brought to trial by him.⁵⁴ However, the verb רָיַב is used each time for another person contending with Job in Job 3-31. In 13,19 and 23,6, רָיַב is used for the reaction of the other at Job's attempt to be proved right. Job reproaches his friends for contending with him in the name of God (13,8) and in 10,2, Job asks God why God is contending with him. Correspondingly, the other –God– is also the subject of רָיַב in 9,3.⁵⁵ Within the image of the lawsuit, Job understands his suffering as God's charge against

⁵⁰ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 204.

⁵¹ Cf. Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 250. Fullerton distinguishes between a forensic and an ethico-religious meaning of the verb צַדִּיק, although there is not a strict distinction between both meanings. According to him, they sometimes merge into each other (244-254). See also Habel, *Job*, 189; K. Budde, *Das Buch Hiob übersetzt und erklärt* (HK II/1), Göttingen 1896, 40; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob* (KHC), Freiburg-Leipzig-Tübingen 1897, 50; Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 151. Some think that this shift into a forensic meaning in 9,2 is meant to be ironic (so Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 254; Fohrer, *Hiob*, 203-204. They read the author's ironic intention up to and including 9,4). However, this is not the case because that would ignore the sharpness of Job's complaint in this speech. For similar reasons, I would not call Job 9 a *parody* on a trial with God (so Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 153ff). Job bitterly establishes that each attempt to enter into a lawsuit with God will fail.

⁵² So Budde, *Job*, 40; Horst, *Hiob*, 144-145; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 141. They also read a human being as the subject of אָנַח (to answer) in 9,3b because he is not able to object to God.

⁵³ So Fullerton, "Job" (1938), 232. He also points to 9,14, where Job can not answer God. In this way, no change in subject is required in 9,2b and 9,3a.

⁵⁴ So Habel, *Job*, 189. Most scholars read 'human being' as the subject of 9,3a: e.g. Fohrer, Hesse, Gordis, Clines, Egger-Wenzel.

⁵⁵ So also Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 205.207 (note 1). Van Selms reads God as subject of יָפִיחַ too. He mentions Gen.3,9-13 as an example for a disputation of God with a creature. Van Selms also points to Job 38-39 where God puts a 'thousand' questions to Job, but Job is unable to answer them (Van Selms, *Job I*, 83). The Dutch bible translation of 1951 (NBG) also takes God as the subject of 9,3a, but regretfully the new Dutch translation of 2004 (NBV) has not maintained this.

him.⁵⁶ Egger-Wenzel argues that for God there is no advantage in beginning to contest with a creature. Therefore, she reads human being as the subject of **גִּבּוֹר**.⁵⁷ However, being proved right against the satan could be to God's advantage. While God is the one who is contending with Job in Job 9-10, Job will later also express his intention to bring God to court. In this way, the image of the lawsuit does not work one-way, from Job to God. Both God and human being can be plaintiff as well as defendant in the book of Job.⁵⁸

A human being is the subject of **עֲנֵה** (to answer) in 9,3b. For, the impossibility of answering God in a lawsuit is elaborated upon in the course of this speech.⁵⁹ This impotence has already been expressed in 9,3. A human being is unable to answer one in a thousand questions of God. This statement gives a first answer to Job's question of how a human being can be righteous before God (9,2). It is impossible because he is unable to reply to God in a lawsuit. This tenor is continued in 9,4. Even a wise and strong human being will not remain undamaged in an attempt to oppose God.

The rather ambivalent character of this God is described in the following hymn (9,5-10). The hymn elaborates upon why a human being does not remain undamaged before God (9,4). The first half of the hymn (9,5-7) shows how God can act destructively in his anger. This anger is explicitly mentioned in 9,5. God's **אַף** (anger) is a reaction against injustice and wickedness and results in punishment and destruction by God.⁶⁰ Outbursts of anger is a divine characteristic (40,11) and God's actions in 9,5 are examples of this. Moving away (**עָרַק**) a rock is used as an image of God's destruction of hope (14,18-19) and is connected with Job acting in anger (18,4). Furthermore, the verb **הִפְּךָ** (to overturn) expresses God's destructive action. The waters overwhelm the earth through the agency of God (12,15) and God overturns the mighty in the night (34,25). In this way, 9,5 describes violent and destructive actions which are performed by God in his anger. **לֹא יָדְעוּ** (they do not know it) points out their unexpected and obscure nature.⁶¹ These wrathful actions demonstrate God's power and sovereignty. This demonstration continues in 9,6-7. The earth and the heavenly bodies also belong to God's dominion. God can

⁵⁶ Elihu and God subsequently turn this view around. They accuse Job of being the one who is contending with God (33,13; 40,2).

⁵⁷ Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 178-179.

⁵⁸ Cf. M.B. Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31", *CQB* 41 (1979), 38-40. Dick points out that Job's lamentable state is evidence that God has initiated legal action against him (40). Job's request in 13,23 implies that he is the victim of a prior juridical action (38). In his defence against Eloah's judgement Job becomes a plaintiff (40, note 17). Pace Many, who argues that only Job is contending in the book of Job because a charge by God or by his friends is lacking. The speeches of God are only God's self-defence according to him (G. Many, *Der Rechtsstreit mit Gott (RIB) im Hiobbuch*, München 1970, 217).

⁵⁹ 9,14-16.20.

⁶⁰ The evildoers perish by the breath of God's anger (4,9). See also 16,9; 20,23.27-28.

⁶¹ Here, Habel refers to the ignorance of Job in 9,11 (Habel, *Job*, 190).

prevent the sun from rising to its common place and cover the stars so that they do not shine. With this, 9,7 mentions God's control of day and night.⁶² Human beings are subordinated to this superior power with which God can act destructively and because of this they do not remain undamaged if they resist God (9,4).

The second half of the hymn (9,8-10) depicts God's creative power. God stretches out the heavens like the canvas of a tent (9,8a).⁶³ Here, the modifier לְבַדּוֹ (alone) emphasizes God's power as Creator in this.⁶⁴ The stars are also made by God (9,9) in which the notion of God as the Creator of the seasons plays a role.⁶⁵ However, God also has the strength to act in the Creation. In God's answer, God asks Job whether he has penetrated the sources of the sea (38,16), while in Job's speech God is walking on the crests of the waves (9,8b). The hymn ends with a characterization of the nature of God's violent and creative actions (9,10). These actions are unfathomable, marvellous, and uncountable. The word חֲקִי (unfathomable) is used for God's inscrutability for human beings.⁶⁶ It also expresses the fact that God fathoms Creation (28,27), unlike Job who is unable to do this (38,16). נִפְלְאוֹתָ (marvellous) returns in 42,3, where Job admits that he has spoken about things without understanding them. Eliphaz interprets God's unfathomable and marvellous actions as righteous and beneficial. According to him, God saves the humble and catches the wise in their craftiness (5,9ff). However, Job describes God's unfathomable and marvellous actions as powerful and wrathful.⁶⁷ He also counts God's unforeseeable and violent actions among them. With this, a first trace of Job's accusation against God appears in Job 9. The impossibility of being righteous before God is apparently connected with God's inscrutability.

The consequences of God's powerful and unfathomable actions are elaborated upon in 9,11-13. In 9,11, Job applies God's inscrutability to his own experience. If God passes by, Job does not observe him.⁶⁸ This physical experience bears a deeper meaning. The verb בִּיַּן (to perceive) in 9,11b sometimes occurs parallel to the verb

⁶² Compare Isa.13,10-13.

⁶³ Compare Isa.40,22.

⁶⁴ See also Isa.44,24. Gordis thinks that the poet stresses the monotheistic theme by לְבַדּוֹ (Gordis, *Job*, 103). So also Egger-Wenzel, who states that the Creation hymn shows that God will carry through his claim to the absolute power against the polytheistic pantheon (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 209). However, it is out of the question that the author of the book of Job would be interested in a polemic against polytheism. God's dominion is clear from the prologue, where the satan and the heavenly council fall within the control of God.

⁶⁵ Cf. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 206; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 144-146.

⁶⁶ 11,7; 36,26.

⁶⁷ Compare Habel, *Job*, 191; Clines, *Job*, 232; H.J. Hermisson, "Notizen zu Hiob", *ZThK* 86 (1989) 131.

⁶⁸ This seems to allude to Exod.33,18-23, where Moses sees God from behind when God passes by. Elisha covers his face and hears God when God passes by (1 Kgs.19,11-13).

יָדַע (to know).⁶⁹ Job states that he does not perceive God, if he is looking for him (23,8). He also uses the verb when he admits that he has spoken without understanding (42,3). So, not seeing God points to Job's inability to see through God's ways. The implication of this observation is that nobody is able to stop God or call him to account (9,12). Zophar mentions a similar view in 11,7-10 when he states that Job can not find the unfathomable things of God and asks who can restrain God (מִי שׁוֹב), if he passes by (וְהִלָּךְ⁷⁰) 'and captures'. In 9,12, Job draws the conclusion that God is able to misuse his position and act in a morally reprehensible way. For, 'who can resist God, if he snatches away?' There is a fundamental difference between God and human beings. Therefore, God's actions can not be fathomed or stopped nor can God be called to account.

The absence of human influence on God's actions is further illustrated by 9,13. God continues his plans and does not change his mind because of human requests or protests.⁷¹ The verb שׁוֹב (to withdraw) refers to שׁוֹב in 9,12. The question of who can resist God (9,12) is responded to with the statement that God does not let himself resist and thereby does not withdraw his anger. אַף (anger) refers to God's violent actions due to his anger in 9,5ff. The remaining submission of the forces of chaos in 9,13b illustrates that this anger is irreversible.⁷² The helpers of Rahab seem to be related to the helpers of the monster Tiamat in *Enuma Elish*. רַהַב (Rahab) expresses that what opposes to order. The remaining submission of the forces of chaos is the result of God's permanent anger. It indicates his strength and shows that God operates imperturbably in his anger.⁷³

2.2.2.3 Stanza II

The second stanza applies the impotent position of human beings before God as mentioned in the first stanza to Job. Thanks to the opening כִּי אִיךָ (how much less) in 9,14, the question of how to be righteous, the image of the lawsuit, and the impossibility of responding adequately to God responding now apply to Job. If a wise and strong person and even the forces of chaos remain submissive to God, how much less will Job be able to formulate an adequate answer in a lawsuit with God while facing God's superior power? On the one hand, even if Job was right, he would not be able to answer God because impressed by his superior power (9,15). Pleading for mercy seems the only solution in this case. Bildad mentions the verb נִתְנַחַם (to plead for mercy) as a condition for restoring Job's righteous abode (8,5).⁷⁴

⁶⁹ 14,21; 15,9; 42,3.

⁷⁰ הִלָּךְ also alludes to 4,15, where רָרַח (wind) passes by the face of Eliphaz.

⁷¹ Compare 23,13-14.

⁷² Van Selms points to the perfect of נִחַשׁ (to bow). According to him, this indicates that the helpers have to submit beneath God's feet once and for all (Van Selms, *Job I*, 85).

⁷³ See also 26,12; Ps.89,11; Isa.51,9.

⁷⁴ In 19,16, Job has to plead for mercy from his servant.

It is unclear whether Bildad supposes that Job is wicked to some extent, when he gives this advice.⁷⁵ In 9,15, pleading for mercy opposes the attempt to be proved right by means of answering God in a lawsuit. But pleading for mercy seems insufficient for Job. He can not do this without losing his integrity.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Job would not believe that God had listened to his voice if God did answer his call in a lawsuit (9,16).⁷⁷ Eliphaz advised Job to place his cause before God (5,1).⁷⁸ However, Job does not believe that God would incorporate Job's complaint in his response. Instead, God would ignore what Job had said and overpower him.⁷⁹ In this way, it is impossible to be righteous before God, even if someone is right.

Job accentuates the imputative character of God's treatment of him.⁸⁰ God crushes him in a tempest and multiplies his wounds for no reason (9,17). The tempest refers to the whirlwind, in which God speaks to Job.⁸¹ Job feels hurt by God in the tempest but he will come to experience that God speaks to him from it.⁸² The charge of 9,17b is even more serious. Job states that God improperly inflicts harm. He refers to his blamelessness. God does not have a reason for letting Job suffer because Job has not sinned. The word **למה** (for no reason) refers to the prologue⁸³ in which God states that the satan incited God against Job for no reason.⁸⁴ In this way, the reader knows that Job speaks the truth in his charge without being aware of it. God indeed increased wounds for no reason by letting

⁷⁵ See §3.2.2.

⁷⁶ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 234.

⁷⁷ In 13,22 and 14,15, **קרא** (to call) and **ענה** (to answer) are used for the possibility that God calls and Job answers.

⁷⁸ **דבר** (cause) does not have juridical meaning here. See also his question in 5,1.

⁷⁹ Cf. Habel, *Job*, 193. Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 208; Clines, *Job*, 234. Jepsen points to the fact that the verb **אמן** (to believe) occurs with a negation nine times in the book of Job. According to him, the verb seems to be accompanied with some extent of scepticism in Wisdom literature (A. Jepsen, art. **אמן**, in: ThWAT I, 322-324).

⁸⁰ Newsom takes this violent action by God as a description of Job's imagined encounter with God in a trial (Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 144). However, I take these verses as a depiction of God's current behaviour towards Job. For, Job's wounds have already been multiplied for no reason.

⁸¹ 38,1; 40,6.

⁸² Compare A. Luc, "Storm and the Message of Job", *JSOT* 87 (2000) 111-123. He thinks that the use of 'storm' in 9,17 carries a forward looking function, providing an ironic foreshadowing of God's speaking to Job from 'the whirlwind'. Then Job will see that God does not crush him with a whirlwind, but appears in it (112-113.120). Habel points to the fact that Job had already experienced the terror of a 'mighty wind' wrecking his abode (1,19) (Habel, *Job*, 193). Luc thinks in this case that the storm image serves as a bridge between the prologue and the speeches (Luc, "Storm", 115).

⁸³ Hermisson, "Notizen", 129.

⁸⁴ 2,3. See also §6.2.2.

the satan hurting the righteous Job.⁸⁵ This awareness intensifies Job's complaint because God confirms that Job's claim is true.⁸⁶ Job continues his complaint in 9,18. God does not give Job opportunity to breathe (9,18a) where רִיחַ (breath) refers to the spirit and the breath by which God gives life.⁸⁷ Job accuses God of depriving him of his ability to live his life and instead God satisfies him with bitternesses.⁸⁸ Therefore, Job does not believe that God would answer him (9,16). It seems unlikely that a God who increases wounds for no reason would seriously respond a human being in a lawsuit.⁸⁹

These injuring actions by God are connected with God's power. In 9,19a, כֹּחַ אֱמִצָּה (strength) is ascribed to God. Job depicts God's strength in a bad light. He expresses the suspicion that God misuses his strength by multiplying wounds for no reason. A quotation of God's words increases this suspicion (9,19b). The question 'Who can summon me?' is reminiscent of some challenging words from God in Jer.49,19; 50,44. In it, God announces a devastating action against his opponents and challenges: "For who is like me and who can summon me?" This appeal to God's sovereign position can also be heard in 9,19. It intensifies the foregoing accusation because it provocatively confirms that nobody can call God to account when he multiplies wounds for no reason. With this, Job slowly works around to his ultimate charge that God abuses his position and acts unjustly (9,22-24). Again Job's impotence in relation to God emerges. God can not be called to account because of the inequality between God and human beings.

The seventh strophe (9,20-21) mentions another important ingredient for Job's argument besides Job's innocence. In 9,21, Job frankly claims that he is blameless. This conviction questions God's actions. For, according to the concept of retribution, Job's suffering would be unjust if Job was innocent. The conclusion that any attempt to answer God adequately in a lawsuit will not succeed precedes this statement. In 9,20, Job maintains that he would condemn himself, even if he was innocent. The divine sovereignty as described in the preceding verses impresses Job to such a large extent that his mouth would condemn him, even though he is in the right.⁹⁰ Horst thinks that Job can not defend himself in this situation because at the moment of God's anger justice is withdrawn.⁹¹ However, Job does not mean that God's emotion overrules God's reasonableness. On the

⁸⁵ פְּצָעִים (wounds) sometimes serve to change people and bring them into a good way of life (Isa.1,6; Prov.20,30; 27,6).

⁸⁶ Noort, *Duister duel*, 17-18.

⁸⁷ 27,3; 33,4.

⁸⁸ See also 13,26 and 27,2.

⁸⁹ Compare Clines, *Job*, 235.

⁹⁰ Compare Clines, *Job*, 235.

⁹¹ Horst, *Hiob*, 150. Van Selms is of the opinion that Job condemns himself by only daring to charge God (Van Selms, *Job I*, 87). However, this is more a dogmatic than a clearly exegetical statement.

contrary, he suggests a conscious perversion of justice by God in Job 9. If it was possible to defend his case before God, Job would say the wrong things because he is overwhelmed by God's appearance and actions. It is striking that Job's ultimate conclusion that he is unable to answer God (40,4) has already been mentioned here in Job 9. Job now foresees that he will not be able to answer God impressed as he is by God's powerful appearance.

While Job presents the possibility of his innocence in 9,20, he explicitly claims that he is 'blameless' in 9,21. The word **צַדִּיק** (blameless) refers to the words of the narrator and God in the prologue. They state that Job is a blameless (**צַדִּיק**) and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.⁹² In this way, Job's conviction is confirmed by God in the prologue. Eliphaz asks Job whether the integrity (**צִדְקָה**) of his ways is not his hope (4,6). Bildad guarantees that God does not reject a blameless person (8,20). However, Job points out his integrity, but concludes that it is to no avail. The relation of the dialogue to the prologue increases this contrast; whereas God himself calls Job a blameless man, Job suffers heavily in spite of his integrity. From Job's point of view, this suffering is unjust because he ought to be blessed according to the standard of the concept of retribution. The relation with the prologue intensifies Job's charge because the readers know that Job's conviction that he is blameless is not unfounded.⁹³ This hopeless situation of being subject to God's caprices despite his innocence makes Job desperate. **לֹא-אֵדָע נַפְשִׁי** (I do not know my soul) in 9,21b expresses a mental confusion in which a person feels beside themselves.⁹⁴ Job distances himself from his life as it is now. Several scholars think that Job states that his integrity is more important to him than his life.⁹⁵ But this view idealizes Job more than the text permits. Job articulates his despair and wonders whether his life has any sense yet. For, there is no way out of his unjust misery.

A heavy charge follows. The implicit feeling during the previous part of Job 9 is now clearly articulated.⁹⁶ God acts unjustly in Job's eyes treating the blameless (**צַדִּיק**) and the wicked (**רָשָׁע**) equally: God destroys them both (9,22).⁹⁷ The perfect

⁹² 1,1.8; 2,3.

⁹³ Noort, *Duister duel*, 17. This relation is further elaborated in §2.2.3.

⁹⁴ S.M. Paul, "An Unrecognized Medical Idiom in Canticles 6,12 and Job 9,21", *Biblica* 59 (1978) 545-547. In Cant.6,12 this confusion is because of the ecstasy of love. See also Gordis, *Job*, 107.

⁹⁵ Pope, *Job*, 73; De Wilde, *Hiob*, 148; Van Selms, *Job I*, 87; Terrien, *Job*, 97; Habel, *Job*, 194. According to Habel, Job has nothing to lose and is therefore ready to risk his life by preparing charges against God (9,22-24).

⁹⁶ He hinted to it in e.g. 9,12.17-18.

⁹⁷ Abandoning God or practising injustice can cause God to **כָּלֵהוּ** (to destroy). Then, it sometimes serves to bring about a turn in the way of life of human beings (e.g. Deut.28,21; Jer.5,3; 14,12; Ezek.22,31; 43,8-9). However, in 9,22 the blameless undergo equal treatment. The book of Qohelet knows a similar line of thought. It states that the same fate

אָמַרְתִּי (I say) in 9,22a expresses an action in direct narration which, although really only in process of accomplishment, is nevertheless meant to be represented as already accomplished in the conception of the speaker.⁹⁸ According to Job, God abuses his sovereign position and allows the righteous to suffer. This is injustice according to the concept of retribution. The word אֶחָד (one) refers to Job's charge that the blameless and the wicked are as one. Clines thinks that it refers to the man Job in his contrasting states: he is 'blameless' on the one hand, while he despises his life on the other.⁹⁹ However, this is not the case because the equal treatment of the righteous and the wicked is the central issue of this verse. So, Job denies that the view, by which his friends confronted him, is true. They proclaimed a distinct treatment of the wicked and the righteous and stated that God does not reject the blameless (8,20). However, Job charges God with rejecting the blameless for no reason and treating the wicked and the righteous equally. With this, God's actions are morally wrong if God's actions are understood to be in accordance with the concept of retribution.

Job's charge is continued in 9,23. God mocks at the despair of the innocent when a flood brings death and destruction. In the Psalms, God mocks his opponents and the wicked because they will get their deserved punishment.¹⁰⁰ But in 9,23, the despair of the innocent is subject to God's mockery. This implies that God treats them as he would the wicked. Eliphaz asked the rhetorical question who ever perished innocently (4,7). Job now describes a God who does not intervene but only mocks at the despair of the innocent. There is a considerable chance that the righteous perish according to Job. Clines thinks that God's response forms the gravamen of Job's charge in 9,22-24. According to him, it is not primarily God's justice which is on trial in this speech, but his sympathy and aloofness.¹⁰¹ However, this view does not do justice to the heart of Job's accusation. Job's charge is more than a complaint about God's sympathy. In light of the concept of retribution, God's righteousness is on trial. For, God denies the blameless their legitimate share by treating them equally with the wicked.

The charge against God comes to a climax in 9,24. While the wicked and the blameless were treated equally in 9,22-23, Job now states that God favours the wicked above the blameless. Receiving land expresses a reward for the righteous because of their upright way of life.¹⁰² However, in 9,24a Job charges God with offering the wicked this recompense. Although God is not directly the subject of the passive נִתְּנָה (is given), this unjust situation can only serve as an accusation

comes to the righteous (צַדִּיק) and the wicked (רָשָׁע). Qohelet calls this an evil (רָע) in all that happens under the sun (Qoh.9,2-3).

⁹⁸ Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Grammar*, §106 i.

⁹⁹ Clines, *Job*, 236.

¹⁰⁰ Ps.2,4; 37,13; 59,9.

¹⁰¹ Clines, *Job*, 237-238.

¹⁰² Prov.2,21; 10,30; Ps.37,9; Matt.5,5.

against God. God is the one who gives and takes. Job's charge is further continued in 9,24b. Gordis proposes to read the רשע (wicked) as subject of כסה (to cover) there. He thinks that the faces are covered by bribing the judges.¹⁰³ However, the subject of 9,24a is also the subject in 9,24b. Job charges God with causing injustice on earth. God clouds the judgement of judges and gives land to the wicked instead of the blameless. Whereas Bildad stated that God does not pervert justice (8,3), Job charges God with that very thing. In Job's eyes, God rewards the wicked with prosperity and sabotages justice on earth. The rhetorical question in 9,24c makes the reader face the seriousness of this charge. אלה (he) refers to אלה in 9,22b, where it refers to God, who destroys. So, the question of 9,24c is: if God is not the one, who destroys and perverts justice; who else is it? The reader realizes that it can only be God.

2.2.2.4 Stanza III

The third stanza focuses on Job's situation. Job complains about his miserable state. His days pass by without prosperity or any prospect.¹⁰⁴ Job compares this with couriers rushing along, the sliding by of skiffs of reed, and vultures fluttering for their prey.¹⁰⁵ This passage does not deal with the brevity of life as such, but with the misery of life that is in no way relieved by the progression of the days.¹⁰⁶ In his speeches, Job mentions several times that his days are aimless and without hope¹⁰⁷, while the wicked spend their days in prosperity (טוב) (21,13). Whereas in the prologue, Job has admonished his wife to accept both good (טוב) and evil from God (2,10), some opposition and despair appear here in the dialogue. A life without seeing any good does not seem to have much sense for Job.

It is impossible to evade this miserable situation. Job considers two possibilities to escape from his misery, but he draws the conclusion that these attempts would fail.¹⁰⁸ This emphasizes the hopeless situation in which Job is caught. First, Job imagines leaving his struggle and worries behind him and becoming happy (9,27). Zophar states that Job will become happy if he throws away his wrongdoing (11,14-16). But Job is convinced that he would not succeed, since God does not

¹⁰³ Gordis, *Job*, 108.

¹⁰⁴ 9,25-26. Compare a similar kind of complaint in 7,6-7.

¹⁰⁵ Gordis thinks that each image represents a certain nuance: the runner speed, the papyrus skiff the idea of fragility, and the vulture theme of cruelty (Gordis, *Job*, 109). Egger-Wenzel sees an analogy between God and the vulture and Job and the prey (Egger-Wenzel, *Freiheit*, 233). However, such aspects are not clear. The point of comparison is the movement. Moreover, if the image of the fluttering vulture was meant to express cruelty, the image would have been formulated more explicitly.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Clines, *Job*, 240.

¹⁰⁷ 3,3-6; 7,6-7.16; 17,1.11; 30,16.27.

¹⁰⁸ 9,27-28 and 9,30-31.

acquit him (9,28).¹⁰⁹ Therefore, he fears his grievance. The image of the lawsuit appears again. Job interprets his grievance as God's sentence. Since Job is not able to answer God adequately in a lawsuit and therefore can not be proved right before God, he remains guilty before God and can not escape his misery. From this observation, Job draws the conclusion that he has to be guilty beyond his influence (9,29). This conclusion straddles both attempts. Whereas earlier Job's own words declared him guilty in light of God's superior power (9,20), Job now states that his behaviour and his actions do not matter at all. His guilt is certain beyond his influence. Therefore, attempts to bring out Job's innocence are in vain (9,29b). Such exhausting efforts would not change anything.

The second attempt is expressed by means of a more cultic image (9,30-31). Job imagines becoming righteous by purifying himself. Washing the body can serve to become pure.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the parallel verbs יָרַח (to wash) and זָכַח (to clean) articulate an image for doing away wrongdoing and evil (Isa.1,16). The cleanness of one's hands matches the extent of one's guilt.¹¹¹ However, an attempt to become pure is doomed to fail from the very start since even the heavens and the stars are not pure (זָכַח) before God.¹¹² Bildad says that God will restore Job's righteous abode if he is pure (זָכַח) (8,6) but Job is of the opinion that he has to be guilty beyond his influence (9,29). Therefore, he would never succeed in becoming pure. Whereas Job tries to clean himself, God prevents it and makes him impure by immersing him in dirt (9,31). This image supports Job's statement that he has to be guilty beyond his influence and that God deliberately causes despair among the innocent; as Job attempts to become righteous, God makes him guilty. The image describes that God would plunge Job's nude body into a pit. Since his body becomes dirty and unclean in this way, his clothes would loathe plunged body.¹¹³

One of the basic themes in Job 9 is clearly expressed by the concluding image of the arbitrator in 9,32-33. Here is the fundamental difference between God and human beings. This is the reason for Job's inability to be proved right before God. If God were equal to human beings, it would have been possible to have a fair case with God. Then it could have been determined whether or not Job was right. The verb עָנָה (to answer) in 9,32a refers to 9,3.14-16. There Job also uses the verb

¹⁰⁹ The verb יָגַר (to fear) in 9,28 expresses the fear for an imminent calamity (see Deut.9,19; 28,60; Ps.119,39).

¹¹⁰ See e.g. Lev.17,15-16.

¹¹¹ 2 Sam.22,21; Ps.18,25; Job 16,17; 22,30; 31,7.

¹¹² 15,15; 25,5.

¹¹³ Compare Fohrer, *Hiob*, 212; Hesse, *Job*, 84; Van Selms, *Job I*, 89; Clines, *Job*, 242. Pope sees in 9,31b an allusion to Zech.3,3-5, where Joshua has to take off his filthy clothes and God takes his guilt away and gives him new clothes. According to Pope, Job means that even if he were clean (innocent), God would dunk him in muck so that he would be unfit for the clean garments given to the acquitted (Pope, *Job*, 76). However, this allusion is not clear, since it is not a matter of changing clothes, but the state of Job changes in relation to the same clothes.

within the context of the image of the lawsuit and says that he is unable to answer God. In 9,32-33, Job clearly explains why this is the case. Whereas the description of God's superior power has already pointed out the difference of character between God and human beings, it now becomes clear that a lawsuit with God is impossible because God is not a human being like Job. There is a fundamental difference between God and human beings. The image of the arbitrator in 9,33a explicates this inequality. There is no independent arbitrator between God and Job controlling a fair progress of the trial. The *מוֹכִיחַ* (arbitrator) refers to an arbitrator above both parties.¹¹⁴ Laying his hand on both expresses his power to protect a fair court procedure. However, there is no such independent person between God and human beings. Ultimately, God himself is the judge who judges what is just. With this, 9,32-33 responds to the challenging question 'Who can summon me?' in 9,19b: 'nobody can.' Nobody is able to control God or call him to account. This makes it impossible for Job to get his supposed right.

Job ends the first half of his answer to Bildad with a plea. He begs God to take away the misery that hurts and frightens him. Several scholars think that he addresses his plea to the independent arbitrator to remove God's rod, so that there could be a fair controversy between God and Job.¹¹⁵ But Job has just established in 9,33 that such an arbitrator between Job and God does not exist. Therefore, he addresses God in these two verses. In the dialogue, the verb *סִוַּר* (to remove; 9,34) expresses God's power to withhold things from people.¹¹⁶ The *שֵׁבֶט* (rod) can serve as an instrument of God to 'hit' his opponents and is regularly an effect of his anger.¹¹⁷ Job interprets his miserable situation as the result of being hit by God's rod. He is treated by God as an opponent. Job is only able to speak to God again if God removes his frightening rod from him¹¹⁸ because now the situation prevents Job from being himself (9,35b). De Wilde means that *כִּן* (so) in 9,35b refers to 9,29, where Job talks of being guilty beyond his influence. According to De Wilde, Job states that he is not guilty.¹¹⁹ However, *כִּי* (for) connects 9,35b with 9,35a. Therefore, *כִּן* refers to the situation as it is now. Job can not be himself and speak adequately to God without fear as long as God's terror and rod affect him.¹²⁰ With this, Job's words of 9,15 appear to be true. In his current miserable situation, Job can only plead to God for mercy.

¹¹⁴ See also Gen.31,37. *מוֹכִיחַ* returns in 40,2 where it refers to one of the parties in a lawsuit. There, it is the person who demands justice: an accuser or lawyer (see for this meaning of *כִּחַ* also Isa.29,21; Ezek.3,26; Amos 5,10).

¹¹⁵ Terrien, *Job*, 100; Gordis, *Job*, 98; Habel, *Job*, 197; Clines, *Job*, 243.

¹¹⁶ 12,20,24; 19,9; 27,2. Except 27,5.

¹¹⁷ Ps.2,9; 89,33; Isa.10,5; 11,4; Lam.3,1.

¹¹⁸ Compare 13,21.

¹¹⁹ De Wilde, *Hiob*, 151. See also Van Selms, *Job I*, 90.

¹²⁰ See also 9,20.

2.2.2.5 Conclusions

Job 9 questions the concept of retribution in an indirect way. Job does not question this concept as such but interpreting God's involvement in Job's innocent suffering on the basis of this concept causes a conflict between the concept of God and his situation.¹²¹ It leads to the conclusion that God apparently perverts justice and consciously causes injustice on earth.¹²² This conclusion serves to question the theological concept that brought Job to it. A theological concept in which God can be thought as unrighteous is as such untenable.¹²³ The image of the lawsuit is the leading figure in this process. After the question of whether a human being can be righteous before God was put in a moral-ethical sense in 4,17, it is placed within a forensic context in Job 9. Job puts the issue of his righteousness into words with the question of how he can be proved right before God in a legal case. Habel sees the futility of litigation as a central notion of Job 9.¹²⁴ However, although the futility of litigation plays an important role in the course of Job 9, it is not the central issue of this chapter as such. The inability to answer God adequately in a lawsuit and the impossibility of having a fair case with God are 'only' building blocks of the more general issue that God's righteousness comes under discussion in Job's case if God's actions are understood according to the concept of retribution.

Job contrasts his impotence with God's superior power. He describes God's power in the Creation, in which God can act destructively in his anger. This divine action is marvellous and unfathomable for human beings at the same time. Job concludes from these attributes that God has the ability to abuse his divine position; nobody can stop him or call him to account. God does not allow his actions be affected by human beings. After Job perceived God's ability to abuse his position due to God's superior power and inscrutability, he introduces his own innocence. According to the concept of retribution, God rewards an innocent person with prosperity and punishes a wicked one with misfortune. Since Job is convinced that he is blameless, the implication is that he suffers unjustly. The only conclusion must be that God is acting unjustly. God misuses his sovereign position.¹²⁵ Clines is more reserved and thinks that the speech is best read as a protest that it is hopeless for a person to seek vindication from God.¹²⁶ However,

¹²¹ Compare Von Rad, who states that ultimately God has become problematic (G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970, 286).

¹²² See also T.N.D. Mettinger, *In Search of God. The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* [=Gudsbeteckningar och gudsbild i Gamla Testament, Örebro 1987, transl. by F.H. Cryer], Philadelphia 1988, 181-183.

¹²³ Compare Fullerton, "On Job" (1934), 333: "...he (Job) attacks the current dogma of penal suffering *through* his attack upon the justice of God."

¹²⁴ Habel, *Job*, 185.

¹²⁵ Compare Cox, *Rational Inquiry*, 632.

¹²⁶ Clines, *Job*, 225-226.

Job's charge extends further and questions God's righteousness. Treating the righteous and the wicked equally is a perversion of the concept of retribution and so God does not act justly from Job's point of view. Hesse says that Job is powerlessly turned over to God's arbitrary actions.¹²⁷ However, Job's charge goes one step further. Job suggests a conscious perversion of justice and misuse of divine power by God.

The image of the lawsuit emphasizes Job's impotence in this situation. Job is turned over to God's superior power. Even if he is right, he will be unable to answer God adequately in a lawsuit because he is overwhelmed by God's strength. This difference between Job and God ends in the concluding image of the arbitrator. Having a legal case with God is impossible because of the fundamental difference between God and human beings. Therefore, God's actions can not be stopped, nor can God be called to account. Fohrer states that Job depicts a situation in which a human being is never right and in which God is always right because justice equates to power for God; God is able to enforce his will as his justice and nobody can resist because he possess all might.¹²⁸ Job's attempts to be proved right do not succeed because of this sovereign position of God. Job is in the hands of God's power because God is also the judge who passes judgement. This fundamental difference between God and human beings is a basic idea of Job 9. Job encounters God's sovereign position in the course of this speech again and again. It is the reason for his inability to contend with God in a fair way and to challenge God's treatment of him. It is because of this that Job can not be proved right before God according to his innocence.

With this, Job 9 causes a decisive turn in the dialogue. It brings clarity to Job's accusations in the course of the dialogue. Job can not avoid the sharp charge that God perverts justice when considering Job's innocence. So, the reader can not ignore any longer that the concept of retribution is problematic. Job holds God responsible for his misfortune. He understands his misery as God's accusation against him.¹²⁹ Since Job is convinced that he is blameless, God must be wicked. With this, the concept of retribution is called into question because it leads to the conclusion that God has to be seen as wicked. This impasse –the possibility that God is wicked– is not surpassed in subsequent dialogue; but it does require a response. Thus, Job 9 overshadows the continuation of the dialogue. On the one hand, it questions the concept of retribution so that the reader requires a result. On the other hand, Job 9 demonstrates Job's impotence by means of the image of the lawsuit. In the dialogue, each attempt by Job to get justice before God is overcome by the awareness that it will not succeed. Also, each complaint about Job's miserable situation stands in the light of Job's impression that God perverts justice.

¹²⁷ Hesse, *Hiob*, 81.

¹²⁸ Fohrer, *Hiob*, 201.

¹²⁹ Köhlmoos, *Das Auge Gottes*, 134.

2.2.3 The Relation of Job 9 with the Prologue

The relation of Job 9 with the prologue intensifies Job's charge. The narrator and God characterize Job as a blameless and upright man.¹³⁰ This confirms Job's claim that he is innocent. Furthermore, God admits that Job is wounded for no reason when he reproaches the satan for inciting God against Job in order to destroy him for no reason (2,3). Thus, God's words in the prologue legitimate Job's charge. Whereas a person's conviction that they are blameless is normally unverifiable, thanks to the prologue the reader knows that Job rightly mentions his innocence.¹³¹ Job's struggle to be proved right is appropriate. So, the relation between Job 9 and the prologue strengthens the questioning of the concept of retribution. This issue can not be brushed aside by doubting the legitimacy of Job's claim that he is blameless.¹³² Actually, it is only thanks to the relation with the prologue that the questioning of the concept of retribution succeeds.¹³³ The reader can not ignore any longer that innocent suffering forms a problem for understanding God's actions according to this concept. The connection between Job 9 and the prologue also sharpens Job's charge against God because God himself admits that Job is blameless and is wounded for no reason.¹³⁴ This implies that God confirms the legitimacy of Job's charge against him from Job's point of view. It is this necessary dependence of the dialogue on the prologue that makes it likely that each is construed with a view to each other. The whole issue of the book of Job would fade away without the scenes of the prologue.

¹³⁰ 1,1.8; 2,3.

¹³¹ Fox also points to the two dimensions of reality in the book of Job; the world of Job (the world within the narration) and the world above the narration, in which the author communicates to the reader. The book's teaching lies in the interplay between these two lines of communication according to him (M.V. Fox, "Job the Pious", ZAW 117 (2005) 351-366 (here 351)).

¹³² This is actually done by the motif of human imperfection in the speeches of the friends (4,17-21; 15,14-16; 25,4-6). See §3.4.

¹³³ Compare Fullerton, "On Job" (1934), 340.

¹³⁴ Noort, *Duister duel*, 17.