THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE: GOD AS ENEMY—

AN IMAGE OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOB

AND OTHER BOOKS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

Brite Divinity School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Interpretation

Fort Worth, TX

May 2011

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ABSTRACT AND METHODOLOGY

Images of God, positive and negative, create an ongoing tension in the biblical text. This tension is due to the paradoxical character of God as seen in Exod 34:6-7. The cognitive dissonance created by the juxtaposition of positive and negative images of the divine is unsettling for many people. Consequently, these negative images are often overlooked. This project addresses one of the neglected images, the image of God as enemy. It seems peculiar that, despite the regularity of Israel's complaints against the divine and its familiarity with enemy language, the word *enemy* is not used more frequently in reference to God. This project considers the idea that while *enemy* language was part of Israel's cultural milieu, the word *enemy* was seldom used to describe God because the image of God as enemy borders on picturing God as demonic—a precipice that neither Job nor the writers of the Hebrew Bible wanted to cross.

Insights in this dissertation are drawn from several approaches to biblical interpretation. This exploration begins with an analysis of theological issues that focus on theodicy informed by a womanist perspective regarding the image of God as enemy in the book of Job and other books of the Hebrew Bible. Literary criticism provides the lens for examining sample texts that express this image of the divine, implicitly and explicitly. The analysis includes consideration of defiance and humor as coping mechanisms that Job utilized in his response to the theodic crisis created by his understanding that God was the source of the reversals in his life.

Preface

Almost always, writing projects begin years before words actually appear on paper. The desire to write on the book of Job has been with me for more than thirty years. I am glad that the seed planted years ago has begun to come to fruition. How was I to know that the path to writing on Job would include years of graduate and doctoral study?

My interest in the biblical text began years ago with a conversation with my ex-husband's grandmother. One of our long conversations resulted in her encouraging me to read the story of Saul and the Medium of Endor. This was the spark that lit what has become my lifetime interest in the biblical text. At the time, I was, totally shocked by what I read. I'm not sure what I expected, but I certainly did not anticipate war stories, disrespect of women, or endorsement of slavery and oppression. These issues were especially troubling since despite its initial depiction of all humanity made in the image of God, the biblical text divided humanity into Jews and Gentiles, sanctioned war, slavery, oppression, and portrayed numerous negative images of women. I was taken aback by the cognitive dissonance between egalitarian ethics and much of what takes place in the biblical text. Although I did not know it at the time, I had stumbled on the kinds of issues that liberation theology, ethics, feminism, womanism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism, among others, seek to address.

As one who stands against violence of any kind (individual or communal), believes in honoring the humanity of every person, and understands that no one has the right to enslave or oppress another, I was, to say the least, totally horrified. How could a beloved sacred text say such negative things about humanity and about God? These texts were dreadfully different from the ones I had heard in church school and worship during my childhood and teenage years. It was not so much the presence of such passages that disturbed me. I was appalled that the biblical text

did not consistently speak boldly against such practices. I felt cheated. Why had I not heard about these texts in church? Why had I not heard about this part of the biblical story? I wanted no part of a religion drawn from such texts. I even considered giving up Christianity. How odd you might think, for one who is now completing a Ph.D. in Biblical Interpretation, who is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, who prior to ordination taught an adult Sunday school class, and who served one church or another as a church musician for many years, starting when I was twelve years old—how odd, indeed.

In the early eighties, I was a musician at a local church.[1] Recently hired, the task of playing at the weekly Sunday evening service fell to me. How was I to know that the sermons I would hear there on the book of Job would enlarge my faith and literally change my life? All my life I had heard about the patience of Job. I was intrigued to hear that there was another side of the story. I was intrigued by the impatience of Job. His questions captivated me. His honesty fascinated me. Sermons I heard and books I read, contrary to what I had been taught, affirmed what I knew all along—raising questions about issues of faith is not a statement of unfaith. The realization that it is permissible to ask hard questions and to see a text from a different perspective was the drink of living water that I needed. Having recently returned to the church after a ten year hiatus, I was eager to try to make sense of what I read.

The book of Job saved me. The book of Job saved my faith. Of the three hundred twenty-nine questions in the book of Job, God asks eighty-eight, the satan asks two, Job's wife asks one, Job asks one hundred thirty-nine, Eliphaz asks thirty-nine, Bildad asks seventeen, Zophar asks

1. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church is an African American church in Fort Worth, TX. The pastor, Rev. A. E. Chew, preached the sermon series that sparked my interest in the book of Job.

twelve, and Elihu asks thirty-one.[2] Job's questions gave me permission to ask my questions. Job's story taught me that while many questions remain unanswered and unresolved, it is still important to ask them.

Job, along with liberation theologians, ethicists, feminists, womanists, postcolonial, and postmodern scholars taught me to consider questions about exploitation, economic justice, social justice, political justice, multiple religions, gender justice, slavery, racism, interlocking forms of oppression, and ethics as I think through theological issues and interpret the biblical text. I am convinced more than ever that even when ongoing, unanswered, and unresolved questions remain, raising them provides an opportunity to reflect, consider, engage, and embrace new ideas.

Thirty years plus years have passed since I heard the first sermon series on Job that so intrigued me. These sermons on Job still dance through my mind, even after thirty years or more. I have seen Job in a musical performed on stage at Jubilee Theatre[3] and as a church musical.[4] I have listened to the music of the Jubilee Theatre's presentation of Job on my cassette player. I have read the book more times than I can count. I have encountered Job through years of formal and informal study and through numerous art forms and media. Memories of lectures, classroom discussions and presentations, along with conversations about Job with professors, pastors, church members, and classmates have left an indelible impression on me. William Blake's artwork based on the book of Job, as well as that of other artists, often provides provocative visual impressions. I have 'heard' Job's story again and again as I listened to sermons, church

2. Jimmie L. Hancock**,** *All the Questions in the Bible,* CD-ROM, version 3.0f. (Logos Bible Software, 2000-2007).

3. Jubilee Theatre is an African American theatre in Fort Worth, TX.

4. Forest Hill Community Bible Church is an African American church in Forest Hill, TX. The musical was composed by the church choir director, Carl Kennerly.

choirs, played piano in worship, and encountered Job through a multitude of art forms. Anyone who says I am a "Jobaholic" would not be far from the truth.

Moreover, there are times when, like Jeremiah I want to weep for the existence of evil and suffering in the world. Miroslav Volf writes, "I have not been able to bring myself to try to defend God against the charge of impotence or lack of care with regard to horrendous evils."[5] I can not defend God, yet I chose faith. Even in the midst of the issues, problems, and challenges of life, I am grateful for an opportunity to be a believer. I have not given up on God because I am convinced that God has not given up on me. Like Jeremiah in Jer 12:1, I ask, even though I know that God will win and my questions will remain: "You will be in the right, O LORD, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?"

The church struggles in the 21st century largely because of its confusion about theological questions. Prosperity gospel, focus on love without justice, and a lectionary that omits difficult passages are but a few expressions of a theology that many find wanting. Years ago when I stumbled upon the imprecatory psalms, those psalms in which vengeful, hateful words are addressed to God, others, and self (see for example, Pss 10:15; 40:14-15; 94:2; and 139:15-21), I was surprised and shocked to find these distressed and distressing words in prayer in the Bible. Even after years in church, I had never heard such words preached from the pulpit or taught in Sunday school. "Surely," I thought, "I must be mistaken. How could anyone say to God as the psalmist did in 44:17, 22-23: "All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant. Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever!

5. Miroslav Volf, "I Protest, Therefore I Believe," *Christian Century* (February 8, 2005): 39.

Growing up, I had been taught that negative feelings were not proper to express, that they were simply not topics one should talk about openly. What was I to do with Ps 109, which contains the longest and most severe of all the imprecations? Eventually this psalm more than any other helped me find well-being and wholeness for my wounded, broken spirit, and when it happened my healing was instantaneous.

The writer of Ps 109 clearly understood and was far more comfortable than I in expressing negative feelings. Verses 6-20 were scandalous. The words captured my feelings, imagining scenarios that I would not want to happen to anyone. I was aghast and horrified when I read:

> [6] They say, "Appoint a wicked man against him;
> let an accuser stand on his right.
> [7] When he is tried, let him be found guilty;
> let his prayer be counted as sin.
> [8] May his days be few;
> may another seize his position.
> [9] May his children be orphans,
> and his wife a widow.
> [10] May his children wander about and beg;
> may they be driven out of the ruins they
> inhabit.
> [11] May the creditor seize all that he has;
> may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil.
> [12] May there be no one to do him a kindness,
> nor anyone to pity his orphaned children.
> [13] May his posterity be cut off;
> may his name be blotted out in the second
> generation.
> [14] May the iniquity of his father be remembered
> before the LORD,
> and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted
> out.
> [15] Let them be before the LORD continually,
> and may his memory be cut off from the earth.
> [16] For he did not remember to show kindness,
> but pursued the poor and needy
> and the brokenhearted to their death.
> [17] He loved to curse; let curses come on him.

He did not like blessing; may it be far from him.
[18] He clothed himself with cursing as his coat,
may it soak into his body like water,
like oil into his bones.
[19] May it be like a garment that he wraps around himself,
like a belt that he wears every day."

[20] May that be the reward of my accusers from the LORD,
of those who speak evil against my life.[6]

Interpreters disagree as to whether the words of Ps 109 reflect the enemy's thoughts about the psalmist or the psalmist's thoughts about his enemy or enemies.[7] Either way, the words of this psalm in vv. 1, 21, 26-28 depict the psalmist's expectation and insistence that God intervene by speaking and acting on his behalf: "Do not be silent, O God of my praise. But you, O LORD my Lord, act on my behalf for your name's sake; because your steadfast love is good, deliver me. Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love. Let them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it. Let them curse, but you will bless. Let my assailants be put to shame; may your servant be glad."

Seeing God through this psalm helped me see myself. Not only was I angry and hurt, I occasionally had feelings of wishing ill for the person(s) who hurt me. I did not like what I saw. When I took the psalm's words as my own, God relieved me of my thoughts of ill will. I realized that my "Self-pity . . . [was] not a pretty thing."[8] Had I, like the psalmist, "bemoan[ed my situation to the point of] becom[ing] ludicrous?"[9] I had to laugh at myself for letting my

6. Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from NRSV.
7. Notice that the NRSV's addition of "They say" in verse 6 is not found in the Hebrew of the psalm.
8. Toni Craven and Walter J. Harrelson, "Psalms," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha,* ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 856.
9. Ibid.

"moaning go . . . too far."[10] As a result of reading this psalm, I was able to come to myself, "get a grip," heal, forgive, and move on.

Through the words of this psalm I found reassurance and correction at a time when I felt overwhelmed by the events of my life. The imprecatory psalms helped me identify the depth of my brokenness. They reminded me that I serve a God who "loves us [me] and listens to our [my] cries."[11] They reassured me that "There is no thought, no problem, nor idea that we [I] cannot share with God."[12] Psalm 109 reminded me that I serve a God who is concerned about my joys and my sorrows.

Although one may react with revulsion or disbelief at this uncensored venting of rage, such as in Ps 109, this prayer and others like it are part of the biblical text. Imprecatory psalms and negative images of God, including the image of God as enemy, are sometimes problematic, at first. In a technological information age the time is long past for disregarding unsettling passages of scripture. To ignore these texts is to "remove something essential in the Bible."[13] Skimming over these passages and pretending they do not exist is ill-advised. I have come to know negative expressions in the Bible are often a misunderstood, misconstrued treasure.

Both the words of Psalm 109 and the book of Job are a cry for justice. These are the words of one who boldly cries out to God because of feelings of "powerlessness in the face of oppression."[14] Both are expressions of "someone who has suffered deep hurt and humiliation."[15]

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10. Ibid.

11. D. M. Flynn, "Songs of the Sages," http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3885/is_200201 /ai_n9024334 (accessed May 6, 2005).

12 Ibid.

13. "Imprecatory Psalms—The 'Greatest Love' . . . and the 'Great Problem,'" http://biblia.com/jesusbible /psalms9.htm (accessed May 6, 2005).

14. Ibid.

15. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 83.

Both are the radically expressed "explicit appeal"[16] of someone "who has no other recourse for justice--when no other aid is available."[17] They are words of struggle with God, oneself, and others. Recovering and reclaiming the words of difficult passages yields an unconventional view of the biblical text, encourages spiritual maturity, and makes room for us to face what we try so hard to avoid in life.

Renita Weems movingly writes of her struggles with God in *Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt.*[18]

> Although a deluge of books has been written about various aspects of the inner journey, much of what has been written in recent years appears to be directed to the novitiate, the recent traveler, the newcomer to the inward journey. Many of these books focus on the intoxicating joys of the inward journey, but not enough has been written about the long dry seasons. What about those of us who are beyond the first blush of the spiritual journey, who after a period of dramatic awakening now feel as if we have hit a brick wall and our prayers have been met with silence? It is comforting to know that even in the book that passes itself off as the word of God, there are testimonies of people who railed at God for what sometimes felt like God's cruel refusal to speak. Biblical poets and psalmists alike longed for the intimacy with God and complained about God's seeming detachment and heartless silence.[19]

As an African American woman whose relationship with God, ever ongoing, is full of fits and starts, leaps and bounds, and more dry places than I'd like to admit, I, like many, identify with Weems's sentiments. She goes on to explain:

> I am finally ready to talk about that difficult period in my life publicly. . . I can share the experience now because I am no longer afraid of God's silence. Nor am I ashamed of having doubted myself and God.[20]

My study of the book of Job leads me to a similar position. I have learned that God's presence is sufficient, even when God's voice is silent and my voice is railing at God.

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16. John N. Day, "The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics." http://63.136.1.23.ezproxy.tcu.edu/pls/eli/ashow?aid=ATLA0001322857 (accessed May 6, 2005).

17. Ibid.

18. Renita Weems, *Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).

19. Ibid., 18-19.

20. Ibid., 21.

Jason Kalman suggests that "The culmination of the book of Job was not that he understood his suffering but that his suffering led to both increased self-awareness and greater compassion for others."[21] Job's "faithful rebellion"[22] was part of his journey of faith and relationship with God. I know that I am more aware and have greater compassion because of the book of Job.

While I have no definitive answers, I know that the dynamics of my relationship with God and my faith are different because of the questions that continue to haunt me. The issues that nearly derailed my faith continue to propel me to a lifetime of study, or as Paul Harvey would say, to consider "the rest of the (biblical) story." Negative images of God, even Job's image of God as enemy, may leave us awestruck. I submit that paying attention to what may seem to be divine cruelty, whether through silence or words spoken, action or inaction, can be a source of maturing faith.

For me, Job's story is not just an old story in an ancient book. I have seen Job's story in the eyes and the faces of people who suffer incredible losses, for example in the eyes and faces of people who struggle to recover from overwhelming disaster and make a life in Haiti, Indonesia, India, Chile, South Africa, Japan, the USA, and disparate locations all over the world. On one occasion I heard Job's agony in the voice of a Nigerian parishioner living in Texas whose sadness was multiplied when she received news her younger brother had died, and she could not afford to travel home to the funeral. I too have had my own "Job moments." I think of Job's friends and wonder, have I been insensitive to the needs and interests of people around me? I think of Job's wife and long to hear the voices and stories of so many who are silenced in the

21. Jason Kalman, "With Friends Like These: Turning Points in the Jewish Exegesis of the Biblical Book of Job" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2005), 252, http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=85173&local_base=GEN01-MCG02 (accessed May 5, 2010).

22. Ibid.

din of a world too busy with its own concerns to consider them. I think of Job's community and wonder how I, ever so unwittingly and unwillingly, have been part of groups that have given too little consideration to someone's struggle, to someone's pain. I think of Elihu and wonder about people who remain invisible even when present. I think of Job and wonder why his voice is not heard more often. I think of God and wonder, why?

Job's story is a living story, a story of life at its best and worst. It abounds with the complexities of life. It refuses to accept the idea that life is predictable and problems can be solved in quick meaningless sound bites. Job knows that life is an unpredictable mix of ups and downs in which one experiences both the 'thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.' Perhaps, that is why the story has been preserved for thousands of years.

Just as Aristotle in the fourth century and Descartes in the seventeenth century, today's scholars have the opportunity to help people see themselves and the world differently. Enlightenment thinking laid the foundation for the world we used to live in. Postcolonial and postmodernist thinking is laying a foundation for today and tomorrow. The question is what type of foundation is it? What type of foundation will it be? The task ahead involves listening to and learning from all of the voices. The challenge is to bring the voices together in a way that respects and honors each. This is not easy work. This is not work for those who give up easily. This is work for all who are committed to bring their part of an emerging reality in which human worth is not determined by social location, economics, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, or the like.

The writing of a dissertation is no small undertaking. It is a project that comes to fruition with the support and encouragement of many people. A well known Buddhist proverb says; "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." This proverb beautifully captures the idea

that there is a moment in time when openness to receive knowledge on the part of the student and willingness to share knowledge on the part of the teacher are in sync. I am grateful for each of the teachers at Brite Divinity School who appeared on my path at just the right moment.

I have been amply blessed with mentors and teachers and will forever be grateful to everyone, seen and unseen, who inspired me, shared their thoughts, or had a part in this journey. My journey toward Brite Divinity School began with a word from alumnus, the Rev. Roderick Miles, my home pastor at Campus Drive United Methodist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The journey toward this project began with a word from Dr. Toni Craven who, from the moment of our first conversation, encouraged me to pursue a Ph.D. in Biblical Interpretation. Dr. Leo Perdue encouraged my love for the book of Job by permitting me to be part of, not just one, but three classes he taught on this book during my time at Brite Divinity School. Dr. Keri Day provided encouraging words at just the right moment. Together they provided the guidance needed for completion of this project. Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas and Dr. Zorina Costello gave encouragement for what is well-known as a gigantic undertaking. Dr. David Gouwens afforded additional insight at a critical moment.

Members of the Texas Christian University library staff were generous and supportive as I conducted my research. I am grateful for the encouragement I received from churches where I served as pastor while on this journey including, Many Peoples Mennonite Fellowship (Dallas, TX), Union Memorial United Methodist Church (Coolidge, TX), St. James United Methodist Church (Waco, TX), Eastern Hills United Methodist Church (Fort Worth, TX), and Grace United Methodist Church (Arlington, TX).

I hold dear words of encouragement from my beloved daughter, Tajiri Brackens of Houston, Texas, and from my friend, the Rev. Cynthia Cole, who constantly reminded me that "I do not have far to go." I can never repay my brother, Anthony Alphonso Terry, and his wife, Lynda Terry, for caring for Daddy during his illness while I continued my studies. In many ways, like Abraham, who completed the journey to Canaan that his father Terah began,[23] I complete my mother's dissertation journey, incomplete because of her illness. It is in memory of Mother and Daddy, Mr. and Mrs. Alphonso and Nellie Beth Terry, both teachers, that I complete this project.

As I reflect on the journey that lies behind this work and the journey that lies ahead, I hope that there will never be an end to persons who inspire us, move us forward, and make a difference in our lives, or to the questions that shape and form our lives for the better.

23. Gen 11:31.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Images of God, positive and negative, create an illogicality that fosters tension in the biblical text. This tension is due to the paradoxical character of God as seen for example, in Exod 34:6-7 where God is both loving and compassionate, and also the exact opposite. This tension in God is part of God's self-description to Moses. It depicts a juxtaposition of mercy and justice within the divine:

> The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation" (Exod 34:6-7 NRSV).

The cognitive dissonance created by these contrasting images of God is unsettling for many, especially contemporary readers who think of the divine only in terms of love and compassion. They are likely to find any negative images of God, including the idea of God as enemy, shocking and unacceptable. Though often ignored, these contradictory images of God are not only present in the biblical text, but also are more prevalent than one might think. For example, in the process of making a way for the Israelites to have a home of their own, God is instrumental in creating havoc and devastation for those who already inhabited the land.[24]

This type of tension is an inherent part of the biblical text. Norman Whybray says, "what may appear to the modern reader to be an inadequate and even distasteful view of God was not suppressed by the final editors and compilers of the Old Testament."[25] `Scholars are giving increasing attention to this difficult topic. Whybray acknowledges the difficulty of addressing

24. Deut 20:10-18.

25. Norman Whybray, "Shall Not The Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just? God's Oppression of the Innocent in the Old Testament," in *Shall Not The Judge of All The Earth Do What Is Right?* eds. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 15.

negative images of the divine. He writes, "The dark side of God . . . has received astonishingly little attention from Old Testament scholars. . . . It is almost as though there is a scholarly consensus that any criticism of God's character in the Old Testament is inconceivable."[26] Perhaps this can be attributed to recognition that assigning negative qualities to God is problematic because such references border on "'the demonic' . . . [and are understood to be] a symbol of evil."[27] These images are generally ignored because they portray the nature and character of God as not beneficent toward humanity. Dismissing negative images of God, whether intentional of not, creates its own theological problems. It overlooks much of the biblical text and in the process, it diminishes God.

Difficulty should not be an excuse for avoiding discussion of the negative side of God. Quite the contrary, difficulty is even more reason to engage conversation. In accordance with a commitment not to continue this neglect and avoidance, I will explore the theological problem created by negative images of God and examine some implicit and explicit references to a particular image of God, God as enemy, in the book of Job and other books of the Hebrew Bible.

Most negative images of God depict a situation in which something has gone tragically wrong in the divine/human relationship. The images and metaphors biblical writers used to describe these situations are often stark and abhorrent. In her book, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets,*[28] Weems explores images of God as abusive husband in Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Julia M. O'Brien examines additional unsettling images in her book, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets*,[29] including not

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26. Ibid., 2.

27. Daniel Day Williams, *The Demonic and the Divine,* ed. Stacy A. Evans (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3.

28. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

29. Julia O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

only God as abusing husband, but also God as authoritarian father, and angry warrior. In *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*,[30] Eric Seibert also investigates negative images: God as deadly lawgiver, instant executioner, mass murderer, divine warrior, genocidal general, dangerous abuser, unfair afflictor, and divine deceiver.

Whybray observes even more examples as he reexamines some of the most well-known passages of the Hebrew Bible.[31] For instance, in the Pentateuch, God initiates mass destruction in the Genesis flood (Gen 6:6-7), attempts to kill Moses in the Exodus (Exod 4:24), kills Egyptians at the Reed Sea (Exod 14:27-28), kills Israelites after the golden calf incident—an incident wherein God blesses those who kill their family, friends, and neighbors by making them priests (Exod 32:29)—and threatens to destroy Israel and start over with Moses after attempts with Adam, Noah, and Abraham fail to make the vision for humanity a reality (Exod 32:30, Num 14:13-20).

In the Deuteronomistic History, the prophet Samuel was angry with God for God's disapproval and dethroning of King Saul (1 Sam 15:11, 35). Likewise, David was angry with God for killing Uzzah because he tried to stabilize a leaning ark (1 Chr 13:7-11; 2 Sam 6:3-8) and for sending a plague to castigate David for taking a census, a census that, according to the writer of 2 Sam, God commanded (2 Sam 24:1). The Chronicler tells the story differently placing responsibility for the census on the satan (2 Chr 21:1).

In the prophets, Jeremiah protests that God deceives not only the people of Israel as a prelude of the destruction to come (Jer 4:10), but also the prophet himself (Jer 20:7). Jeremiah's

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30. Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

31. Whybray, "Shall Not The Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?" 1-19.

response is to curse the day he was born (Jer 20:14-18).[32] In Ezek, God permits Israel to engage in "'human sacrifice,' by offering up their own first-born children" [33] (Ezek 20:25-26), promising that, despite such transgressions, Israel will one day see God's favor, and in the future, Israel itself will be as acceptable to God as if it were a sacrifice (Ezek 29:41). Another example from the Writings includes God's conversation with the satan in the book of Job (Job 1:6, 2:10b). In Lam 2:4-5, Israel laments exile and the idea of God's acting like an enemy when Israel lost its war against the Babylonians.

Among the many negative images of God in the Hebrew Bible, perhaps, God as enemy can be considered one of, it not the most extreme. It seems peculiar that, despite the regularity of Israel's complaints against the divine and its familiarity with enemy language, the various Hebrew words for *enemy* צָר, אוֹיֵב, שַׂנְא, שׁוֹרֵר, and צוֹרֵר are not used more frequently in reference to God. This project considers the idea that while vivid metaphorical *enemy* language was part of Israel's cultural milieu, the words for *enemy* were seldom used to describe God since the image of God as enemy borders on picturing God as demonic. The writers of the Hebrew Bible were reticent to speak of God in these terms.

The observant reader notices that references to *enemy*/*enemies* are a standard part of biblical language. Enemy language is, for example, prevalent throughout the lament tradition of the Psalms in which the writers frequently praise God and request deliverance from both human and divine enemies, and troubling circumstances. For instance, the author of Ps 89:38-51 wondered how long God would continue to reject the anointed. In Ps 88:4-7 the writer complains because God fails to provide defense and deliverance to one who is troubled. The author of Ps

32. Job also is so troubled that he too curses the day he was born (Job 3:1).
33. Whybray, "Shall Not The Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?" 13.

39:13, feeling oppressed by the divine, subsequently asks God to look away so that the psalmist might know gladness before he dies.

While individual laments are explicit about how one might feel about one's situation, specifics about personal situations and the enemy remain vague and ambiguous. Try as they might, interpreters of the psalms are at a loss to determine the particulars of the situation or who the enemy is. Amy Erickson clarifies, noting that rather than being specific, "The language and imagery used to depict the enemy is both stereotypical and open-ended, characteristically employing animal metaphors, war and hunt terminology, and legal expressions."[34] Lack of specificity lends itself to an uncertainty which "heightens the tension"[35] depicted in the psalmists' situations. This increased tension opens the door for enemies to be described as enemies, not just of the psalmist, but by default, of God as well.

Israel's enemy language extends to complaints about God. Use of nuanced and implied enemy language for God was so frequent one can say that it was part of the cultural milieu (much like attributing bad things to Satan is for many today). Whereas use of the word *enemy* was reserved for extreme situations, these complaints generally describe what God has (or has not) done. In other words, while the words *enemy/enemies* are used frequently to address human enemies, frequently, only rarely do complaints about God use the word *enemy*.

Lest one think that it is only biblical writers who struggled with this issue, contemporary readers also wrestle with a larger issue known as theodicy. James Crenshaw suggests that theodicy was so problematic for the writers of the Hebrew Bible that "The scope of . . . wrestling

34. Amy Erickson, "God as Enemy in Job's Speeches" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2009), 21.

35. Ibid., 23.

with theodicy is astonishing."[36] From the opening pages of Gen to the closing pages of 2 Chr, biblical writers and editors struggled with this issue.[37] The author of the story about the Garden of Eden wondered why good and evil were present in the world. The prophets and the writer of Lamentations wondered why God would permit the beloved city (Jerusalem) and the chosen country (Judah) to suffer such a devastating loss to Babylon. Negative depictions of God in such a wide range of images and in such a variety of Hebrew Bible texts is an indicator that "this negative view of . . . the divine nature was a remarkably persistent one that was not confined to any one particular social or religious group."[38]

Though the Bible does not provide fixed answers, these examples make it clear that the biblical text itself certainly raises many difficult questions about this side of God's character. Along with Pss, the book of Job comprises one of the biblical text's most vivid explorations of the nature and character of God. Its willingness to explore the implications of negative images of God assures its place not only in the biblical text, but also among world literature. The Bible never provides an answer, but leaves the conversation open to readers, ancient and contemporary, who have questions about this aspect of God's character.

Roland Murphy affirms this stream of biblical thought in which doubts and misgivings about God are in the forefront when he writes, "There is a tradition for such questioning at the heart of Israel's faith."[39] Not only does the biblical text raise questions, it seems to honor those who raise questions as much, if not more, than it does any of the persons whose stories grace its

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36. James Crenshaw, "Theodicy," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 445.

37. Ibid. Gen to 2 Chr is a reference to the books of the OT in the order in which they appear in the *TaNaKh*.

38. Whybray, "Shall Not The Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?" 15.

39. Roland E. Murphy *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature,* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 34.

pages. Included in this group are people like the following: Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Naomi, some of the psalmists, and Job.

As they wrestle with the task of interpreting negative images of God, some readers seek to defend God by adapting an approach similar to Seibert's in which he draws clear distinctions "between the Textual God and the Actual God."[40] His concept of the textual God represents Israel's experiences of God, while the actual God represents the character of God. Seibert's analysis includes approaches to the text such as: divine immunity, just cause, greater good, "God acted differently in the Old Testament," and the permissive will approach,[41] each of which he considers to be an inadequate way of coming to terms with evil, suffering, and negative images of God, all of which eventually lead to questions of theodicy.

The divine immunity approach allows room for God to act in unethical ways. The just cause and greater good approaches suggest that the end justifies the means. The God acted differently in the Old Testament approach comes close to the perspective of Marcion who posited that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different gods. The permissive will approach proposes that God allows bad things to happen. While Seibert can be applauded for addressing negative images of God, he seems to defend God, rather than let the unpleasantness of what the biblical text says about God stand on its own.

Although Seibert writes from a Christocentric perspective, many of his insights are helpful for understanding negative images of God. Digging deeper, he lists several rationales that might explain why biblical writers utilize negative images of God, including the following: to explain national failures and disasters, to support the ruling elite and their policies, and to

40. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior*, 169-181.
41. Ibid., 69-88.

encourage particular behaviors and beliefs.[42] He further suggests that Israel's world outlook is comprised of beliefs that God is the sole divine causal agent God who controls the natural world, causes personal fortunes and misfortunes, rewards the obedient, punishes the disobedient, sanctions warfare, brings victory, and causes defeat in battle.

Seibert suggests that setbacks in Israel's national life, the Babylonian Exile for example, were attributed to God's agency. The ruling elite identified itself with God making what it authorized equal to what God authorized. National life and personal life were said to be regulated by God's decrees. Since God is the source of all, good and bad, Israel understood God to be responsible for the natural world, the blessings and the troubles in one's life, rewarding the faithful and punishing the unfaithful, not only approving war, but determining its outcome. In summary, ultimately God is responsible for all things. Seibert's thoughts on these matters provide useful background to keep in mind when exploring negative images of God, including the image of God as enemy in the Hebrew Bible.

If one recognizes the theological implication of negative images of God as bordering on picturing God as demonic, it is understandable why until recent years the subject received so little study. However, given that negative images of God were not censored, excised, or deleted by ancient biblical writers and editors, contemporary interpreters should not neglect them either. If allowed to surface, the image of God as enemy, along with other negative images of God, gives voice to an understanding of God that can "provide a welcome corrective for an institutional religion that desires to isolate itself from the pains and hurts, the darkness, dangers and sacrifices of life as it really is."[43] The contemporary unwillingness to explore negative images of God in the biblical text mirrors a reluctance to face negatives in life. Acknowledging

42. Ibid., 132-140.
43. Herbert E. Hobenstein, "Oh Blessed Rage," *CurTM* 10, no. 3 (June 1983): 166.

negative images of God is "an invaluable resource that remains largely untapped but nevertheless might assist . . . in giving voice to the truly tragic in human existence"[44] and providing a vehicle "to expand metaphors for God."[45]

Recognizing negative images of God not only provides a lens for thinking about the divine, it opens a door that also admits that there is a "dark side of monotheism . . . which has remained present in the cultural memory of the West as an object of negation and denial at best."[46] The correlate to not wanting to see the underside of God and/or of the biblical text is refusing to see the underside of life. James Metzger conveys the value of exploring negative images of God when he writes:

> First, incorporating these unsavory portrayals of God into our repertoire of intertexts enables us to give voice to the roles chance, contingency, and the destructive forces in the universe play in our lives, to poeticize life in a world that is just as often experienced as antagonist as friend. Put differently, they attend to the magnitude and variety of creaturely suffering in ways that traditional divine representations do not.[47]

In actuality, the world "is very often a cruel place riddled with enormous waste, pain, and suffering."[48] If one ignores negatives in God and in the biblical text, one is likely to overlook negative realities—in one's life and in the world.

Chapter 1, "Theodicy: A Problematic Theological Issue" will present theodicy as a theological problem inherent in worship of one God. This chapter will lay the ideological and theological groundwork highlighting the tension created when one God is ultimately responsible for both good and bad.

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44. James A. Metzger, "Where Has Yahweh Gone? Reclaiming Unsavory Images of God in New Testament Studies," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009): 73, http://docserver.ingentaconnect.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/deliver/connect/brill/01959085/v31n1/s5.pdf?expires=1284232378&id=58568119&titleid=75001427&accname=Texas+Christian+University&checksum=841C6E0B7C542490E88296291CAA36E (accessed July 5, 2010).

45. Ibid. 74.

46. Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 119.

47. Metzger, "Where Has Yahweh Gone?" 64-65.

48. Ibid., 66.

Chapter 2, "Theodicy and the Book of Job," will discuss "*theodic crisis*" [49] in the book of Job from various scholarly perspectives. A theodic crisis occurs when life experience, individual or communal, does not line up with belief in God. Generally, a theodic crisis is precipitated by some type of major loss requiring a significant change in the everyday life of an individual or community. The already complex divine/human relationship, which is itself inherently "emotionally and theologically complicated,"[50] becomes even more complicated in times of crisis.

This chapter will affirm that the image of God as enemy is part of how Israel understood and talked about God and its relationship with God whenever the community faced unprecedented losses and challenges. This metaphor was intended not just to serve as a metaphor, a literary construct, but also to be a reflection of the character of God.

Chapter 3, "God as Enemy: An Image of God in the Hebrew Bible (In Books Other Than Job)," will address passages outside the book of Job with explicit and implicit references to God as enemy. Similar to ch. 2, this chapter also will affirm that the image of God as enemy is part of how Israel understood and talked about God and its relationship with God whenever the community faced unprecedented losses and challenges. It will corroborate the insight from ch. 2 that this metaphor was intended not just to serve as a metaphor, a literary construct, but also to be a reflection of the character of God.

Chapter 4, "God as Enemy: An Image of God in the Book of Job," will explore Job's understanding of God as contrasted with those of other characters in the book. As the story unfolds, his experience of unexplained reversals defies the usual explanation of divine retribution

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49. Brueggemann, "Some Aspects of Theodicy in Old Testament Faith," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26 (1999): 257 (accessed July 10, 2009).

50. Richard Beck and Sara Taylor, "The Emotional Burden of Monotheism: Satan, Theodicy, and Relationship with God," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 36, no. 3 (2008): 151 (accessed July 10, 2009).

provided in the covenant model. With the idea of God's role as the initiator of Job's troubles in mind, indeed the idea of God as enemy, W. Lee Humphreys gets to the crux of the matter when he asks, "How does one live with the savage god?"[51] This basic question, "How does one live with the savage god?"[52] raises even more questions about righteousness and wickedness, justice and injustice, as the book of Job examines the premise that the relationship between God and humanity is complex, encompassing diametrically opposed ideologies about God and faithfulness including Job, the satan, the wife of Job, the three friends of Job, Elihu, and yes, even God.

Conclusion, will delineate insights, invite conversation, and make suggestions for further research. This chapter will affirm that while explicit reference to God as enemy was rare, implicit reference was part of Israel's cultural milieu and was not uncommon. The rarity of specific reference can be attributed to theological connotations that border on connecting God and the demonic. Scholars will be invited to continue the conversation on the image of God as enemy, to mine the insights that exploring the insights that negative images of God can reveal.

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51. W. Lee Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 98.

52. Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE

THEODICY: A PROBLEMATIC THEOLOCIAL ISSUE

The existence of suffering and evil in the world despite the knowledge, power, and goodness of God is the dilemma that theodicy explores. The enigma has puzzled believers and non-believers, scholars and non-scholars alike, for centuries. Clarice Martin explains:

> [Theodicy is] the inevasible [*sic*] problem of evil in the universe. As the question has been formulated, "*Si dues est, undemalum*?" or, "If God exists, why is there evil?" . . . This decidedly pointed and direct question focuses on "the problem of evil," often referred to by the term *theodicy.* The term *theodicy,* coined by the eighteenth-century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, is based on the conjunction of the Greek words "*theos*" (God) and "*dike*" (justice). The term *theodicy* represents the attempt to affirm divine justice despite the suffering in the world.[53]

Leibniz gave theodicy its name. The question of God and justice, theodicy, is especially problematic in the Hebrew Bible because of Israel's belief in only one God. As the source of everything, ultimately, Israel's God is responsible for both good and evil. The biblical story attests to Israel's struggle with this issue. Though freed in the Exodus so they could worship the God who delivered them from slavery, the idea of an invisible, often silent God was difficult (Exod 20:1-6).

Male and Female G/gods in the Ancient World

In the ancient world, there were gods and goddesses representing various aspects of life. While some gods and goddesses, such as Heket, goddess of birth[54] and Isis, goddess of healing,[55] represented positive aspects of life, many had negative connotations. Negative images often

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53. Clarice J. Martin "*Black Women's Spiritual Autobiography,"* in *A Troubling in My Soul,* ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 13-14.

54. Michael Jordan, *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses,* 2nd ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 119, http://secondsun.webs.com/E-books/Dictionary%20of%20Gods%20and%20Goddesses.pdf (accessed March 31, 2011).

55. Eric Chaline, *The Book of Gods and Goddesses: A Visual Directory of Ancient and Modern Deities* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 23.

reflect the ancients' fear of the unknown. For example, stories about Seth, desert god;[56] Horus, sky god;[57] Reseph, god of pestilence and war;[58] Kuk, god of darkness;[59] Osiris, god of the underworld;[60] and Sakhmet, goddess of war[61] helped the Egyptians make sense of their world. The Mesopotamian pantheon included Mot, god of death and the underworld,[62] Tiamat god of chaos,[63] and Marduk, creator and national god.[64]

Among the Canaanite pantheon were: Anat, virgin goddess or war and strife;[65] Asherah, mother goddess;[66] Astarte, goddess of love and fertility;[67] Baal, god of vegetation;[68] Baal Hadad (or Baal), storm god;[69] Baal Hammon, god of fertility;[70] Eshmun, goddess of healing;[71] El, creator god;[72] and Elohim (plural form of El).[73] When multiple gods are available, the negatives of evil and suffering can easily be assigned to different gods.

Margaret Brackenbury Crook discusses the problem:

> In the ancient . . . world of many gods, when one showed enmity to a man, the sufferer could always appeal to another. In the Babylonian story of the Deluge, a god, Enlil, is enraged to find that Utnapishtim (the Noah of the story) and his wife have survived the Flood. Another god, Ea, persuades Enlil to reverse his attitude. Causing Utnapishtim and his wife to kneel, Enlil blesses them and makes them into gods. In the same way, when the goddess Anath slays Aqhat, son of Daniel, Baal acts to rectify the violent deed. For

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56. Ibid., 29.
57. Manfred Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, trans. G. L. Campbell, Routledge Religion Online, http://www.routledgereligiononline.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/Book.aspx?id=w005 (accessed March 31, 2011).
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Chaline, *The Book of Gods and Goddesses*, 22.
61. Jordan, *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, 270-271.
62. Chaline, *The Book of Gods and Goddesses*, 17.
63. Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils And Demons.*
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Jordan, *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils And Demons*, 31-32.
67. Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils And Demons.*
68. Jordan, *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, 41-42 .
69. Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons.*
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Jordan, *Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, 87-88.
73. Lurker, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods And Goddesses, Devils and Demons.*

> Job, the monotheist, there is no resort to other gods. The One God acts alone, and Job faces Him alone.[74]

Israel's move toward monotheism began with merging various characteristics of multiple gods onto one God.

God in Israel

Carryover into the Hebrew religion from the surrounding cultures is visible in the names for God such as: El/Elohim (translated God), El Elyon (translated Most High God), and Yahweh (translated LORD God). Whereas in Canaanite religion these were names for various gods, in the Hebrew religion these were some of a multitude of names for the one God. All of life, positive and negative, good and evil, was attributed to this one God, presenting the problem of theodicy. Commenting on this conundrum in her article, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God,"[75] Marilyn McCord Adams writes, "Over the past thirty years, analytic philosophers of religion have defined 'the problem of evil' in terms of the *prima facie* difficulty in consistently maintaining (1) God exists, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good and (2) Evil exists."[76]

A problem occurs since the presence of suffering and evil is contradictory to both the idea that "A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could,"[77] and the idea that "There are *no limits* to what an omnipotent being can do."[78] In other words, "If God is *powerful* and *good*, how can there be evil in the world?"[79] God is less than omniscient if God does not know that much is amiss in the world. God is less that omnipotent if God does not have

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74. Margaret Brackenbury Crook, *The Cruel God: Job's Search for the Meaning of Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 48.

75. Marilyn McCord Adams and Steward Sutherland, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 63 (1989): 297-310.

76. Ibid., 297.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 169.

the ability to stop evil and suffering. God is less than good if God will not put a stop to evil and suffering—especially when it is unmerited. Simply put, theodicy explores the co-existence of God, evil, and suffering, whether deserved or undeserved. Theodicy seeks a vindication of God's attributes, especially divine justice, in establishing and/or permitting evil and suffering in the world. "Suffering is not the problem; God is."[80] As much as Job suffered, suffering is not his main concern. He does not seek reversal of his situation, only to understand it. He wants to know why God, who was so much a part of his life that he made sacrifices for his children just in case they may have sinned, turned against him.

Eliezer Berkovits explores the crux of the problem one encounters when one's expectations of God are at odds with one's experience of God:

> The problem that often occupies man's [*sic*] mind is, however, not that God is a judge who is too exacting, executing justice without mercy and charity, but rather that he so often seems to be indifferent toward the evil perpetrated by man and the suffering of the innocent. . . . Job queries the justice of God. One ought to appreciate the seriousness of Job's inner struggle. Not his undeserved suffering is his chief preoccupation, nor the self-righteous affirmation of his innocence. His concern is with the nature of God. How can God be unjust? It is the most serious problem that may perturb a believing soul. It is for this reason that he must reject all the arguments of his friends. The issue is a fundamental concern of religious faith. It must not be blurred over with pious words. How can God be unjust? . . . Demanding justice of God, Job is the great hero of faith who struggles for the honor of his God. He will not rest until he is given an answer, until he understands. For it cannot be, it must not be, that God should not act justly; and yet, he has experienced injustice at the hand of God. The issue must be faced for the sake of God [and humanity]."[81]

If God's justice eludes the present and remain unfulfilled, hope and expectation of divine justice is projected into the future.

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80. Dermot Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence: The Book of Job* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 11.

81. Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism,* ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2002), 148-149.

Theodicy in Other Books of the Hebrew Bible

Writing on theodicy and the book of Lam, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp notes:

> Given the presence of such prominent theodicy impulses in Lamentations, it is no wonder that the dominant interpretive pose assumed by most critical interpreters of these poems has been overwhelmingly theodic in orientation. But to read Lamentations as theodicy is . . . to misread Lamentations. Alongside the theodic there appear decidedly more tragic or antitheodic sensibilities. . . . The appeal of antitheodic sentiments, as with literary tragedies, is increased at precisely those moments when social and symbolic orders seem most vulnerable, when a community's very survival is at stake.[82]

Dobbs-Allsopp quotes Zachary Braitermann who "calls antitheodic all refusals 'to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering.'"[83] I submit that a broader understanding of theodicy incorporates antitheodic elements and utilize this understanding in my writing.

As Walter Brueggemann[84] suggests and Crenshaw[85] affirms, theodicy is not just an interesting, provocative, mind-boggling theoretical question about God—one that is best left to the intellectuals and academics among us. Rather, whether people realize it or not, the question of theodicy affects the everyday life of a community and its expectation of what constitutes a "better society."[86] Individual and communal decisions regarding treatment of people who suffer most and/or who have few resources are a defining characteristic that affects the overall quality of life in any society. If, for example, it is deemed that people bear the sole responsibility for their circumstances and that institutions have no affect on whether or not one is successful in life, justice for all is likely to be a pipedream and not a reality. In these situations, similar to the

82. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 29. Zachery Braiterman, *(God) after Auschwitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

83. Ibid.

84. Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," *JSOT* 35 (1985): 4.

85. Crenshaw, "Theodicy," 445.

86. Ibid.

thinking of Job's friends, all of the responsibility for difficulties is deemed to lie within the individual, not any outside forces.

In "Theodicy in a Social Dimension,"[87] Brueggemann argues that discussion of the question of theodicy is not limited to conversation about God and an individual but must consider God's role in a society's "arrangements of social power and social process" [88] as well. How individuals or a community see God affects how they see themselves and one another. If God is exclusive, people are likely to be exclusive in their dealings with one another. If God is inclusive, people are likely to be inclusive.

Clarifying further, Brueggemann argues that references to the "*moral, natural,* and *religious"*[89] dimensions of theodicy lend themselves to considerations that have no connection to "real human life."[90] Lacking such connection, discussion of theodicy quickly dwindles into an exercise in futility, the kind that the preacher of Ecclesiastes warned against (Eccl 12:9-14). Crenshaw argues that the book of Job "offered several partial answers—human ignorance, divine mystery, corrective discipline, delayed punishment and rewards—but acknowledged the problem as an insolvable enigma before which the best response was silence in the presence of a self-revealing creator."[91] With Brueggemann's, Crenshaw's and the preacher's comments in mind, I define theodicy as a reconciliation of God's attributes, especially divine justice, and its connections to social justice in establishing and/or permitting evil and suffering in the world. It is because "evil is somehow bound up with God"[92] that theodicy is a critical theological issue.

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87. Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," 3-25.

88. Ibid., 5.

89. Ibid., 8. Moral evil consists of acts human beings commit detrimental to other human beings; natural evil consists of havoc created by natural disasters; religious evil consists of distortions in the relationship between "the individual and God" (Crenshaw, "Theodicy," 446).

90. Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," 8.

91. Crenshaw, "Theodicy," 445.

92. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction,* 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) 103.

The problem is thorny because Gen 1 paints such an endearing picture of God and creation. The writer notes that God assessed creation to be good. It is interesting to note that contrary to popular thinking, the Hebrew indicates that God's assessment is based on what God "saw (רָאָה)," not on what God "said (אָמַר)." Except for the brief mention of chaos, the opening chapter of Gen presents such an idyllic picture of creation as good, it is expected that the God who created it all would also be good.

Interestingly, the divine shares power with creation. From the moment of the naming of the animals it is clear that "none of the power in the world, including . . . human power . . . is inherent to the world, it was all delegated freely by God."[93] Similarly, power in the divine council, which is conspicuously absent from the creation story, is also delegated, including Job's test (Job 1:12, 2:6). "Although it is not God's hand that strikes Job, God cannot be absolved of responsibility. God is, after all, the source of blessing and affliction, and it is only with God's permission that Job can be stricken."[94]

Pursuing the matter further, one might inquire into any connections between God and the demonic. Dirk Kinet argues that there is an "Ambiguity of the Concepts of God and Satan in the Book of Job."[95] Kinet explores the matter, "The question about evil and its origin is not under discussion in the frame story" (the prose tale in Job 1:1-2:13, 42:7-17).[96] Although the text is silent on the origin of evil, its presence is unmistaken. The appearance of God and the satan, not once, but twice, in the prologue signals that there is some connection, however subtle and undefined, between the two (Job 1:7-12, 3:3-6). Ambiguity about this connection makes it

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93. David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 20.

94. Dianne Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 17.

95. Dirk Kinet, "The Ambiguity of the Concepts of God and Satan in the Book of Job," in *Job and the Silence of Job*, eds. Christian Doquoc and Casiano Floristan (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 30.

96. Ibid.

possible to show that "God [not the satan] bears the ultimate responsibility for evil and injustice [in Job's life and] in the world."[97]

While there is ambiguity about God, there is no ambiguity about the high esteem God gives to Job. God and the narrator agree. The narrator explains that Job is "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1b-c). God says that Job is "a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:8d). Though God and the narrator agree, the satan's questions to God about the authenticity of Job's devotion and his upright living betray a troublesome uncertainty—the satan's, the writer's, and God's.

Kinet explains the quandary, "What is in question is the righteousness of Job, about whose merits God and Satan differ."[98] The conversations between God and the satan create a theological tension that sets the tone for the entire book. It seems that "the figure of Satan was only incorporated—and could only be incorporated—at a period when people found it more difficult to push the responsibility for suffering and injustice, and their authorship, on to God alone."[99] It epitomizes a time when people began to think about the lives of individuals within the community and not just the life of the community as a whole.

One of the first questions that comes to mind is whose adversary—God's? Humanity's? Both? The opening chapter seems to indicate that the satan is adversary to both God and humanity. The satan questions whether God is right about Job's righteousness and its implication that there is more to the divine/human relationship than reveling in the blessings that God provides. The complicating factor, of course, is that God both initiates and brings up Job's name in the conversation (Job 1:6-12). God then delegates by agreement and becomes directly

97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid., 31.

complicit in Job's troubles. One wonders if this is the same God of all creation who was introduced in the opening pages of Gen? It is disconcerting that "The creator God destroys his own creation."[100] How could God be in cahoots with the satan on this endeavor? What does God's involvement say about the nature and character of God? Astonishingly, the biblical text indicates that this is the very same God. In that case, God is both creator and destroyer. Dermot Cox elucidates, "It is not the existence of suffering that is tragic, but the existence of a divinity responsible for this."[101] Is it possible that the "'real' God . . . [is] a cruel and deliberate destroyer of innocent human life?"[102] If God does this in the life of one man, "God has done more than 'destroy Job's hope'—he has destroyed the cosmic order."[103] With this move, the central issue "passes from a sense of personal injustice to one of social injustice."[104] A God who overpowers an individual for no reason could overpower a nation for no reason. A God who puts the fate of one man in the hands of the satan might do the same for a whole nation.

Forthrightly, yet subtly, "the Prologue brings to the surface of the reader's perception the dangerous ambiguity in the traditional concept of Yahweh."[105] Where did this God come from? What happened to the God of creation? The Hebrew Bible implies that "the demonic was . . . [a] latent"[106] part of creation, a latent part of God. There would be no creation if it were not for the chaos of the opening verses of Gen. Many choose not to see. Most choose not to inquire. Yet, a contrary force is clearly present at the moment of creation.

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100. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence,* 67. In the Gen flood story, God repents from the first divine attempt to destroy creation and the earth (cf. Gen 6:6-13, 9:11-13). God is sorry (נחם) about the creation of humanity. (Gen 6:6 is the use of the same verb in Job 42:6).

101. Ibid., 26.

102. Ibid., 29-30.

103. Ibid., 75.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid., 25.

106. Griffin, *Evil Revisited,* 32.

Daniel Day Williams observes, "the theme of the demonic and divine powers takes us to the central questions about the sources and relationships of good and evil."[107] Ponder as one might about the particulars, the why and how this came to be, the biblical text is deafeningly silent. Yet, the demonic seems to be somehow present, however silent from the beginning. Why is chaos present in the opening scene in Gen? If not somehow already present, how else could God give Adam and Eve a choice between the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17)? In other words, the Gen story seems to begin not at the beginning, but somehow in the middle of the story of creation since chaos is already on the scene.

If the demonic recedes, it would not remain in the shadows long. In Job's story, the demonic is present, though silent, from the very beginning. God's familiarity with the satan is suspicious. Of all the beings—demonic, angelic, or otherwise—present in the divine council, how is it that the satan is the one whose input is sought? According to Williams:

> Demons are found first as special heavenly beings associated with the divine realm. In the early religion of Israel they are messengers of God with special functions; Satan first appears in the Hebrew Bible as an angel who serves God, sometimes in rather extraordinary ways. . . . Slowly a transition takes place, separating the heavenly beings into the good and the evil ones. In the New Testament the demons are wholly evil."[108]

Although the term *demonic* has come to "mean anything that we don't like or that troubles us, and especially . . . applying it indiscriminately to our opposition,"[109] here it is used as a reference to that which opposes God and/or humanity. According to Williams, "demons are not beings . . . they are structures within being, manifest in experience, and they bear a special relationship to the ultimate reality that is the ground of all things."[110] Dianne Bergant comments: "The Satan performs a rather significant role on earth, that of patrol. The text does not indicate

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107. Williams, *The Demonic and the Divine*, 4.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., 5.

whether this patrolling is for the sake of overseeing or of guarding or of spying."[111] Although particulars not specified, the position, "adversary" (Hebrew the satan, which is this character's job description as tester or adversary) represents the basis of the tension that prevails throughout the book.

It seems odd that God seeks and accepts the opinion of the satan. In human relationships, whose advice do people seek? Whose ideas are acted upon? Generally, it is those of persons whose perspective one respects. Whose ideas are accepted? Often it is those whose opinions, in one way or another, reflect and confirm or respectfully challenge one's own. In other words, what is the relationship between God and the satan—the one whose office (not person) is called upon?

The only voices in the council that speak are those of God and the satan. The divine does not address other members of the council. Nor does God ask other members of the council to speak. This scene "provides a very interesting representation of God. This God lives removed from human beings and deals with them through intermediaries."[112] The gathering of the divine council where God and the satan are both present raises questions about the relationship between the divine and the demonic in the book of Job. Williams explicates, "The demonic will always produce an inner conflict."[113] According to the biblical text, God creates life; the satan opposes it. God brings order, the satan promotes disarray. "The mystery of the demonic is the mystery of a disruption of human life at the deepest levels of feeling and thought."[114]

One might wonder, does what happens in the divine council point to a conflict within God? Might the opening scene signal a conflict of the divine and the demonic within God? Might

111. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 22.
112. Ibid., 17.
113. Williams, *The Demonic and the Divine,* 8.
114. Ibid., 32.

this scene reflect a desire for "the victory of the divine over the demonic?"[115] Williams further comments that "The demonic feeds on the divine power of being and distorts it."[116] In fact, the satan is obedient to the letter of what God permits (Job 1:12-19, 26-8). What risk might there be for God if Job does not pass the test? What risk might there be for the satan if Job does pass? Might the absence of the satan in the epilogue signal that "the divine power outlasts every power that in any way blocks it. . . . The demonic structures have power, but not the same kind of staying power."[117] Perhaps the absence of the satan in the epilogue signals that "demonries [*sic*] do get exposed and that a creative power . . . reasserts itself."[118]

Phillippe Nemo is on to something when he suggests in *Job and the Excess of Evil* [119] that God not only is in cahoots, but God's acceptance of the satan's challenge, God's willingness to put Job on the spot not only borders on, but also is demonic. Nemo's exploration of the relationship between God and the satan is the most extreme position of which I am aware:

> Does the prologue of the Book of Job not present God and Satan as being in collusion? The strategy deployed for putting Job to the test is devised by the two of them *together.* They are partners in the same enterprise, their Intention [*sic*] is common. In fact, there would seem to be no reason to distinguish between them. The Divinity is the Devil—God *is* Satan, and Satan *is* God, and Job would not be Job except by way of the Game of God-Satan.[120]

Summarizing this provocative position Nemo proposes that " the 'God' who personifies an evil in excess of the world . . . [is] the 'God' whom Job addresses."[121]

The book of Job is the only book of the Hebrew Bible that presents this possibility so directly. Of all the negative images of God in the Hebrew Bible (and there are many), the image of God in Job is surely the most disturbing—not because of the nature of Job's suffering and

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115. Ibid., 33.
116. Ibid., 36.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Phillippe Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).
120. Ibid., 141-142.
121. Ibid., 101.

losses—but because of God's role in the suffering, even in the life of someone of whom God held in high esteem. What is the writer trying to communicate about God? What is the reader to understand about God—knowing that even restoration can never erase or compensate Job's losses. A man known from the start as one who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1) experiences losses that change him forever. No amount of material goods, no return to community, not even a new family can undo or make up for what has happened to him. What could the writers and compliers of this story possibly have been thinking? What was so meaningful that the editors included this text in the Hebrew Bible? Was it just to tell an unquestionably unforgettable tale about one man's suffering? Or was there something more?

Clearly someone or some groups were struggling with an understanding of God, trying to make sense of it all. The struggle manifests not only in the content of the text but also in how the text that appears in the canon is organized. For example, logically, Zophar should have a third speech, as do Eliphaz and Bildad, but he does not.[122] Sometimes Job seems to be talking out of both sides of his mouth. At times he describes the wicked as blessed despite their ungodly lifestyles (24:1-25). Other times he seems to describe the wicked as living bereft of God's blessings (27:11-23). These oddities in the book of Job contribute to its being what Tony Campbell describes as a "magnificent but mangled piece of literature."[123]

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122. Job's first full length speech is in ch. 3. Eliphaz's three speeches appear in chs. 4-5, 15, and 22. Bildad's three speeches appear in chs. 8, 18, and 25. Zophar's two speeches appear in chs. 11 and 20. Job responds to Eliphaz's three speeches in chs. 6-7, 16-17, and 23-24; to Bildad's three speeches in chs. 9-10, 19, and 26, respectively; and to Zophar's two speeches in chs. 12-14, and 21, respectively. Without a speech from Zophar between them, chs. 26 and 27 appear together as a response to Bildad. Chapter 28, a wisdom poem, interrupts the flow of Job's speeches which continue in chs. 29-31. Eliphaz speaks uninterrupted in chs. 32-27. God's two speeches appear in 38:1-40:2 and 40:6-41:34.Job's two responses to God appear in 40:3-5 and 42:1-6, respectively. The prologue in 1:1-2:13 and epilogue in 42:7-17 completes the story. Craven, interview by author, Fort Worth, TX, April 12, 2011 with lecture notes.

123. Tony Campbell, "God and Suffering 'It Happens': Job's Silent Solution," *American Theological Inquiry* 3, no.1 (Ja 15 2010): 160.

This inimitable book gave voice to Israel's misgivings about God. With negative images of God so prevalent in the Hebrew Bible, anyone who ignores them to see only a loving God should be aware—they have encountered only part of the story, they have encountered only part of God, and part of themselves. Barry Harvey references Martin Buber on God's freedom:

> The emphasis placed on loving God in much contemporary spirituality further exacerbates the situation, making it much harder for persons to come to terms with devastating events of nature [and life]. Martin Buber warned that the one who begins with the love of God "without having previously experienced the fear of God, loves an idol which he himself has made, a god whom it is easy enough to love." Such a person does not learn to love the real God, who is "to begin with, dreadful and incomprehensible." According to Buber, once that person "then perceives, as Job . . . perceive[s], that God is dreadful and incomprehensible, he is terrified. He despairs of God and the world if God does not take pity on him, as He did on Job, and bring him to love Him Himself."[124]

It is only when one comes to terms with this side of God and this side of life that one is able to move from shallow living so prevalent in the world and in the church today, especially in North America. Healing and wholeness comes, as it did for Job, for anyone who can be counted among those of whom Harvey, again referencing Buber, says, "endures in the face of God the reality of lived life, dreadful and incomprehensible though it [may] be."[125] Healing and wholeness comes when one learns to "love God for who God is, not as we might want him to be."[126] To seek the love of God without recognizing the negative side of God is like trying to be married to part of a person. It just doesn't work. Relationship with God entails loving all. God loves all—the good, the bad, and the ugly—individually and collectively. To be in relationship with God is to learn to love and trust God—a God who has menacing features. To

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124. Barry Harvey, "Imagination and the Nature of Evil" *Theology Today* 63 (2007): 456. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands: NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 36.

125. Harvey, "Imagination and the Nature of Evil," 457. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God*, 37.

126. Harvey, "Imagination and the Nature of Evil," 457.

be in relationship with God is to say with Israel, one would rather have one God—even a God with a dark side, than to have other gods or no god at all.

Negative images of God, nonetheless, present difficult ethical dilemmas. The biblical text records times when even God is displeased with the consequences of divine decisions. For example, as punishment for taking a census, God offers David a choice of punishments: seven years of famine, three months of military defeat, or three days of devastating contagious disease (2 Sam 24:1-14). The biblical text offers two opinions as to the reason for this census. In this passage God provokes David to conduct a census. In a retelling of the story in 1 Chr 21:1-30 Satan provokes David. Recognizing the severity of all three alternatives and that David, not the people, were responsible for the census, David abstained, throwing himself and his people on the mercy of God who chose three days of pestilence. After seventy-thousand were killed, God relents:

> So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died, from Dan to Beer-sheba. But when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented concerning the evil, and said to the angel who was bringing destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." The angel of the LORD was then by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam 24:15–16).

God commands the angel to sheath his sword, saying, "It is enough; now stay your hand."

In this case, the Holy One puts a stop to the destruction. This reversal portrays God as overriding the first instruction to the angel. What does this say about the divine when God reverses God's own commands? The implication is that sometimes, even God, not just humanity, questions God's decision-making. Knowing that God makes these kinds of decisions, even if only on rare occasion, one encounters questions of theodicy and whether there is something in God that sometimes borders on the demonic. The angel's sword (21:16) prevents David from

worshipping at Gibeon. David's words, the actions of God and those of the angel validate Jerusalem as the future sight of the temple.

This tension is also present in Gen 2:8-9, where God plants two trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. The two opposing trees reflect division in the thinking of the Creator. In the same way that a musician's music is a reflection of the musician or a writer's words are an expression of the writer, the biblical text presents the creation as a manifestation of the Creator. Two trees in the garden signal the presence of two potential mindsets in humanity, which itself is made in the image of God. The presence of two opposing trees implicitly reflects a tension that exists, not only in the mind of the writer, but also in the mind and nature of the divine.

Crenshaw suggests that juxtaposition of the attributes of justice and mercy in God (cf. Exod 34:6-7) exposes "a conflict within the soul of Israel."[127] This tension in God's character also appears in Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; and Nahum 1:3. The fact that this tension appears in so many passages throughout the text affirms a "struggle to balance these qualities of justice and mercy in describing God's interaction with a covenanted people permeates much of the Bible"[128] and signals that this tension was an ongoing issue in ancient Israel.

This conflict between the love of God and the justice of God represents the cognitive dissonance created by the schism between divine promises of God's care, concern for humanity's well-being, and the reality of life's imperfections here and now. This paradox is inherent in the question of theodicy. As a result, any solution to the problem carries with it an ongoing dilemma that makes a satisfactory resolution impossible. Anyone who undertakes this endeavor soon finds

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127. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2005), 4.

128. Ibid.

that one is facing a task of Sisyphean proportions. Unlike Sisyphus, one discovers the task more than worth the effort.

Presenting the image of God as enemy is one way that the Hebrew Bible addresses the "notion of theodicy as an existential struggle against the practical realities of lived experience."[129] Deliberations about theodicy reflect times when stark realities of life require an engagement with evil and suffering. Questions of theodicy give voice to the "anger and rage"[130] one might feel toward God when life doesn't make sense. Herbert Hobenstein writes, "Rage is compatible with faith. Once the enemy has been correctly identified as God, then to rage against him is not only inevitable, it is necessary."[131]

Even though many find the idea of rage toward God as unacceptable, the writers of the psalms clearly did not. On the contrary, they understood that anger and rage are part of the range of human emotions. They knew that expressing feelings such as these toward God provide an outlet that permits one to "get a grip" without causing harm to others or oneself. Hobenstein affirms this view, noting that the ability to express rage against God portrays an "authenticity"[132] that is needed for coping with life and spiritual crisis. The image of God as enemy is one vehicle for expressing this human emotion. The frequency of the appearance of this image indicates that God as enemy is not intended to be just a literary device, but rather is a part of God's character—a part that causes much human consternation due to a display of God's complexity as seen in relationships with individuals and with Israel where God is the aggressor, the avenger, the enemy.

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129. Elizabeth Boase, "Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering: Theodicy in Lamentations," *VT* 58 (2008): 454.

130. Hobenstein, "Oh Blessed Rage," 164.

131. Ibid., 166.

132. Ibid.

Richard Beck and Sara Taylor understand that a theodic crisis is not just an intellectual crisis limited to the mind; a theodic crisis connects to one's deepest emotions. As they observe, "monotheism . . . creates a unique emotional burden for its adherents."[133] This emotional burden persists because Israel's faith does not provide multiple gods as a means of symbolizing, talking about, and coping with evil and suffering in the world. Instead, God is seen as the ultimate source of all that is. The problem of theodicy goes deeper than addressing the mere existence of good, evil, and suffering; the problem is connected to the very nature of God. With God as the ultimate source of all, good and bad, questions of theodicy are unavoidable. The writers and compliers of the book of Job approach this problem directly. In the next chapter we will examine alternative expressions of theodicy and the characterization of God as enemy.

133. Beck and Taylor, "The Emotional Burden of Monotheism," 151.

CHAPTER TWO

THEODICY AND THE BOOK OF JOB

The writers of the book of Job refuse to withdraw from difficult questions about life and difficult images of God. In doing so, they address some of the most problematic theological issues in the Hebrew Bible. These include topics such as divine retribution, creation motif, legal metaphors,[134] "nature of evil, theodicy, and divine providence, the extent of free will . . . the significance of the pursuit of biblical, philosophical, and mystical wisdom,"[135] "disinterested piety,"[136] suffering, undeserved suffering, nature of God, nature of humanity, nature of divine/human relationships, rebuttal of a theology of retribution, use of a legal process to bring charges before and against God, and use of creation theology to show the wonder and priceless value of life, even in the midst of chaos, sin, and evil. These topics provide an entree into the question of theodicy in relation to the concept of God as enemy, a seemingly unthinkable question that the book of Job uncompromisingly addresses. Justice and the Holy One come face to face.

The gap between expectations of God and experience of God are at the forefront "From the opening chapters of the *Book of Job* [in which] it is evident that this is the critical question: *what kind of God* is it that allows the innocent to suffer, and indeed seems to cause that suffering?"[137] To the stunned reader's horror, God, in fact, admits responsibility in the second council meeting (Job 2:3). How could a good God do such a thing, especially to a righteous man? Is this an abuse of power? Why would God arbitrarily attack a virtuous man? How could

134. Gregory Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on The Book of Job,* ed. Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 23-33.

135. Kalman, With Friends Like These," 2.

136. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 103.

137. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence,* 11.

God do something so unethical? How could God do something so immoral (Job 1:12, 2:6)? Dermot Cox explains, "Indeed, in . . . his second boast in the Prologue, God appears to concede that to some extent he at least shares responsibility for what had happened 'you provoked me to move against him' . . . he says rather defensively to the Satan."[138] This is unsettling for "there seems to be something shame-faced about the divine admission, and this is coherent with the whole picture of Yahweh."[139]

Job is not the only biblical character to question God. In 12:1, the prophet Jeremiah ponders God's character, yet insists on raising questions—even when he knows from the start that God's view will prevail:

> You will win, O LORD, if I make claim against You,
> Yet I shall present charges against You:
> Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
> Why are the workers of treachery at ease?[140]

Brueggemann puts the troubling matter succinctly, "theodicy is a concern for a *fair deal"*[141] from God. If one can not get a fair deal from God, there is no such thing as a fair deal—ever for anyone. If God is not fair with an individual, how can God possibly be just to an entire nation? Could God restore the life of a nation after defeat in a devastating war?

Much of the Hebrew Bible questioned when and how restoration would come to a nation torn by destruction of its temple, loss of its king, and exile of its people to another land. Many of the images of God as enemy appear in texts that respond, in one way or another, to Israel's losses to the Babylonians in 587 BCE. Even in these texts, for example, the prophets, seldom specifically refer to God as enemy. Why such restraint? After all, losing the war against the

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138. Ibid., 25.
139. Ibid.
140. NJPS.
141. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms, 169.*

Babylonians threatened the very life of the Israelite community. This loss created what Brueggemann thinks of as a "*theodic crisis*."[142] A theodic crisis occurs when the gap between what is and what is expected can not be explained. This type of crisis causes one to question the reality and character of God. Unknowns and contradictions that may have been quietly lurking in the background require attention.

Willingness to engage the complication, to struggle with God with mind and emotion, is often a sign of the depth of one's humanity and "the strength and vitality"[143] of one's faith. Avoidance and refusal to struggle with the realities and difficulties of life, Job's friends for example, leads to a limited existence, much like one, who out of fear sits on the edge or floats happily in the shallow end of the pool while the best is reserved for all who venture a swim into deep water. How does one who is willing to engage the complication converse with one who is unwilling? Perhaps, Job suspected that despite his friends' presence and the fact that they travelled a great distance to be with him, they would be unable to cope with his new situation. Job understood that his friends' efforts to silence him were "nothing else than . . . [an] attempt to force him into the role of student . . . [or] back into the role of the silent son, the unquestioning recipient of wisdom."[144] Job, nonetheless, refused to let the narrow-mindedness of his friends silence him. His willingness to delve into his theodic crisis is evident in his first speech, the lament of ch. 3. The troubles he fears becomes reality and he finds no rest (Job 3:25-26). No rest is available because sleep eludes him and friends attack him.

142. Brueggemann, "Some Aspects of Theodicy in Old Testament Faith," 257.
143. Hobenstein, "Oh Blessed Rage," 164.
144. William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1996), 64-66.

Job's opening words leave him tottering on the edge of the precipice of blasphemy. His words seem "to give credence to the satan's charges."[145] William Brown's assessment leaves no doubt as to what is at stake, "Indeed, the next natural step for Job would be to curse God and end it all."[146] In this case, Job would have followed his wife's advice (Job 2:9). If Job fails, the satan wins, and God loses—end of story. Brown explains Job's predicament:

> Job's final words in his lament [in ch. 3] appropriately anticipate the verbal onslaught he is about to suffer from his friends. Whereas Job fervently seeks the solitude necessary for him to die and thereby find rest, Job's friends rudely interrupt the process. The peaceful communion for which Job desperately yearns among the dead is about to be displaced by strife among the living.[147]

Job 3 poses the problem in painfully clear terms, after which there seems nothing more to say, though his "friends" and Elihu will certainly try.

Seven days of silence and the sound of his own voice bring Job to a point of no return, a place of critical consciousness, a place of conscientization. Seven days of silence yield a deep understanding of the theological implications of the oppression he now feels. God has become his enemy. If Job wondered "why" this happened to him, his friends wondered how Job, a man who had everything, could come to this? Much like people today who are at a loss for words when someone they think they know well commits some atrocity, Job's friends wondered what he had done to bring these troubles upon himself.

Theodicy brazenly threatens to dismantle Job's carefully constructed world. Bewildered, he can not overlook the knowledge that God has caused these calamities. His friends ask questions about the externals of his life, how he treated others. Job asks questions about the internals of his life, how God has treated him. His friends, though present, can not comprehend just how much he has changed. The friends want to know *how* Job lost his goods and his

145. Ibid., 63.
146. Ibid.
147 .Ibid.

standing in the community. Job wants to know *why* he lost his standing with God. "Exasperated with his friends, Job chose to turn toward and against God"[148] –the very same God who is his enemy. He can not ignore or deny the recent events in his life, or their significance. Finding himself in the throes of a full blown theodic crisis, Job chooses to struggle with, rather than give up on God.

The conversation about the relationship between God and Job includes acknowledgement that the relationship is complex. Frequently, the rudiments of relationship oppose each other diametrically. These unresolved ideological conflicts, contradictions, contrasts, and paradoxes give voice to theological pluralities. Crenshaw notes, "Viewpoints collide everywhere, not just in the dialogue."[149] In the end, Job's understanding enlarges to include the contradictions, resulting in a continuous new cultural memory of God.

Israel formed an identity largely based on its memories and understanding of God. Yet, Israel had not just one, but multiple memories reflected in theological pluralities that became part of the sacred text. Philip R. Davies notes that biblical stories contain "clear traces of distinct and contradictory memories."[150] In the book of Job, multiple memories and contradictions are reflected in the differences of theological perspectives of the various characters in the book and the differences between the prose and poetic sections of the book. For example, Job's friends represent memories of traditional retribution theology. Job, to the contrary, represents the wisdom of those who understand that retribution theology is not the only principle at work in the world. The prose sections (prologue and epilogue) reflect a patient Job and the poetic section reflects an impatient Job. Multiple memories, theological pluralities, and contradictions in Job

148. Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God* (New York: Random House, 1976), 226.
149. Ibid., 98.
150. Phillip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 114.

complicate matters. They began a conversation on theodicy that continues to evoke the interest of scholars today.

A scholar can enhance the conversation by recognizing the multiplicity of memories and utilizing principles from process theology. Process thinking permits the scholar to "transform the paradox in such a manner that a larger frame of reference is attained, one capable of embracing both poles of the paradox in a unified and expanded view."[151] In regards to the book of Job, process thinking permits the covenant theology of the friends, Job's rejection of covenant theology, and God's presentation of creation theology to exist simultaneously in a way that reflects the complexity of life. Crenshaw writes, "process thought offers a way of approaching the problem [of theodicy] that resembles the OT emphasis on God's susceptibility to change."[152] Process theology with its ability to embrace contradicting realities opens a door to absorbing, engaging, and appreciating the profundity of the book of Job. It permits not only both poles of a paradox, but multiple perspectives to be present and valid simultaneously. It seems that the writers/editors of the book of Job (and the biblical text in general) were engaging in their own version of process theology when they allowed multiple contradictory perspectives to stand without resolving them. Process theology provides an explanation for the multiple perspectives on theodicy that one finds in the book of Job.

The book of Job looks at theodicy by questioning not only the nature of God, but also the nature of humanity. Consideration of the nature of God pivots on the question: Does God have a negative side that would create havoc in the life of a righteous person? Consideration of the nature of humanity pivots on the question: Is it possible for "anyone [to] serve . . . God for

151. Ronald L. Farmer, *Revelation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 128.
152. Crenshaw, "Theodicy," 447.

nothing?"[153] Unfortunately, "the only way to find out whether persons would remain faithful [to God] without thought of the carrot or the stick was to submit them to a test."[154] The test would invoke questions about both humanity and God. Much is at stake, for Job's ordeal at the hands of God peels back a curtain that unveils something heretofore unidentified in the character of both. Questions of theodicy that remain in the background of other Hebrew Bible texts appear in the foreground of the book of Job.

Theodicy is a fascinating topic for many scholars. Whereas Whybray laments the lack of attention to the negative side of God and Terrien laments the lack of attention to the book of Job, [155] contemporary scholars have ventured into discussion of the negativity of God. Many issues raised by the book of Job reflect the questioning posture of postmodern life. The scholars mentioned below represent some of the approaches to theodicy and the book of Job. As one would expect, their approaches range across a wide spectrum of ideas.

Scholarly Perspectives

Jason Kalman points out, "The biblical book of Job has captured and held the interest of Muslim thinkers for more than a millennium; of Christian thinkers for two millennia; and of Jewish thinkers even longer."[156] He explains, "This interest [in the book of Job] has resulted particularly because of its disturbing depiction of an ostensibly compassionate God who not only allowed a righteous man to suffer, but also apparently allowed himself to be provoked into actively participating in the sequence of events that resulted in the affliction of the central

153 Ibid., 446.
154 Ibid.
155. Samuel Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), 13-15.
156.Jason Kalman, "With Friends Like These," 1.

character, Job."[157] Although there is much scholarly focus on the book of Job, there has been proportionately less conversation regarding its presentation of the negative side the God, and even less on the image of God as enemy. Ironically, the concept of the negative side of God receives a great deal of attention in the book of Job, and in many other books of the Hebrew Bible, notably Psalms.

Catherine Chin

Catherine Chin does not take on the question of theodicy directly. Instead, she challenges views of God and God's relationship to humanity in which scholars view a positive characteristic of the divine as a negative trait. She voices her objection to interpretations in which "The traditionally awe-inspiring power of God is . . . ironically converted into a liability."[158] This is the perspective of the person who notices the glass is half empty, even though it is also half full. According to Chin, interpreters make this kind of move when they "so equalize . . . the litigants that Job can make God answerable to him . . . [because] God has apparently acted unfairly or unjustly, and must answer for his actions."[159] While interpreters may be guilty of making this type of interpretive repositioning, Job himself makes this type of shift from a positive to a negative view of God. For example, Job turns the psalmist's wonder at God's creation of humanity (Ps 8:4) into a complaint about excessive divine attention that he would rather escape (Job 7:17).

Chin expresses concern that these interpretive moves diminish the character of God. She notes that although the book of Job upholds the infinite value of the divine/human relationship, in reality, it poses a "serious challenge to most commonly held notions of God and his relation to

157.Ibid.

158. Catherine Chin, "Job and the Injustice of God: Implicit Arguments in Job 13:17-14:12," *JSOT* 64 (1994): 96.

159. Ibid., 95.

the human experience."[160] These notions include an expectation that God works, directly and indirectly, to benefit humanity. The thought that God might do otherwise is seemingly unbearable for her, and for many.

For Chin, the critical issue in the book of Job is "God's justice, the question of whether God can truly be just when the innocent suffer."[161] For her, the suffering of the innocent is not just Job's situation, but the situation of many around the world today. In these circumstances there is an unspoken expectation that God would do everything possible to alleviate this kind of suffering. The persistence of this kind of suffering calls God's concern for humanity into question. In the book of Job, innocent suffering puts not only Job, but God, on trial.

One might wonder, is it possible "to put God on trial?" Chin briefly explains Job's position as God's accuser as being that of one who thinks of God as enemy. She explains how this idea develops when she writes, "Job increases his moral standing, not by simple statements of his own righteousness, which would be vulnerable to a flat denial, but by rhetorical questions which put his opponent [God] on the defensive."[162] (Interestingly, God uses the same strategy to put Job on the defensive in the whirlwind speeches.) Chin further explains Job's strategy by using Job 13 and 14 as an example:

> The legal case against God in Job 13 and 14 is a masterpiece of insinuation. The author of the text avoids a denial of God's traditional virtues, but uses these virtues implicitly to attack God more effectively than is possible in direct confrontation. Simple accusations are easily open to denial and suspicion; insinuations woven into the fabric of rhetoric are not. In divine power, Job reads unfair threats; in divine knowledge and judgment, intrusive scrutiny; in divine exaltedness, irrelevance to human weakness and the human experience. Implying such faults through . . . literary devices . . . and tying them to God's virtues through ironic insinuations creates an argument difficult to refute, since the flaws are portrayed as proceeding naturally from the virtues. Thus using his opponent's traditional

160. Ibid., 94.
161. Ibid.
162. Ibid., 97.

> strengths to his own advantage, the author of Job succeeds in crafting a highly polished accusation of God's injustice.[163]

The uniqueness of Job's situation as a suffering innocent elicits unique questions about God and God's relationship to Job. Positives of God become negatives from Job's point of view. Job does not question God's power. Rather he questions how God uses divine power in the life of Job and in the world. As Job sees it, God misuses divine power since Job has done nothing to deserve such treatment. Likewise, from Job's perspective, God misuses divine knowledge to attack Job in key areas of life, relationships and finances. With these edges of the divine character clearly in view, one is apt to reject, or at least question, God and God's intention toward humanity. Chin's analysis is helpful for discerning some of the literary devices used in Job to develop questions of theodicy.

James L. Crenshaw

In *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil,*[164] Crenshaw notes that belief in one God carries with it an ever-present "hermeneutical dilemma . . . [that] requires a convincing explanation for the problem of evil."[165] Similar to a child's incessant *why* question, the question of evil relentlessly pleads for an explanation. As Crenshaw explores one explanation after another, it is clear that no satisfactory explanation is possible. Yet, the lack of a satisfactory answer does not mean, as some would have it, that the question should not be raised.

For both Judaism and Christianity, the dilemma created by the presence of evil and suffering in the world creates a "divine pathos . . . [as a consequence of God's] decision to become involved in . . . human"[166] affairs. Of course, God's lack of involvement would be problematic as well. The dilemma persists whether one addresses it or not. Whether attributed to

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163. Ibid., 101.
164. Crenshaw, *Defending God.*
165. Ibid., 12-15.
166. Ibid., 16.

"retributive, disciplinary, revelational, probative, illusory, transitory, or mysterious"[167] causes, suffering and evil must be dealt with theologically.

Crenshaw discusses eleven answers as biblical solutions to the question of theodicy. Most of the eleven can appear in the Book of Job. Crenshaw divides the eleven solutions "into three . . . [categories]: 'Spreading the Blame Around,' 'Redefining God,' and 'Shifting to the Human Scene.'"[168]

Spreading the Blame Around

Spreading the Blame Around includes three subsections: (1) The Atheistic Answer: Abandoning the Quest, (2) Alternative Gods: Falling Back on a Convenient Worldview, and (3) A Demon at Work: Letting Benevolence Slip.

The atheistic answer: abandoning the quest. Crenshaw explains that for many people today, the explanation for evil lies in believing that "the universe . . . [came to be by] accident"[169] and "deny[ing] the existence of God."[170] Writers of the Hebrew Bible identify this perspective as the position of foolish and wicked people. Three verses in the Psalms claim there is no God (Pss 10:4, 14:1; 53:2). According to the psalmist, the one who fails to acknowledge the divine is a fool. This solution allows the atheist an escape from having to confront the question of theodicy. Unlike today's world where atheists and agnostics are not unusual, this solution would have been a rarity in the ancient world, Israel included, for "Ancient thinkers . . . rarely ventured to question the existence of gods or a God."[171] None of the characters in Job opts for this solution. Even the

167. Crenshaw, "Introduction: The Shift from Theodicy to Anthropodicy," *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 4.
168. *Crenshaw, Defending God*, 18.
169. Ibid., 26.
170. Ibid., 25.
171. Ibid., 26.

satan and Job's wife, who express misgivings about God in their own way, take for granted the existence of the divine.

Alternative gods: falling back on a convenient worldview. This view is a reminder that prior to worship of only one God, Israelites saw the universe as a place filled with not just one but many deities in a "polytheistic world."[172] The shift "from polytheism to monotheism . . . [was eventually accompanied by] an ethical system that gives priority to the weak and defenseless members of society."[173] This shift in theology and ethics was long and painful. It was much easier to explain evil when one could attribute evil to multiple gods. When there is only one God, and as Job understood it, both good and evil both come from the hand of God, it is difficult to explain evil. In other words, Israel's move toward monotheism created a religion with a difficult theological problem. Theodicy could not be overlooked even though it had no solution. Job, his friends, and Elihu all express a belief in on supreme God. Each attempts to render a solution to the problem of theodicy. Job's friends accept a worldview defined by the dualistic categories of retribution theology. Job understands, but rejects, this solution. Elihu, whose myopic view saw Job's trials as a learning experience and added vicarious suffering on behalf of others to the mix. was not much different than Job's friends.

A demon at work: letting benevolence slip. In his explanation of this option, Crenshaw suggests that "ancient Israelites . . . believed that their God had a dark side, one that eventually manifested itself as an independent being, at first a servant of the deity but ultimately as a powerful opponent."[174] Continuing his explanation, Crenshaw notes, "This elusive figure appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible, and on two of these occasions an article is attached to its descriptor, *satan* (the adversary), which should not be translated as a proper name (Job 1-2; Zech

172. Ibid., 50.
173. Ibid., 53.
174. Ibid., 56.

3:1-2). Only 1 Chr 21:1 understands the word as a name, Satan."[175] This movement from title to name seems to recognize that the negative side of God is problematic. It appears to be an early attempt to separate the negative from the goodness of God.

In Job, the satan fulfills a dual role, simultaneously a servant to and opponent of God. This duality is visible in the conversations between God and the satan in Job 1:6-12 and Job 2:1-7. As servant, the satan obediently does only what God permits. As opponent, the satan questions God's judgment as to human beings' capability of maintaining relationship with God solely for the sake of relationship without expectation of reward. Even though obedient to God, "'the Satan' expects the worst of everyone. Only God has complete faith in the goodness of a human being."[176]

Redefining God

Instead of a focus on the effort to place blame on humanity, Crenshaw's second category focuses on alternative solutions that redefine God. This category has four subsections: (1) Limited Power and Knowledge: Accentuating Human Freedom, (2) Split Personality: Reconciling Justice with Mercy, (3) A Disciplinary Procedure: Stimulating Growth in Virtue, and (4) Punishment for Sin: Blaming the Victim.

Limited power and knowledge: accentuating human freedom. Most likely Job was written during the Babylonian exile. If so, limited power and knowledge: accenting human freedom represents an "attempt to exonerate the deity from permitting the defeat of Jerusalem and the exportation of a large number of Judeans to Babylonia." [177] Exonerating the deity put the responsibility for the Babylonian exile on Israel and its failure to follow God's commandments. It depicts a divine

175. Ibid.
176. Crenshaw, *A Whirlwind of Torment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 58.
177. Crenshaw, D*efending God*, 76.

vulnerability to humanity's ability to make wrong choices. In this scenario, limiting God makes room for a greater range of human freedom and responsibility than would otherwise be possible.

God's response to the satan's challenge regarding Job is a reflection of the possibility that God, though quite confident in Job, was still somewhat uncertain of what his response would be if tested. This uncertainty in God reveals a limitation of the power and knowledge of God—a limitation that makes it possible for Job to freely respond to the test put forth by God and the satan. In other words, this solution implies that human beings can experience true freedom only if there is a limitation to the power and knowledge of God. For better or worse, in this scenario, individually and collectively, human beings are free to make choices, even to their detriment. This is a self-imposed limitation in which God has power but does not use it. This limitation on God's part makes room for humanity to develop. As Crenshaw explains, God "possesses full potentiality for absolute power and knowledge . . . [but] chooses in actuality to limit those qualities so that he might endow human beings with self-determination."[178] Sadly, humanity often makes poor choices. Sometimes the consequences of these choices, whether individual or collective, remain for generations.

Split personality: reconciling justice and mercy. Crenshaw's discussion of the divine split personality addresses the attempt to reconcile that which seemingly is un-reconcilable—"a deity who is at once perfectly just and perfectly merciful." [179] This situation is the classic theodic dilemma wherein two or more attributes of God are contradictory and incompatible. Resolving the dilemma, many would say, is an impossible task, "for even the deity cannot reconcile the irreconcilable."[180] This solution appears in the depiction of God who, on one hand, gives the

178. Ibid., 76.
179. Ibid., 91.
180. Ibid.

satan permission to afflict Job with a multitude of simultaneous losses and a debilitating illness. On the other hand, God limits what the satan can do to Job, first sparing his body, second sparing his life. This alternative emerges as the flip side of a demon at work: letting benevolence slip, wherein the negative side of God is born not by the divine but by an alternative being. In this view, the satan represents the negative side of God.

A disciplinary procedure: stimulating growth in virtue. This subsection attributes evil to a painful but necessary disciplinary procedure useful for one's spiritual growth and development. As with limited power and knowledge, this view of theodicy grew in importance when Israel found itself in utter turmoil during assaults by Assyria and Babylon. Losses to Assyria and Babylon were painful experiences that taught Israel to worship God and God alone. The nation needed an explanation of why it had come upon such hard times.

There was a consensus for individuals, and for the community as a whole, that some of life's lessons come only through difficulty. Experience would drive home a point that "repeated [prophetic] warnings that ought to have produced repentance,"[181] but did not. For example, after years of false starts, the Babylonian exile taught the community to worship only one God. Although the lesson applied to an individual instead of to an entire community, Elihu took the position in his commentary that Job's losses are blessings in disguise. He was convinced that there were lessons in life that Job needed to learn that could only be learned through adversity. Unlike the friends who had a long list of accusations, Elihu had no suggestions as to just what those life lessons might be. Perhaps, he expected Job to figure them out for himself. Job, of course, knew that Elihu's position was untenable and gave no answer.

181. Ibid., 114.

Punishment for sin: blaming the victim. Crenshaw explains that "sin and punishment . . . [merge because people] expect justice from the deity or deities . . . [due to] a deep psychological need for order."[182] Based on this kind of thinking, Job's friends could not imagine a world where the difficulties in a person's life had no connection to the individual's sins. In their world, evil and suffering always had to have a cause, a reason connected to one's behavior—especially one's behavior toward others in the community. Job's friends could not image "The God of . . . [the] prologue [who] has the power to bless or to afflict and does so irrespective of any customary principle of retribution."[183]

Job's friends represent a traditional approach to theodicy which ignores the facts and realities of life, just as Job's friends did when they failed to even consider the possibility that Job had done nothing to merit his troubles.[184] Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, convinced that Job has sinned, and Elihu, convinced that Job needs a life lesson, all exhibit this type of thinking.[185] Based on his unique experience, Job, on the other hand, presents a nontraditional perspective wherein evil and suffering may be present, but there are no sins in one's life that warrant punishment.

Shifting to the Human Scene

There are four subsections in Crenshaw's last category, Shifting to the Human Scene. The four subsections are (1) Suffering as Atonement: Making the Most of a Bad Thing, (2) Justice Deferred: Banking on Life Beyond the Grace, (3) Mystery: Appealing to Human Ignorance, and (4) Disinterested Righteousness: Questioning the Problem.

182. Ibid., 117.
183. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 17.
184. Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 120-127.
185. Ibid.

Suffering as atonement: making the most of a bad thing. This option merges two different theological systems: "merit . . . and substitution."[186] When people could not earn favor with God, they needed to do something to rectify the situation. Unlike the Augustinian theological heritage, which emphasizes the depravity of humanity expressed as the doctrine of original sin that is part of much ecclesial theology today, ancient Israelites did not see "human nature . . . [as] flawed to the core."[187] Instead, the contest of good and evil signals a "battle between two natures . . . —an evil inclination and a good disposition."[188] Although people hoped that the good would eventually win, that was not always the case. The battle was relentless, ongoing, and in need of some form of atonement.

In this solution, substitution is based on a theological system similar to Augustine's. In this scenario, people desire to go their own way and disregard any notions of divine will. Individuals could easily upset the balance and harmony in the community. Ancient cultures established an elaborate system of sacrifice to cover every conceivable violation of divine rule. The sacrificial system substitutes animals and innocent victims for guilty persons. Regular and periodic sacrifices were necessary to appease the divine in hopes of avoiding negative effects of God's wrath. Israel's sacrificial system, centralized at the Jerusalem Temple, fulfilled this need. A system of punishment discouraged digression from established norms.

Lack of a temple during the Babylonian exile was traumatic for the Israelite community. The destruction of the temple meant that the customary substitutionary sacrifices were impossible. Loss of a place to make atonement was so traumatic that it required rethinking the

186. Ibid., 135.
187. Ibid., 136.
188. Ibid., 138.

"handling of sin and its consequences."[189] Longing for something to fill the gap created by loss of the temple, Israel began to emphasize life in decentralized synagogues when it was no longer able to worship in the centralized Temple at Jerusalem. In 42:7-9 of the epilogue, God called not only on Job to pray for his friends, but also on Eliphaz to make a substitutionary animal sacrifice for himself and his friends. Job, approved by God, needed no such animal sacrifice.

Justice deferred: banking on life beyond the grave. Atonement theology raises "the question—Is death final?"[190] This option comes into view in Job's determined quest for an umpire (מֹוכִיחַ) in 9:33, a witness (עֵדִי) in 16:19, and a redeemer (גֹּאֲלִי) in 19:25-26. This system of rewards and punishments eventually became an extension of retribution theology into the next world. Although initially resisted, hope for life after death eventually led to a belief in immortality and resurrection when a final justice would right the wrongs in the world. This belief became important in the extracanonical literature of second temple Judaism. Job had no expectation of life beyond the grave. He sought a hearing and vindication in this life. His search for an umpire, witness, and redeemer affirmed his undying confidence in his integrity.

Mystery: appealing to human ignorance. The dilemma created by the "paradox of a self-revelatory God who is at the same time hidden from human sight"[191] confounded human reason which could not comprehend such a God. Humanity, not God, is the problem due to the limitation of human knowledge. Here, limited knowledge and power are applied to human beings rather than to God. The discussion on wisdom in ch. 28 affirms the belief that wisdom begins and ends with the divine. Wisdom is ultimately unfathomable and unattainable by humanity. God speaks from this perspective during the questioning of Job from the whirlwind (38:1-42:17).

189. Ibid., 141.
190. Ibid., 149.
191. Ibid., 165.

Only God understands the way to it (28:23). "Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (28:28).

Disinterested righteousness: questioning the problem. This option represents the perspective of the satan in doubting the possibility of disinterested righteousness in Job's life in particular and in humanity in general. In God's response to Job, God does not address the topic of justice in Job's situation, or in the divine human relationship in general, but speaks only in terms of creation, an arena where Job could not win even if he tried.[192] For example, in 38:4 God asks Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" This of course, is a rhetorical question designed to catch Job off guard and make it impossible for him to answer. Job was not present; both God and Job know it.

A twelfth option. Crenshaw's description of the eleven responses to the question of theodicy as an examination of the divine/human relationship is a reminder that with worship of one God the question of theodicy necessitates multiple responses and remains forever open to possibilities. An example I would add to Crenshaw's list of open possibilities is "*Theodicy Ignored*: *Disregarding the Problem*."[193] This is the view of one who is "living the good life." When things are going well, people give hardly any thought to God, let alone pay attention to the thorny question of theodicy. This is the response of the person who does not want to think about the issues, problems, and challenges of life. Feelings of gratitude are likely accompanied by an implicit expectation that life will be like this always. Secretly, people with this perspective, hope that if they ignore the negatives of life, they will just go away. This is the proverbial "head in the sand" response. Despite all his piety, this was Job's response until trouble struck his household, his family, and himself.

192. Ibid., 187-190.
193. Craven, conversation with author, Fort Worth, TX, July 31, 2009.

Amy Erickson

Amy Erickson's 2009 dissertation, "God as Enemy in Job's Speeches"[194] explores the image of God as enemy and its connections to "biblical laments"[195] from a literary perspective. On how the Joban poet accomplishes his task, Erickson comments, "Job exploits paradoxes and theological inconsistencies in the traditional images by employing a variety of devices, including mixing metaphors, altering context, disrupting standard forms, and making substitutions within typical syntagmatic relations."[196] Creative use of these literary devices reinforces the theological complexity and ambiguity one encounters in the face of evil and suffering. The situation defies explanation, particularly when God is the cause and the one suffering is innocent. Erickson explains the literary exploitation of the enmity of God as a metaphor that

> creates and communicates new constructions of reality by 'mapping' relations, properties and knowledge from the source domain onto the target domain. Job's God-as-enemy metaphor draws from three distinct source domains in order to highlight different aspects of his experience of divine persecution: human warfare, the legal proceeding and the divine realms of cosmic warfare and creative activity. Three sub-metaphors result. Through the war metaphor, Job is able to highlight his physical torment – the way in which he feels physically and immediately attacked by God. Through the legal metaphor, the poet highlights Job's experience of injustice at the hand of the deity. Finally through the cosmic metaphor, Job exposes the enmity of the creator as a betrayal of intimacy; with this metaphor Job also suggests that God has betrayed not only Job but all creation.[197]

Use of these three types of metaphors, war, legal, and cosmic, give the book of Job an unparalleled depth as it explores Job's response to his troubles.

The book of Job is not for the faint of heart. The portrayal of God an enemy in this book is far afield from the portrayal of God in Gen 1. Erickson acknowledges that the "metaphors

194. Erickson, "God as Enemy in Job's Speeches."
195. Ibid., 4.
196. Ibid., 29.
197. Ibid., 4-5.

which focus on God's treatment of Job are disturbing and at times even horrifying."[198] Clarifying the matter further, she suggests that "Rather than defending God with pious slogans and dead metaphors, Job engages traditional tropes, re-framing and even subverting them, in order to explore the meaning of suffering in the context of relationship with God."[199] For example, the hedge of blessing in the satan's accusation of 1:10 becomes a hedge of trouble that Job attributes to God in his opening speech in 3:23. The satan and Job both accuse God of doing too much in Job's life. The ambiguity of blessing/cursing on the lips of Job's wife in 2:9 becomes the reality of reversal in Job's life.

Erickson explains that this ambiguity is a powerful literary tactic because Job is righteous and there is no one else to blame. She writes, "God is exposed and left unprotected by orthodox theologies and traditions. There is no third party on which to blame suffering and injustice in the world. Theology that blames the victim—or the wicked—is flat-out rejected by Job. . . . For Job the buck stops with God. . . . Because Job does not personally experience God's justice, he concludes that God is not just."[200] His voice will not be softened, muffled, or silenced. His voice must be heard. If that voice makes his friends or his reader uncomfortable, so be it. He insists that the truth will not be suppressed. Someone has to take a stand against injustice. If God won't, Job will. Erickson surmises, "Job's trope of divine enmity not only speaks, but shouts, truth to power."[201] Job is much like protesters today who shout, "What do we want, freedom! When do we want it, now!" Job is determined to have his day in court. Erickson clarifies:

> Job is not content to hope for a better future or a deliverance that God may eventually extend to him. He demands justice in the present. His theology is not rooted in abstract piety; rather it is a theology that insists on justice in the immediate present for real flesh and blood individuals who are suffering, not because they deserve it, based on their

198. Ibid., 201.
199. Ibid., 202.
200. Ibid., 205.
201. Ibid., 207.

> righteousness, but because a commitment to justice on earth is integral to YHWH's character.[202]

Job voices an uncomfortable truth: injustice is rampart on the earth. Injustice perturbs him. God's role in injustice upsets him even more. Erickson elucidates saying, "The truthfulness Job speaks is that God is ultimately responsible for enacting justice. . . . When that justice is not apparent, it lies in the hands of the righteous not to defend God and blame the enemies, but rather to speak truth to the power that is God and demand that God intervene to restore justice."[203] Injustice is so pervasive, only God can make things right. Yet, God is woefully absent and seems unconcerned.

Job desperately seeks an answer. Since God takes no action, he "demands that it is the task of the righteous ones to remove the theological hedge—the safety net—from around God and call God to accountability."[204] This literary turn from the satan's accusation that God placed a hedge of prosperity around Job, to Job's insistence that God is a hedge of trouble around him, and further to removal of the underlying theological hedge around the divine is as revolutionary today as it was when the book of Job was written. It is so revolutionary that some prefer to defend God's actions, even when those actions, under any other circumstances, are unethical and immoral.

René Girard

René Girard sees Job as a victim[205]/scapegoat[206] of his community. Job has many enemies—human and divine. Although as Erickson points out, Job shares much with the laments of the Psalms, there is a significant difference. Girard explains, "In the psalms, only the victim

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202. Ibid.
203 .Ibid.
204. Ibid., 207-208.
205. René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).
206. Girard, "'The Ancient Trail Trodden by the Wicked:' Job as Scapegoat," *Semeia* 33 (1985): 13-41.

speaks. In the dialogues of Job, other voices make themselves heard."[207] In the book of Job these voices include not only the voice of Job, his friends, Elihu, God, the satan, and Job's wife, but they also include the voices of the community that derides Job.[208] Each of these voices, in its own way, participates either directly or indirectly in attacks against Job.

The friends are particularly cruel. It is enough to accuse Job of everything they can imagine. They make matters worse when they assume they speak for God. They "sacralize . . . [their verbal] violence . . . [against Job and engage in a] collective persecution"[209] that tries to subdue him. The reversals in Job's life reduced his social status. However, that is not enough for his friends. They want to reduce his emotional and spiritual status as well. They want him to deny his integrity. Determined to get their point across, they simply will not tolerate or understand Job's perspective. In the process of deriding Job they resemble people who make and live by their own rules. The friends can not see what they are doing to Job, or to themselves. They do not realize that their accusations have nothing to do with Job. Rather their accusations are projections of their fears and their narrow mode of thinking.

Job, who had it all, suddenly has nothing. The man who had everything sits alone, abandoned by his community. Job is the scapegoat of his community, the victim not only of loss of economic resources, family, and health, but also of his status in the community. He is a victim—a victim of a "sudden reversal of . . . public opinion."[210] The community that once revered him ignores him. If anyone pays attention, it is only to deride him. To their credit, the friends know that how Job relates to his community is an important measure of his righteousness. In the eyes of his friends, whose words accuse rather than provide comfort, Job is the "'oppressor

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207. Ibid., 17.

208. Noting that the respect of the community has turned into derision, in 30:9 Job complains bitterly, "And now they mock me in song; I am a byword to them."

209. Girard, "'The Ancient Trail Trodden by the Wicked:' Job as Scapegoat," 26.

210. Ibid., 19.

of the people'"[211] not their benefactor. Their focus is on externals that are visible. They do not realize that Job is not guilty of their accusations.

As is true for any group of people who participate in sacred violence, Girard explains, the friends "exercise . . . [this] violence against a victim whose innocence leaves no trace."[212] The friends' attacks on Job's sense of self are invisible, primarily to themselves. Fortunately for Job, he is strong enough to maintain his integrity despite his friends' thoughtlessness. Unlike his friends, Job is not clueless. He understands his friends though they do not understand him. Although he feels powerless to change his situation, Job knows what is happening to him. In 19:13-20 he describes himself as a scapegoat when he complains that his extended family and his friends have rejected him. Job, who was the epitome of godly success in his world, has now become the victim, the scapegoat whose only defense lies in the words of the very God who caused his troubles in the first place.

Phillippe Nemo

Nemo presents an unusual perspective on Job. In *Job and the Excess of Evil*,[213] he focuses on the anxiety Job experiences as a result of individual suffering. Deep suffering elicits a rush of conflicting emotions. Given his losses, it is no wonder that Job exhibits all of the emotions associated with loss—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Job seems almost schizophrenic. On the one hand, he wants an audience with God. On the other hand, he wants God to leave him alone. With such conflicting desires, his pain is simply too much to bear. Even if Job's questions go unanswered, the anxiety he feels is too much to endure. As Nemo

211. Ibid., 21.
212. Ibid., 27.
213. Nemo, *Job and the Excess of Evil.*

explains, Job's emotional pain is so great that "overcoming anxiety, and nothing else . . . [is the reason why] Job initiates a trial demanding justice."[214]

Since people and nature create Job's problems, from the outset it appears that "God . . . is . . . innocent of evil."[215] The Chaldeans, the Sabeans, and a fire from heaven destroy Job's possessions and their caretakers. A whirlwind kills his children. The reader, of course, knows for certain what Job only suspects. Job protests not his troubles but God's role in his troubles. His protest frightens his friends and threatens their faith. They don't want to hear what he has to say and try to silence him. God intensifies Job's misery by delaying the divine response. With no one to help or even empathize, Job reaches a point of no return. He has to have an answer. It is a matter of survival. It is a matter of life and death. Restoration is an impossible dream and Job's protests fall on deaf ears.

Nemo boldly suggests that when evil extends beyond all efforts at correction and protest, as it does with Job, then "'God' . . . personifies an evil in excess of the world."[216] God does not reply until Job, his friends, and Elihu have exhausted themselves and one another with provocative but fruitless debate. God's delay makes bad matters worse. God's delay is a cruel addendum to a situation that seemingly couldn't get any worse. Since God both afflicts and defends Job, Nemo concludes that "there would seem to be no reason to distinguish [between God and Satan] . . . God *is* Satan and Satan *is* God."[217] For Nemo the demonic comes full circle and points back to God.

Job's challenge, Nemo says, provides an opportunity for God to be his own true self because Job understands God's ambiguous role in his life. He knows that God is the source of

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214. Ibid., 39.
215. Ibid., 54.
216. Ibid., 101.
217. Ibid., 142.

both the good and the bad in his life. Recognizing God as the source of everything in Job's life, Nemo proposes what Job leaves unsaid that God and the satan are one and the same. The difference, ultimately, is that while God and the satan both exhibit a negative side, the satan exhibits only a negative side. God, on the other hand, also exhibits compassion. Job's self-imprecatory testimony is evidence not only of his self-confidence, but also of his confidence in God. Despite all he experiences, despite God's silence, Job believes that in the end everything will resolve "on the side of benevolence."[218]

David Penchansky

David Penchansky explores theodicy in the book of Job by examining various views present in the text.[219] Sometimes these differences are obvious. Most often these differences are quite subtle and easy to miss. Either way they create discord within the text. For example, in 1:10 the satan complains that God put a "hedge" (שַׂכְתָּ) of blessing around Job. In 3:23, Job complains that God put a "hedge" (יְסָךְ) of trouble around him.[220] Though similar in meaning, the change in context of the two verses conveys a subtle change in God's role in Job's life. The theological contrast in the two affirms the basic theological conflict between God as source of blessing and God as source of trouble, not just in Job's life, but by implication in the lives of all humanity. The difference is subtle and most readers miss this literary reference to the theological dissonance in the book of Job.

Multiple points of view, often in tension with one another, can be present in the same text, even when the reader is unaware.[221] Although people seek harmony and overlook

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218. Ibid., 144.

219. David Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God—Ideological Conflict in Job* (Westminister/John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990).

220. The NRSV translates 1:10 and 3:23 as "fence" and fenced in," respectively.

221. Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God*, 21-22.

dissonance, texts (biblical and otherwise) are not harmonious.[222] Penchansky highlights the difficulty saying, "harmonizing [viewpoints is problematic because it] . . . deliberately and systematically conceal[s] . . . dissonant voices, banishing them from the surface of the text only to find them lurking underneath."[223]

The book of Job certainly fits that description. Not only does each character represent a particular point of view, but some also portray different points of view at different points of the story line. For example, the patient Job of the prologue is very different from the impatient Job of the dialogues. This tension permeates every aspect of the book.

Tension within texts does not stand alone; rather, tension within texts reflects tension in their authors. Penchansky explores the connection, observing that textual conflict begins with a writer's inner turmoil. This turmoil may in turn be a reflection of an unrest present in the communities in which they live. Penchansky observes, "He or she writes out of a sense of pain, of dislocation, a feeling or wrongness in his or her universe, either to call attention to the wrongness, or to conceal it."[224] Even if writers attempt to hide their inner struggles, astute readers are still likely to surmise what precipitates the writing. He notes that "a person in harmony seldom writes. . . . It is when the pain of the writer resonates with the pain of readers . . . that a work is widely disseminated."[225] Many journal keepers can attest to this truth. Their journal writing is likely to flourish during times of great stress and is likely to be minimal or nonexistent during the periods of their lives that are relatively stress free. Many books on the bestseller lists often reflect an invisible pain that their writers make visible.

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222. Ibid., 9-26.
223. Ibid., 18
224. Ibid., 20.
225. Ibid.

For the book of Job, readers generally overlook dissonances within the text. This results in readings that consider the book to be "a sermon on steadfastness . . . [based on] 'the patience of Job.'"[226] Such readings are congruent with a theology that God rewards good and punishes evil. Job reflects cognitive dissonance, however, when the losses he experiences cause him to question this traditional theological perspective. Conflict within Job mirrors an ongoing reality in which "The intelligentsia in every age have an awkward and complex relationship with the ruling powers."[227]

Unlike some scholars who stop short of saying that Job blasphemes God, Penchansky posits that Job not only blasphemes God, but God affirms Job. To the reader's astonishment, God simultaneously "approves and disapproves of the piety and the blasphemy of Job."[228] In a similar vein, Bergant notes, "Job does not disavow his integrity. But then God did not speak about justice. This is a man who is in error, not in sin."[229] Not one of his friends is willing to relinquish his point of view. "Both Job and his visitors clung fast to what they believed was right, but Job was grounded in reality while they were caught in convention."[230] God's words to the friends in Job 42:7-8 are proof of God's approval of Job. Yet, this approval does not stand alone; it stands in tension with God's accusation of Job in 38:2. It is not a matter of either/or, but a matter of both/and. In other words, God's contrasting approval/disapproval of Job is an example of the cognitive dissonance present throughout this book. "God is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in Job's life but is not bound to human standards of compensation in managing it."[231]

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226. Ibid., 10.
227. Ibid., 25.
228. Ibid., 56.
229. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 32.
230. Ibid., 38.
231. Ibid., 35.

Penchansky argues for a comprehensive approach to interpretation that considers the whole of Job, both its prose and poetry.[232] For example, it is fascinating to know that although referred to as a work by a single author, the Joban poet, the book of Job likely is the work of many hands over an extended period of time, with some focused on the prose, some on the poetry, or a combination of the two. However, since the book comes to the contemporary reader as a whole, it is best to interpret comprehensively.

Since he is interested in the book of Job as a whole, Penchansky is willing to let "The conflict between the pious Job of the frame and the blasphemous Job in the center"[233] stand with their pictures of Job and God in disparity, rather than try to harmonize them. He is willing to 'let the text be the text'—forever dissonant, forever discordant. Penchansky suggests that Job was written to address the dilemma created by Israel's experience of the Babylonian exile in light of the tension between temple theology (a theology in which bad things could not, would not happen to Israel because of the protection of God and the temple) and covenant theology (a theology of rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience; similar to retribution theology). This view that failure to obey the commandments of God caused the exile enabled the nation to make the people of Israel, rather than God, responsible for the unfortunate turn of events.[234]

Penchansky further explores the idea that not only are the prose and the poetry in conflict, but the prose contains within it five dilemmas that set the stage for the drama of the poetry that follows. These five dilemmas are (1) a negative picture of God as being insecure in God's relationship with Job in particular and with humanity in general, (2) a satan who slyly plays on

232. Perchansky, *The Betrayal of God,* 38.
233. Ibid., 32.
234. Ibid.

this insecurity and sets both God and Job up for the events that follow, (3) a character, Job, who unlike the psalmists, neither protests his losses nor seeks deliverance from God, (4) the sudden resolution of Job's troubles, and (5) the problem of God as the source of Job's troubles.[235] These opening dilemmas create a set-up not only for Job, but for the question of theodicy as well.[236] Much like stalemate in a game of chess, in this scenario of dissonances, closure with a precise identifiable solution or resolution is impossible.

The tension of this set-up is implicit in the narrative but explicit in the poetic portion of the book. Job's friends, despite their failure as comforters, seem to understand at least one thing. Their accusations that he has mistreated the people of his community recognize the "social implications"[237] of what has happened to Job. If he, the greatest man of the east, the one who holds his community together sits on the dung heap, surely the fate of others is involved. If he suffers, surely, from the friends' perspective, the community may face the same fate. The friends of Job can not afford for Job to be in the right.

Penchansky suggests that both Job of the prose and Job of the poetry, each in his own way, "fight against a similar enemy"[238]—Job of the prose through submission and Job of the poetry through protest. He observes another tension in the text in the difference between the YHWH speeches where YHWH speaks "*in the* [poetic] *style* of the . . . [dialogues, but the content of his speeches is] *in the spirit* of the prologue."[239] The tone of God's survey of creation is similar to the initial description of Job's idyllic world. Yet, God's words are in the terse style that Job, his friends, and Elihu use to present their arguments in the dialogues. It is as though God is arguing with Job, but doing it ever so gently, ever so subtly. Much like people who never

235. Ibid., 37-38.
236. Craven, conversation with author, Fort Worth, TX, August 1, 2009.
237. Penchansky, *Tbe Betrayal of God,* 48.
238. Ibid., 40.
239. Ibid., 48.

raise their voices and keep their cool, even in the heat of an argument, God takes the position of one with whom Job can not argue. Most like Elihu, God makes lengthy speeches. Job can not get a word in, even if he were to try. God, though immanently powerful and present with Job, remains transcendent and off point, speaking to Job about creation, and never once mentioning the situation of Job.

Penchansky suggests that Job represents two conflicting pictures of both piety and integrity. In the prose, piety consists in right action, but in the poetry it consists of right, that is "honest speech."[240] Job does the right thing, but perhaps out of habit. He is so accustomed to having things go his way and having everyone cater to him, like God in the theophany of chs. 38-42, he can distance himself from it all. The sacrifices to God for his children certainly seem to be routine (1:5). His words of praise to God in the prologue seem almost unfeeling (1:21 and 2:10b). Although his reply to his wife is quite harsh, the narrator does not fault him for it. In fact, the narrator enthusiastically approves of Job and finds his behavior above reproach.[241]

Job's integrity remains in contrast to how everyone, including God has treated him. In the end, everyone has to acknowledge his integrity. The friends do so by accepting his sacrifices for them (42:9). The community does so by reconnecting with him. God does so by defending him. Penchansky writes, "By not attacking the integrity of Job, but rather by defending his own integrity, God accepts Job's definition of the problem."[242] What was the perception of Job?—that God was the source of his troubles. God neither concurs nor denies this role. God's refusal to testify is similar to "taking the fifth" amendment. Much like a person who answers a question by not addressing it, leaving the listener to figure it out for him or herself, God does the same with

240. Ibid., 47.
241. Ibid., 50.
242. Ibid., 53.

Job—leaving Job and the reader hanging, dangling in midair with only conjecture but no hard evidence with which to accuse God.

The lack of resolution at the end of the book attests to the absence of a consensus on the many dissonances in Job, including its dissonance regarding the issue of theodicy. Questions "are raised, clarified, magnified, but never answered. The questions themselves are questioned. The multitudes of answers cancel each other out."[243] For example, the writer implies a connection between God and the satan, but the specifics remain a mystery. Job speaks rightly, but the precise nature of what is right lingers unidentified. Job's wife is missing from the poetic section and the epilogue, but seems to have reconciled with Job because he has a new family. Job prays for his friends, but they never apologize for having treated him so badly. God never affirms or denies the role of the divine in Job's troubles. Neither God nor the narrator hints at the reason why God accepted the satan's wager.

Penchansky interprets the ambiguity of the book of Job as a reflection of a society where "people . . . [are] disillusioned . . . [traditional answers no longer work,] and ideological ghosts"[244] unwittingly undermine and support the prevailing worldview. With no specific historical setting, the sense of disillusionment best fits the period of the Babylonian exile. The senses of disillusionment and ambiguity are two of the many reasons why scholars theorize a late date for the writing despite its patriarchal setting. Eventually, this type of open-minded thinking created the space necessary for "The Israelite religion . . . [to be] transformed into what is subsequently called Judaism."[245]

243. Ibid.
244. Ibid. 61.
245. Ibid., 50.

Anthony Pinn

Anthony Pinn utilizes Black humanism in his approach to theodicy. He is cognizant that while the social dimension may have been absent from academic conversations about God, social dimensions of the question of theodicy have never been far from the minds of African Americans. In fact, questions of theodicy necessitated a shift in African American theology from North American theology, a shift that acknowledges the humanity and equality of all persons, with a focus on God as deliverer and special emphasis on Jesus Christ as a member of the trinity.[246] Although he acknowledges theistic approaches to theodicy, Pinn dismisses the God question in order to spotlight a humanistic perspective. He rejects theistic approaches because in this view "God condones the suffering of Black Americans without being held responsible for it. Granted, the actual acts are the result of human misconduct; yet who made this misconduct possible? God?"[247] Not only does the theistic perspective condone suffering but it also "maintains the possibility of divinely sanctioned oppression."[248] For example, the prophet Ezekiel regularly approves of war and its consequences as a strategy for making God's name known in not only in Israel, but in surrounding nations and ancient empires as well.

Pinn prefers to look suffering in the face and stipulates that "a proper understanding of suffering is unquestionably and unredeemingly evil."[249] Like Job, Pinn looks at evil and suffering without flinching and without offering excuses. In his book, *Why Lord, Why? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology,*[250] Pinn adopts a decidedly non-theistic, humanist approach. He defines his approach as a "Nitty-gritty hermeneutics . . . [that] holds no allegiance to Christian

246. Anthony Pinn, *Why Lord, Why? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 27.
247. Ibid., 99.
248. Ibid., 89.
249. Ibid.
250. Ibid., 9-158.

doctrine or theological sensibilities. . . . [It] maintains as its priority a sober look at life as it is, and it seeks hard truth unsoftened by theological obligations"[251] and is born of the experiences of African Americans. Pinn is especially concerned that theology works against the needs of African Americans.

Attributing evil to people, not God, Pinn stipulates that suffering is useless. He calls for an end to evil and suffering, demanding justice in humanity's dealings with one another. If human beings are responsible for suffering, together they can work toward change. If God is responsible for suffering, people are less likely to put forth the effort needed to make a difference.

As Pinn sees it, a sense of connection to others is enough to motivate people to make life better for everyone. According to Pinn, belief in God is not necessary and in some instances is a hindrance. He writes, "Moral obligation and proper ethical conduct are not dictated by God but by a genuine concern with unified existence—ontological wholeness on the individual level and communal relations. Achievement of this goal is not certain, however, humanity must work toward it nonetheless. There is intrinsic value in the effort itself."[252] Similar to the insight gained by raising questions, even when unanswered, there is value in improvement, even when the goal is elusive.

Pinn objects to the theology presented in the book of Job because of God's role in Job's suffering. He writes that Job "is an example of suffering permitted by God . . . [who] *indirectly* participate[s] in it."[253] It is God's role in suffering that Pinn finds distasteful. He is against suffering and the God who approves it. Connecting Job's plight to that of African Americans, he

251. Ibid., 19-20.
252. Ibid., 155.
253. Ibid., 99.

writes, “Due to the presence of a situation similar to Job’s–unmerited suffering—it is plausible to consider Black Americans modern Job figures.”[254]

Like Job, many African Americans doubt the goodness of God. Many notice that Job suffered and eventually he is restored. He talks with his friends about his situation, but this does nothing to alter it. He does not take the initiative to change his circumstances. Contrary to waiting for change or expecting someone else to change, Pinn insists that people take the initiative and do their part. He is convinced that people have a role in their own blessing. Too often, like Job, Pinn observes, “Many choose passivity because God’s role is uncertain, and so it is best to accept one’s fate as divinely orchestrated . . . [relying on] comforting assertions”[255] as a means of coping with discrimination and mistreatment. This is a self-defeating passivity that does not question the status quo or work toward a better *sitz im leben* for African Americans or for the community as a whole. Contrary to this perspective, Pinn seeks to empower people to work toward a better life for all. Of course, a better life for all requires the combined efforts of all.

Kathryn Schifferdecker

Kathryn Schifferdecker argues that contrary to many contemporary scholars who find God’s speeches irrelevant to Job’s inquiry, she finds the speeches are not only relevant, but they provide an important key to understanding the book of Job. She posits that creation theology, which acknowledges “the existence of chaotic forces like the Sea, Leviathan, and human wickedness, but that also limits these forces,”[256] is an alternative to traditional retribution theology. Creation theology provides new insights for the theological dilemma of Job

254. Ibid., 100.
255. Ibid.
256. Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3.

Schifferdecker explains that each section of Job has its own perspective on creation. The prologue presents a picture of a world that has no room for disorder. Consequently, "Only domesticated animals (sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys)"[257] appear in the prologue. The first lament of Job in ch. 3 is his attempt to "un-create" the world. Creation metaphors appear throughout the dialogues (chs. 4-27) in the debates between Job and his friends. Chapter 28 makes use of metallurgical metaphors in its discussion on wisdom. Chapters 29-31, Job's speeches about his past, present, as well as his self-imprecatory monologue, utilize positive and negative depictions of creation that match his positive and negative musings about his life. Elihu makes frequent use of creation images, especially in his "attempt to address the issue of injustice raised by Job."[258]

Job and his friends use creation images to support their arguments. God overwhelms Job by using only creation images. When Job and his friends utilize creation images, the images usually refer to people. God exploits creation images to discuss the cosmos, but not as references to human beings. As a result, it is clear that "the divine speeches do not directly address Job's situation: the problem of the suffering of the righteous. Instead, they offer Job a God's-eye view of creation in all its complexity."[259] God enlarges Job's view by encouraging him to see life from a broader perspective. God's use of cosmic images is much like seeing the earth from the perspective of cosmonauts. When cosmonauts report their impressions, they note how beautiful the earth is with its patches of blue and green and wonder why humanity has such a difficult time living in harmony. While a view such as this does not diminish Job's pain, it does put it in perspective.

257. Ibid., 25.
258. Ibid., 55
259. Ibid., 66.

After his encounter with God, Job has a different understanding of what it means to be human. He learns that evil and suffering are an inescapable part of life. He understands that the order of the world includes "human wickedness"[260] and that God "does not abolish chaos and evil ("natural" and human) but he does establish limits for them."[261] In the end, Job realizes that life goes on even as God's sovereignty includes forces detrimental to human beings.

Samuel Terrien

Samuel Terrien makes connections between the book of Job and the artistry one finds in creative endeavors including poetry, literature, philosophy, science, and music.[262] He explores the nothingness that Job experiences during his time of excruciating loss and pain, its connection to existentialism, and his movement beyond nothingness to an understanding of "life without illusion, but not with despair."[263]

Terrien's work helped propel the book of Job to its present status as a book that intrigues many readers. In the process of confronting "theological death,"[264] Job emerges with a new understanding of God and humanity. Connecting Job to the ills of today Terrien writes, "God is not a mere adjunct of a social group, be it Israel, the church, the United States of America or Western culture."[265] Raising questions and leaving them unanswered is the book's strength. As an open-ended text, the book of Job is able to speak to sufferers everywhere.

Imagining ancient audiences, Terrien surmises that "the poem was highly offensive, and it was preserved only because its prose framework upheld the orthodox doctrine of divine retribution . . . [and the idea] of faith at all cost."[266] Job's faith was indeed costly. Every

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260. Ibid., 118.
261. Ibid., 119.
262. Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence.*
263. Ibid., 15.
264. Ibid, 18.
265. Ibid., 20.

relationship, human and divine, is affected by his spiritual crisis, a crisis in which he confronts the possibility of theological death. Like many people today, he no longer tolerated traditional theology because of his experience. Traditional theology became for him an "intolerable theology."[267] Terrien explains, "In the process of struggling with this intolerable theology in the aloneness of a breakdown of all of his relationships, he comes to terms with the realities of life and the hiddenness of God, a God whom he experienced as both benefactor and enemy. Through the breakdown of these relationships and his sense of aloneness, Job learns to see life differently, though the writers never explain and leave the reader to wonder exactly what that difference is. Of Job's journey through nothingness Terrien writes, it is not just Job, but God as well, who encounters anomie:

> The theme of nothingness has . . . been developed with unsurpassed art. First in the soliloquy, Job was attracted by the kind of escapism which may be found in death, especially when its horror can be veiled for a moment by Egyptian illusions. Second, the theme reappears in an entirely different context. The intervention of society only reveals to Job the brutality of his isolation. Having confronted nothingness in relation to his own destiny, Job now faces a new kind of void—the lack of love. Third, it is God who faces nothingness. As Job's hope in a God who would not let him go regains a hold in his consciousness, and is contradicted by his observation, he comes close to affirming the reality of the love of God. But this affirmation is immediately withdrawn by the prospect of Job's own death, which only affirms the reality of the hatred of God. Still, love is not canceled by hatred. Just as Job, in the presence of his friends faced nothingness, so also God, in the scandal of Job's death, will look at the void. With this daring thought, the poet undoubtedly conveys another. In our kind of world, a true God must be a god who suffers.[268]

God's cosmic view of creation accomplishes its task. As the book draws to a close, Job does not deny his experience or what he knows of God. Rather, he upholds both his personal and "theological integrity"[269] because he accepts himself as is and God as is. Likewise, God accepts

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266. Ibid., 24.
267. Ibid., 25.
268. Ibid., 65.
269. Ibid,. 165.

Job as is. In the end, Job "transfigure[s] the perplexity of existence into the will to live triumphantly"[270] in spite of all that has happened to him.

John E. Thiel

John E. Thiel indicates that he is interested in issues related to theodicy. He prefers to call his perspective a theology.[271] Like Seibert, he writes of faith from a Christocentric point of view. His insights are, however, helpful to interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Thiel takes innocent suffering, an example of evil, seriously without assigning any role in it to God. He observes that "Innocent suffering . . . presents the greatest threat to faith in God, since this suffering particularly forces believers to face the possibility of God's complicity in evil."[272] Innocent suffering, of course, is the setting for consideration of questions about the nature of God in the book of Job.

Convinced that "God neither permits, nor wills, nor causes any kind of suffering at all,"[273] Thiel wants to disavow the idea that God has any relationship whatsoever to evil and suffering. He surmises that the question of God's role in evil and suffering has to be left open, not as a matter of mystery but as a matter of human "ignorance."[274] In other words, he prefers to let evil and suffering hang in the balance with no reference to God.

Thiel's view resembles Crenshaw's perspective that attributes the lack of definitive questions of theodicy to mystery and human ignorance. Like Beck and Taylor, he is very aware of the emotional burden of belief in God. While Beck and Taylor discuss the burden in terms of worship of one God, Thiel discusses it in conjunction with an objection to the idea that God is

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270. Ibid., 247.

271. John E. Thiel, *God, Evil and Innocent Suffering: A Theological Reflection* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 2-3.

272. Ibid., 11.

273. Ibid., 64.

274. Ibid., 98.

present with the suffering, preferring to think of God as "moral witness and . . . as the graceful power of salvation."[275] Like Chin and Pinn, Thiel sees the need for solidarity with and actions on behalf of persons who are suffering. Though thoughtful and provocative, like many, he gives little or no credence to much of what the biblical text says about God, including the conversations between God and the satan in the prologue of the book of Job.

Summary of the Scholars

It would be difficult to find scholars looking at the same text whose views are more different from one another than these. Like the prophets who spoke regularly, yet distinctively, of Israel's need to repent, Chin, Crenshaw, Erickson, Girard, Nemo, Penchansky, Pinn, Schifferdecker, Terrien, and Thiel distinctively address the book of Job. Taking issue with negative portrayal of God in the book of Job, Chin explores literary devices in order to determine just how it is that God who is so good and powerful is made to look so bad in this book. She seems astonished by the idea that the power of God which, ideally, should bring one comfort and assurance becomes a liability in Job. God's granting the satan permission to attack Job so fiercely coupled with God's silence is simply atrocious. She observes that the use of rhetorical questions by both Job and God creates an ideological verbal battlefield. Job asks questions that God will not answer. God asks questions that Job can not answer. This literary structure brings Job's agony to the forefront. God's questions sound much like a full court press that never lets up. God's silence juxtaposed to God's questions make God come off looking much like a bully.

While Chin approaches theodicy through examination of literary devices, Crenshaw approaches theodicy through examination of the thought process that comprises the attempt to account for evil. Whether they knew it or not, the writers and editors of Job put together a book

275. Ibid., 75.

that offers many human responses to the question of theodicy. Though Crenshaw does not apply every option to the book of Job, analysis shows that most of his eleven alternatives appear in the book. The story is old, but the theodic options could not be more contemporary. Evil persists. People continue to search for answers, but no one finds a universal solution. Sooner or later, nearly everyone is likely to ask the theodicy question.

Erickson, like Chin, examines literary devices that make Job such a powerful book. Erickson searches the text for connections to Pss, Jer, and Lam. Highlighting metaphors that the Joban poet uses related to warfare, courtroom drama, and the cosmos, she examines Job's theological dilemma. She surmises that enemies in Pss are human enemies, Jer and Lam address the topic of God as enemy, but it is Job that explores and develops this theme to its fullest. Erickson suggests that Job draws from the lament tradition, transferring descriptions of enemy behavior from human enemies to God. Erickson explores the theological implications of Job's theology. She acknowledges that Job questions neither God's power nor God's strength, but rather the goodness of God and that Job desires justice, not mercy from God.

Girard knows that Job is a troubled man. Whereas Chin and Erickson look at Job from an individualistic point of view, Girard, like Brueggemann and Crenshaw, looks at Job and his relationship to his community. Much the same as with Job's relationship with God, his wife, and his friends, something has gone terribly wrong in Job's relationship to his community. Girard suggests that Job is the scapegoat, the victim in his community, the one whom everybody "dumps" on. The one dumped on sits in the dump. Job has enough problems. The reaction of his community makes his situation even worse. No one offers a word of comfort. No one offers a shoulder to cry on, No one offers to lend a hand. The remarkable thing is Job is able to hold his own. Through it all, he never gives up. He never gives in.

For Nemo, the unthinkable is reality. He takes a position beyond looking at whether or not Job blasphemes and concludes that God's collusion with the satan in effect, puts God in the same position as the satan, that of being on the side of the demonic. Theologically speaking, is there anything more disturbing than to suggest that in Job's case at least, God is on the side of the demonic? Is there anything more disturbing than to suggest that if this is possible in God's relationship with Job, what about God's relationships with others and with the rest of the world? While God may later bless beyond measure, as God does in Job, what of the sufferer during the time of difficulty? If God is on the side of the demonic, where is the help? Where is the hope? Where is the balm in Gilead? Nemo's point exactly—there is none.

While Chin and Erickson examine rhetoric, Crenshaw examines possible solutions to the question of theodicy, Girard examines the scapegoat phenomena, and Nemo explores the demonic, Penchansky ponders the book's ideological conflict. He brings the cognitive dissonance in the book to the forefront. Insightfully, he sees the turmoil in the text as a reflection on the turmoil in the lives of the creators of the book. He examines not only Job's pain, but also the writer's pain. He suggests that not only does Job blaspheme, but God also approves the blasphemy. Yet, God also accuses Job. God and Job accuse each other. Much like a couple who fight by throwing barbs at each other, God and Job argue through their silences and their words. Penchansky understands that not only is there tension between God and Job, between Job and everyone, but there is also tension within God and Job. Interestingly, God is the one who takes the initiative to resolve the tension between Job and the divine. If the Babylonian exile is in view, there is tension in the community between those who trust in covenant theology and those who trust in temple theology. Like Chin and Erickson who examine the literary organizations in Job, Penchansky examines ideological positions in Job. Since words are the source of ideas, the

two approaches have close connections. For Penchansky, it is clear that tension exists on every level. The fact that these tensions are not resolved means that thousands of years later not only are people still searching, but the questions continue to invite consideration.

While Chin and Erickson look at Job from a literary perspective, Crenshaw probes possible solutions to the theodic dilemma, Girard examines the social psychology of the community, Nemo investigates God as demonic, and Penchansky studies ideological conflict, Pinn inspects the importance the social dimension. He prefers a humanistic point of view. While he specifically addresses African American theology, his perspective is applicable to any setting where suffering and evil occur. His main concern is ethical and he is committed to working toward a better quality of life for everyone.

Using a theological approach, Schifferdecker examines the book by looking at creation theology. What is fascinating about her perspective is her ability to detect different approaches to creation theology in each major section of the book. The movement from Job's attempt at un-creation in ch. 3 to God's verbal display of creation in the whirlwind speeches in 38.1-42:6 is a move from despair to healing and wholeness.

Terrien utilizes an existential approach to Job's dilemma. He is concerned with Job's experience of nothingness at the hands of an inexplicable God. Thiel attempts to remove God from evil, suffering, and death except for the desire to undo the damage done to humanity by all three.

Whether viewed from a literary, philosophical, social psychological, ideological, ethical, existential, or theological perspective, the question of theodicy in Job is unanswerable. God is the ultimate perpetrator. God is the enemy. Anyone who thinks that taking a different approach to the book might resolve the issues once and for all or make God come off looking better will be

sorely disappointed. One is still left wondering: How could God? Why did God? How would God? Only God knows.

Personal Perspective

Unlike Penchansky and other scholars who conclude that Job blasphemes God, I submit that Job stands on the precipice, that he does everything but blaspheme. Tension first appears in the opening lines of the prologue. If Job blasphemes, God 'loses the bet.' The absence of the satan in the epilogue suggests that the satan has indeed lost the bet. Why would a loser want to show up? Job has maintained his integrity despite his ordeal. His sense of self allows him to "endure . . . his own friends' attempts to blame him for his suffering."[276] God's confidence in Job and in humanity's willingness to engage in relationship with the divine without expectation of personal benefit stands. In the end, the absence of the satan in the epilogue signals that the satan's job is done. The satan followed God's commands to the letter, not once, but twice—once in 1:12 to spare Job's body and again in 2:6 to spare Job's life. The satan plays a pivotal role in Job's story. If there were no satan, there would be no Job. As antagonist, the satan, in effect, puts Job is a most difficult position. Job is not a guilty man, yet he must proceed, to act as though he is guilty if he is to find healing, wholeness, and a renewed relationship with God.

The Joban poet effectively uses and plays on the cognitive dissonance created by the realization that "The truth about God's relation to evil is uncertain."[277] From beginning to end, Job meets this dilemma without flinching. He remains true to himself, even when he refuses to be anything less than absolutely honest, even when it is painful for him, distasteful for his

276. Scott Black Johnston, "Where Were You When I Laid the Foundation of the Earth?" *Journal for Preachers* 31, no. 4 (2008): 11-12.

277. Atle O. Sovik, "Why Almost All Moral Critique of Theodicies is Misplaced," *Religious Studies* 44 (2008): 480.

friends, and inconceivable for his wife. A "similarity between the Satan and Job's wife may be that they both seem to be trusted associates of their counterparts, associates who enjoy a degree of confidence. Perhaps they are even alter egos, who can make explicit (a curse) what the majestic God and the righteous Job would never even contemplate."[278] He refuses to give in to his friends' empty counsel to pray, to admit guilt, and to confess theological confusion. His experience makes him uniquely qualified to understand that there is no such thing as a predictable unchangeable world or an unchangeable predictable God.

There is no need to resolve Job's dilemma. Humphreys explains that a tragedy such as Job's is not for the faint of heart. He writes, "Tragedy is not for those who cannot accept unanswered and unanswerable questions, or answers that are questions. Nor is it for those who will not question. Easy answers deny Job the recognition and sympathy his suffering and integrity demand."[279]

When the Joban poet closes Job, God does not explain how justice operates in the world or why Job was right. The author leaves the reader/listener hanging, wishing for a better conclusion, longing for a resolution. Yet, that is just the point of the conclusion itself—that there is no answer, no resolution—the question remains open for exploration without final solution. Cox affirms this lack of resolution:

> The author does not supply answers—not necessarily because he could not but because his purpose in writing was to force the reader to think for himself [*sic*] in the light of his own experience. It is a poetic statement, and no systematic theology can be derived from such since reading poetry is, after all, an aesthetic experience, and so each reader is individually involved in the an experience of human alienation and divine remoteness, and draws his own conclusions.[280]

278. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 24.
279. Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition*, 115.
280. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 31.

While the wager between God and the satan initiates the plot for the story, the wager is not really a wager at all, but a setting for addressing questions that will not go away. People continue to be intrigued by Job for this very reason. With Brueggemann's and Crenshaw's insights that theodicy is not just an abstract question about the nature of God, but a practical one about a community and its expectations of what life is and can be, it is clear that when one suffers, all suffer. Job's situation affects not just himself, but the lives of his children, members of his household, his wife, his friends, his extended family, and his community as well. Job's dilemma affects God, who remains silent, and the satan, who remains missing. No one can doubt the faithfulness of Job.

The book of Job presents a complex God capable of relating to an incredibly complex world. Job explores this phenomenon more than any other biblical book. Job takes God, humanity, and the unpleasant realities of life seriously. Questioning the status quo is not only acceptable, but an account of Job becomes part of sacred scripture, part of a life of faith, and engages conversation for generations to come.

Only the story of Judith, an apocryphal deuterocanonical book, comes close in its questioning of the status quo. Against all norms and traditions, Judith trusts God and takes matters in her own hands when others are immobilized by fear and unable to take action against the enemy of the community. In Judith 8:11b, she confronts the leaders' cowardice saying, "Listen to me rulers of the people of Bethulia. What you have said to the people today is not right; you have even sworn and pronounced this oath between God and you, promising to surrender the town to our enemies unless the Lord turns and helps us within so many days."

Recognizing the importance of taking action, she continues in 8:17, "Therefore while we wait for his deliverance, let us call upon him to help us, and he will hear our voice, if it pleases

him." Determined to do her part, whether she lives or dies, she goes into the enemy's territory and beheads their leader, Holofernes. Her actions save her entire community. Like Job, Judith has the courage to follow her own mind, to go against the grain, and to trust God, despite overwhelming odds and the pressures against her. On her account the Israelites survive.

Thousands of years later, people are still thinking about Job. The book does its job, keeping the conversation open to any who dare join the discussion. William Whedbee suggests that in the end, Job celebrates life, even as the book accepts its many ambiguities, incongruities, and paradoxes.[281] The lack of a completely satisfactory solution to Job's problem is actually its resolution.

281. William J. Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 278-288.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD AS ENEMY: AN IMAGE OF GOD IN THE HEBREW BIBLE (IN BOOKS OTHER THAN JOB)

Though the contemporary reader might wince, ignore, or otherwise disregard negative images of God, the reality is that the Hebrew text is replete with many images, including the negative image of God as enemy. Davies's thoughts in *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern*[282] provide an insightful lens for contemporary readers who want to understand the Hebrew Bible. Commenting on the importance of understanding biblical texts as memories rather than as history, he writes:

> The simple lesson to learn is that our stories about the past may well shed light on the past itself, but they shed a colored light as well as shedding light on us. A lot of what I have . . . been describing may have been once regarded as history, but we might now refer to it rather as cultural memory—stories about the past shared by people who affirm a common identity, and who use stories to reinforce that identity. The Bible's narratives are a supreme example of this: they convey above all a story of a national identity.[283]

Israel's identity was formed largely by its memories and understanding of God—an understanding that includes negative images of God. Memories are known to be highly selective and subject to forgetfulness. Even if well preserved through communal retelling, it is understandable that writers fill in what memory forgets. Biblical writers want to safeguard the meaning, not the details, of their memories. Anything, living and nonliving, can be used as a metaphor to make a point. Images transposed to different contexts transmit meanings that details never could. For example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel reverse the familiar image of a cup of blessing in Ps 23:5c to convey a message of abject destruction in Is 51:22, 65:11; Jer 49:12, 51:7; and Ezek 23:31-33. The power of this image expands exponentially since it is used to

282. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel.* See note 150 for full reference.
283. Ibid.,12.

communicate the idea of overflow and excess in contradictory contexts. Repetition and variety make the images of the biblical text unforgettable. Clearly, biblical writers utilize a variety of images to convey not only their memories, but also the "*meaning*"[284] of those memories:

> We will miss a lot of what the Bible contains if we do not see and understand the literal and symbolic meanings of the Bible's images. . . . The Bible is a book that *images* the truth as well as stating it in abstract propositions. Correspondingly, the truth that the Bible expresses is often a matter of truthfulness to human experience, as distinct from ideas that are true rather than false. . . . Images require two activities from us as readers of the Bible. The first is to experience the image as literally and in as fully a sensory way as possible. The second is to be sensitive to the connotations or overtones of the image. . . . The most elementary form of connotation is simply whether an image is positive or negative in association in the context in which it appears.[285]

Sensitivity to connotations and their meanings is especially important regarding biblical images of God. Attention to connotations, including emotional and psychological implications, provide "a fresh way to view the theological content of the Bible"[286] and increases "awareness of the Bible as a work of imagination."[287]

With connotations in mind, one might wonder why it is that the book of Job, the most radical book of the Hebrew Bible, is set outside Israel. Why is Job's story set in Uz (Job 1:1)? Why do "The disputants carry on their discussion solely on the level of (international) wisdom?"[288] Why are there no Hebrews or Israelites among his friends? Why is Elihu, who is present but not considered one of Job's friends, the only person with an Israelite ancestry? Why was Job the one who brought questions of theodicy, justice, and suffering on the forefront?

One possibility is that Job's questions, though important to Israel, could not be asked overtly. Job and his friends were outsiders. They were the bearers of what Israel understood to be

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284. Ibid., 9.

285. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), xiii-xiv.

286 . Ibid., xxi.

287. Ibid, xx.

288. Murphy *The Tree of Life*, 33.

negative images of God (as enemy) and of itself (as a nation that had lost everything). As with many people today, it seems that biblical writers wanted someone else to shoulder the responsibility of raising subversive, unsettling questions—the answers to which just might open a path to healing and wholeness for everyone. The image of God as enemy and the connection to the satan were far outside Israel's traditional theology. The story is also set outside Israel; its God-fearing, pious, wealthy protagonist is "the greatest of all the people of the east" (Job 1:3).

The image of God as enemy gives voice to an understanding that "God is not always experienced as a beneficent force, and sometimes honest expression of God's felt oppressiveness is necessary and even healthy."[289] Although the concept of God as enemy receives significant attention in the book of Job, the implicit idea surfaces in a variety of ways that point to divine anger, in many books throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Implicit References to God as Enemy

Psalm 44

The Psalms regularly call on God to intervene against one's enemies. The war-filled pages of the Deuteronomistic History expect God to referee all conflicts in favor of the Israelite community. Given Israel's familiarity and comfort with "enemy" language in human relationships, for me, the surprise is not that the text sometimes refers to God as "enemy" (צָר, אוֹיֵב, שָׂנָא, שׁוֹרֵר, and צוֹרֵר), but that it so seldom uses this specific language in reference to God and the divine/human relationship.

Even in the Psalms, most references to "God as enemy" do not use the word *enemy*. For example, Ps 44 is a complaint against God's poor treatment of Israel. This excerpt from the Psalm vividly describes God's role in Israel's troubles, even as the "psalmist . . . call[s] for

289. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 31.

[divine] help."[290] Accusation paired with a call for deliverance infers a state of "mental turmoil in which the protestor-psalmist is trapped."[291] Although God is acting like an enemy toward Israel, only the taunters and revilers (v. 16) are so specified. The responsibility for Israel's situation is placed directly upon God. Yet, God is acting like an enemy toward Israel.

[8] In God we have boasted continually,
and we will give thanks to your name forever. *Sē'lah*

[9] Yet you have rejected us and abased us,
and have not gone out with our armies.
[10] You made us turn back from the foe,
and our enemies have gotten spoil.
[11] You have made us like sheep for slaughter,
and have scattered us among the nations.
[12] You have sold your people for a trifle,
demanding no high price for them.

[13] You have made us the taunt of our neighbors,
the derision and scorn of those around us.
[14] You have made us a byword among the nations,
a laughingstock[b] among the peoples.
[15] All day long my disgrace is before me,
and shame has covered my face
[16] at the words of the taunters and revilers,
at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

[17] All this has come upon us,
yet we have not forgotten you,
or been false to your covenant.
[18] Our heart has not turned back,
nor have our steps departed from your way,

[19] yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals,
and covered us with deep darkness.

[20] If we had forgotten the name of our God,
or spread out our hands to a strange god,
[21] would not God discover this?
For he knows the secrets of the heart.

290. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Psalm 44: The Powers of Protest," *CBQ* 70 (1986): 686.
291. Ibid., 689.

[22] Because of you we are being killed all day long,
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

[23] Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?
Awake, do not cast us off forever!
[24] Why do you hide your face?
Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?
[25] For we sink down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.
[26] Rise up, come to our help.
Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love (Ps 44:8-26).

The psalmist is clearly in a quandary. In any other situation, requesting deliverance from the same source that caused the trouble in the first place would be considered sheer madness.

Hardening Someone's Heart

Sometimes God's enemy actions take the form of hardening someone's heart. The verb (קָשָׁה) conveys the idea. In the Hebrew Bible, there are 27 references to hardening of the heart. Of these, nineteen appear in Exod. Most mention God's role in hardening the heart(s) of Pharaoh and Egyptians.[292] The idea of God's hardening someone's heart begins in Exod with the contest between God and Pharaoh for deliverance of the Israelites from enslavement. In Deut 2:30 Moses reminded the Israelite community that King Sihon would not let them pass through his country on their journey to the Promised Land. The king's decision is attributed to God's hardening his heart.

With the divinely initiated takeover of the land of promise in view, Joshua's success is explained in Josh 11:20, "For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed, and might receive no mercy, but be exterminated, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." In this instance, as with Pharaoh during the time of Moses, God is described as hardening the hearts of Israel's enemies.

292. There are nineteen references to the hard hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians: Exod 4:21, 7:3, 7:13, 7:14, 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, 8:32, 9:7, 9:12, 9:34, 9:35, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10, 14;4, 14:8, and14:17. Most refer to God's role in hardening their hearts.

God acts as an enemy toward the inhabitants of the land of promise in order to make room for the Israelites. In 1 Sam 6:6, priests appeal to the Philistines to return the ark to Israel by asking, "Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had made fools of them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?" In Isa 63:17, Israel prays for God's help and wonders why God made them stray, "Why, O LORD, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?" Thus it is that God hardens both the heart of Israelites and non-Israelites alike. Although a hardened heart is a sign of an enemy, the word *enemy* is not used.

Divine Anger

In ancient times, the anger of the LORD (אַף־יְהוָה) was not the shock that it is for contemporary readers. Contemporary readers of the biblical text must keep in mind that "Israel's understanding of reality is not one that parallels . . . that of the majority of the modern Western civilizations. . . . Many of the occurrences of Yahweh's wrath in the lives of Israel, Judah, or her international neighbors would be seen today as natural events, or as the ordinary accidents of international intrigue."[293] Similar to the image of God as enemy noted previously, the anger of the Lord was part of the cultural milieu. Kari Latvus explains, "In many ways Old Testament writers share the concepts of the . . . [ancient] world where the anger of God is the rule and not the exception."[294]

According to Bruce Baloian "There are close to 380 verses in the Old Testament that speak specifically of divine anger. If these verses are divided into their appropriate pericopes, there are roughly 280 units of Scripture that specifically attribute anger to Yahweh."[295] Baloian's

293. Bruce Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 65.

294. Kari Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology: The Anger of God in Joshua and Judges in Relation to Deuteronomy and the Priestly Writings* (Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 89.

list includes a wide variety of nouns, verbs, and combinations used to express the idea of God's anger. The phrases "the anger of the LORD" and "the LORD's anger" are of particular interest in this study. The phrase "the anger of the LORD" (אַף־יְהוָה) appears twenty-nine times throughout the books of the Hebrew Bible[296] while the phrase "the LORD's anger" (אַף יְהוָה) appears thrice in Num and once in Deut.[297]

Generally, divine anger is connected to Israel's communal experiences. Latvus explains: "The theology of anger is deeply bound to experiences of national catastrophes and crises. . . . It can be called theology of experience because the values of the past are interpreted in the light of historical events and experiences. In deuteronomistic theology, unlike later chronistic writings, experiences of individuals have no specific importance, which means that we are dealing with the collective experience of an exiled generation."[298] For example, Num 25:3 reads, "Thus Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor, and the LORD"S anger was kindled against Israel." Israel's years of wandering in the wilderness are explained in Num 32:13, "The LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD had disappeared."

In a warning not to yield to the temptation of forgetting God in times of prosperity, the writer instructs Israel in Deut 6:15, "Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, because the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the LORD your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth." Judges 2:1-4 attributes the reason for Israel's failures in battle after the

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295. Baloian, *Anger in the Old Testament,* 73.

296. The phrase "the anger of the LORD" appears in: Exod 4:14, Num 11:33, 12:9, 25:4; Deut 6:15, 7:4, 11:17, 29:27; Josh 7:1, 23:16; Judg 2:14, 2:20, 3:8, 10:7; 2 Sam 6:7, 24:1; 1 Kgs 16:23; 2 Kgs 13:3, 1 Chr 13:10, Ps 106:40, Isa 5:25, Jer 4:8, 12:13, 23:10, 25:37, 30:24, 51:45, Lam 2:22, and Zeph 2:2.

297. The phrase "the LORD's anger" appears in: Num 25:3, 32:10, 32:13; and Deut 29:20.

298. Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology,* 86-87.

death of Joshua to God's anger. Isaiah attributes Israel's troubles with Assyria and Babylon to the idea that "the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people" (Isa 5:25). In Hos 8:5, God's anger burns against Samaria. All of these examples picture God's behavior as enemy-like, yet the word *enemy* is not used.

Know that I Am the Lord

Another phrase that is used to describe God's enemy-like actions is "you shall know that I am the LORD" (יִדַּעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה) as in Exod 6:7 or in an alternate form "you shall know that I am the Lord God" (יִדַּעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי אֲד֫נָי יְהוִה) as in Ezek 13:9. This phrase appears seven times in Exod, twice in 1 Kgs, once in Isa, and a remarkable fifty-seven times in Ezek for a total of sixty-six times in the Hebrew Bible.[299] Variations of this phrase appear an additional eighteen times as references to knowing that God is God (six of the eighteen appear in Ezek).[300] The phrase "will know that I am the LORD" appears twice.[301] In each case, "knowing" God is a consequence of devastating events or enormous blessings in Israel or the nations. Ezekiel uses the phrase repeatedly to emphasize that Israel will indeed worship one God, not many, after the Babylonian exile. Even when Israel is blessed it comes on the heels of traumatic events that occur in neighboring nations.

Examples of this appear in Exod in which both Israel and Egypt are to know God when the Israelites are freed from Egyptian bondage. In Exod 6:7, God affirms fidelity to the Israelites by declaring, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the

299. The phrase, "shall know that I am the LORD" or "shall know that I am the Lord God" appears sixty-six times in: Ex 6:7, 7:5, 7:17, 14:4, 14:8, 12:2, 29:46; 1 Kgs 20:13, 20:28; Isa 49:26; Ezek 6:7, 6:10, 6:13, 6:4, 7:27, 11:10, 11:12, 12:15, 12:16, 12:20, 13:9, 13:14, 13:21, 14:8, 15:7, 16:62, 17:24, 20:38, 20:42, 20:44, 22:16, 23:49, 24:24, 24:27, 25:5, 25:7, 25:22, 25:17, 28:22, 28:23, 28:24, 28:26, 29:6, 29:9, 29:16, 29:21, 30:8, 30:19, 30:25, 30:26, 32:15, 33:29, 34:27, 35:4, 35:9, 35:15, 36:11, 36:23, 37:6, 37:13, 38:23, 39:6, 39:7, 39:22, 39:28.

300. Variations that use "shall know" referencing that God is God appear eighteen times in: Exod 16:6, Num 16:28, Josh 3:10; Is 52:6, 60:6, Jer 16:21; Ezek 5:13, 17:21, 22:22, 34:30, 35:12, 36:36, 37:14; Hos 2:20, Joel 2:27, 3:17, Zech 2:11, and 6:15.

301. The phrase "will know that I am the LORD" appears twice in: Isa 49:23 and Ezek 13:23.

LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians." In 7:5, God says, "The Egyptians shall know that I am and the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them." Although not discussed in detail here, it is noted that deliverance presents numerous ethical problems regarding God's treatment of the Egyptians. Here, God acts as an enemy toward Egypt although the word *enemy* is not used.

I Am Against

The phrase *I am against* (אֲלֵיךָ) is always negative and appears six times in relation to the divine in Jeremiah, eleven times in Ezekiel, and twice in Nahum is always negative for a total of nineteen times in the Hebrew Bible.[302] Ezekiel's use of this phrase is especially noteworthy, for here, not only does God say "I am against you," but God's actions, through they be enemy-like, are the means by which nations, Israel included, will come to "know God." Although knowing God occasionally comes from God's blessing (for example, Ezek 28:25-26, 29;1-20, 34:20-31, 36:22-38), generally this knowing is produced by extreme tragedy and difficulty (for example, Ezek 24:15-27, 25:1-17, 28:20-24, 29:21, 30:1-26, 35:1-15), including much loss of life. Enemy-like behavior on God's part seems to be integral to making room—figuratively, physically, and spiritually—for what will in time become monotheism.

These words spoken by the divine against a variety of objects (Jerusalem, false prophets, and Babylon in Jer; false prophets, Tyre, Sidon, Pharaoh, Egypt, Israel's leaders, Edom, and Gog in Ezek; and Nineveh in Nah) are indirect descriptions of God as "enemy." Each instance carries a promise of destructive action precipitated by God. For example, in language similar to that

302. The phrase "I am against" as words of the divine appears in: Jer 21:13, 23:30-32; 50:31, 51:25; Ezek 13:8, 13:20, 26:3, 28:22, 29:3, 29:10, 30:22, 34:10, 35:3, 38:3, 39:1; and Nah 2:13, 3:5.

acknowledged by Weems to be both pornographic and problematic in Jer, Ezek, and Hos[303] referring to Israel, Nah 3:5-7 says of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria:

> [5]I am against you,
> says the LORD of hosts,
> and will lift up your skirts over your face;
> and I will let nations look on your nakedness
> and kingdoms on your shame.
> [6]I will throw filth at you
> and treat you with contempt,
> and make you a spectacle.
> [7]Then all who see you will shrink from you and say,
> "Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her?"
> Where shall I seek comforters for you?

Here, God is the referent creating havoc for Nineveh. God is against Nineveh. Yes, the prophet is perhaps expressing his own anger and prejudice toward one of Israel's enemies—one that eventually conquered Northern Israel—yet as presented in the text, the words are God's words. The expectation is that God would take Israel's side in the conflict with the Assyrian empire. God is Nineveh's enemy, yet the word *enemy* is never used.

While *against* is not unexpected in reference to Israel's enemies, this language, surprisingly, is also used in reference to Israel. In Lev 20:1-5, for instance God warns that if people sacrifice their children to Molech, they will be excommunicated from the community. A similar fate awaits persons who turn to mediums and wizards in Lev 20:6. Later in Lev 26:17, 22, 25, and 33, God continues to warn of the consequences of noncompliance. These consequences occur because God has taken a stance against disobedience. Each verse notes that God is the one creating mayhem in the community regardless of the form the destruction takes. Whether it be losing a war (Lev 26:17), wild animals (Lev 26:22), a sword (Lev 26:25), or scattering among the nations (Lev 26:33), ultimately God is the source. In Deut 2:15, the writer

303. Weems, *Battered Love,* 1-119.

ponders the death of so many in the wilderness and concludes, “Indeed, the LORD’s own hand was against them, to root them out from the camp, until all had perished.”

In 1 Sam 3:12, God moves against the house of Eli because Eli knew but did not try to stop his sons’ corrupt behavior. First Kings 16:1-7 records God’s word against the family of King Baasha because he led the Israelites astray. In Amos 3:1, the prophet declares that God has spoken against Israel, the very nation that God delivered from enslavement in Egypt. Obadiah notes the impartiality of God in v 16 when he writes that the “day of the LORD is near against all the nations.” In these instances, God is spoken of in third person. The third person reference puts some distance between God and the destruction at hand.

First person for God references such *I am against* remove the distance and make the point even more poignantly. Even in the Pss, where is it expected that God will take action against Israel’s enemies, the psalmist writes using a first person reference to the divine against Israel in Ps 50:7, “Hear, O my people, and I will speak, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.” Similarly, through the words of the prophet Ezekiel, God makes it plain where the divine stands, “therefore thus says the Lord God: I, I myself am coming against you, I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations” (Ezek 5:8). The word *enemy* is not used, but in each case, God’s actions are those one would describe as belonging to one’s enemies.

Explicit References to God as Enemy

The biblical text reflects that Israel had more than a passing acquaintance with the concept of enemy. Recurrent references to enemies lead to the conclusion that the idea of enemies was very much a part of biblical culture. Frequently at war with or controlled by other nations, Israel worked hard to hold on to its land, religion, and culture. Its struggle to hold on to its heritage and keep its human enemies at bay is visible on many pages of the Hebrew Bible.

The examples of implicit references noted above, collected and recorded over centuries, illustrate that Israel's idea of enemy was not limited to human enemies. Rather, writers often had God in mind when they used enemy language, even when they didn't use the word *enemy*. Regular occurrences of these images in connection with God indicate that Israel had an ongoing acquaintance with the concept of God as enemy. Familiarity with enemy language was due, at least in part, to the fact that, as noted by Jan Assmann, the movement toward "Monotheism demand[ed] emigration, delimitation, conversion, revolution . . . [a] radical break"[304] from polytheism. Radical cultural movements such as these are difficult no matter when or where they occur.

Despite the many implicit descriptions of God's enemy-like words and actions, specific mention of the word *enemy* generally refers to human enemies, seldom to God. There are five Hebrew words as we have seen[305] that can be translated as *enemy* in English: צָר, אוֹיֵב, שָׂנְא, שׂוֹרֵר, and צוֹרֵר. English translations variously use a variety of words, for example, adversary and foe as synonyms for *enemy*. The NRSV utilizes *enemy/enemies* 305 times in the Hebrew Bible,[306] *adversary/adversaries* 52 times,[307] and *foe/foes* 61 times.[308] Whether translated as enemy, adversary, or foe, most occurrences appear in the book of Ps (*enemy/enemies* 79,

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304. Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 118.

307. See p. 4.

306. The NRSV utilizes the word "enemy" (plural or singular) 305 times in the Hebrew Bible. A listing categorized by Law, Prophets, and Writings follows is as follows: Pentateuch (Total - 58); Gen (4), Exod (8), Lev (13), Num (8), and Deut (25); Prophets (Total - 114): Josh (11), Judg (10), 1 Sam (22), 2 Sam (15), 1 Kgs (9), 2 Kgs (3), Isa (7), Jer (21), Ezek (3), Hos (1), Amos (1), Mic (6), Nah (3), Hab (1), and Zeph (1); Writings (Total 143): Ps (79), Prov (7), Job (3), Lam (17), Esth (11), Dan (2), Ezra (2) Neh (8), 1 Chr (5), and 2 Chr (9). There are no occurrences of enemy/enemies in Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal, Song, Ruth or Eccl.

307. The NRSV utilizes the word "adversary" (singular or plural) 52 times in the Hebrew Bible. A listing categorized by Law, Prophets, and Writings follows is as follows: Pentateuch (Total – 10); Exod (1), Num (3), and Deut (6). Prophets (Total 24): Josh (1), Judg (1), 1 Sam (2), 2 Sam (2), I Kgs (4), Isa (6), Jer (1), Ezek (2), Amos (1), Mic (6), and Nah (3); Writings (20): Pss (14), Job (4), Ezra (1), and 1 Chr (1). There are no occurrences of adversary/adversaries in Gen, Lev, 2 Kgs, Hos, Joel, Obad, Jonah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal, Prov, Song, Ruth, Lam, Esth, Dan, Neh, Eccl, or 2 Chr.

308. The NRSV utilizes the word "foe" (singular or plural) 62 times as follows: Law (Total - 6); Gen (1), Exod (2), Lev (1), Num (2); Prophets (Total - 10); 2 Sam (1), Isa (3), Jer (3), Nah (1), Zech (2); Writings (Total - 46) Pss (35), Lam (8), Esth (2), 1 Chr (1).

adversary/adversaries 14, and *foe/foes* 35).[309] Sigmund Mowinckel suggests that there are strong connections between enemies and evildoers (פֹּ֣עֲלֵי אָ֑וֶן).[310] NRSV utilizes *evildoer/evildoers* 40 times in the Hebrew Bible, 20 of which are in the Pss.[311] Additional words for *evildoer/evildoers* include רָעִים, בְּנֵי־עַוְלָה, עֹ֣שֵׂי רָ֭עָ, עֹ֣שֵׂי רִשְׁעָה, אָדָם רָ֝עָ, עֹ֣שֵׂי רָ֭עָ, and עֹ֣שֵׂה רִשְׁעָה. Interestingly, *evildoer/evildoers* does not appear in the Pentateuch; all appearances are in the Prophets and the Writings. The next sections of this chapter will discuss six passages with with explicit references to God as enemy (1 Sam 28:16, Lam 2:4-5, Exod 23:22, Num 22:22, Isa 53:10, Jer 30:14).

1 Samuel 28:16

Of all the tragic figures in the Hebrew Bible (for example, Samson), Saul is perhaps the most tragic.[312] His story is particularly tragic because his efforts to communicate with God are futile and his story ends in suicide. Tapped by God to lead Israel through a major change—from theocracy to monarchy—Saul found himself responsible for a job that he did not want. Described as "Israel's reluctant king,"[313] he was thrust into a position that he did not seek. After an initial military success against the Ammonites, one inspired by God, his future looked bright (1 Sam 11:1-15). Thereafter, he seemed inept at almost everything he did, often driven by forces he could not control. Unimpressed with power and status, he seemed to undermine himself at nearly every turn.

309. While other NRSV occasionally utilizes additional English words (opponent/opponents, assailant/assailants 5, oppressor/oppressor 19, etc.) to convey similar meanings, this study focuses on enemy, adversary, foe, and evildoer as these appear most frequently.

310. Sigmund Mowinckel, "Psalm Studies" (unpublished manuscript, October 4, 2010) Microsoft Word file.

311. Evidoer/evildoers appear(s) in the Hebrew Bible 40 times as follows: Pentateuch (Total – 0); Prophets (10), 2 Sam (1), Isa (3), Jer (2), Ezek (1), Hos (1), and Mal (2); Writings (30) Pss (20), Job (4), Prov (5), 1Chr (1).

312. Sarah Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul: An Intertextual Approach to Biblical Tragedy* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

313. Tamas Czovek, "Three Charismatic Leaders: Part One: Saul," *Transformation* 19, no. 3 (July 2002): 171.

Saul was Israel's first king. He was appointed by the prophet Samuel to be the king of Israel after God reluctantly agreed that Israel's twelve loosely connected local groups could, like their neighbors, establish a monarchy in place of the theocracy (1 Sam 8:9, 22). Once in position, his conflicts with the God who chose him and the prophet who anointed him never seemed to subside. He led at a difficult time made all the more challenging because God and Samuel had mixed feelings about Israel's request for a king. They seemed to interpret Israel's request for a king not as a response to communal needs but "as a personal rejection of their leadership."[314] In 1 Sam 8:21 Samuel tells God about his misgivings regarding Israel's desire for a king. Not once, but twice God tells him to go ahead and honor the people's request (1Sam 8:9, 22).

Summarizing the challenges that Saul faces as king, Simcha Shalom Brooks suggests that new leadership was needed to address problems created by territorial expansion and population growth.[315] These challenges created a leadership void. The Judahite community recognized the need for a new leader because Samuel was too old and his sons were too corrupt to inherit his office (1 Sam 8:4-5). Saul was caught in the crux of a "tension between the old and the new."[316]

Tall, handsome, the son of a wealthy family (1 Sam 9:1-2), Saul seemed to have everything—everything that is, except confidence in God and himself. This lack of confidence would be his undoing. His lack of confidence causes him to make one bad choice after another, eventually destroying all of his relationships, and in the end, leaving him utterly alone. His descent ends with the story of Saul and the Medium of Endor (28:3-40). Things couldn't be worse for Saul.

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314. Howard, Cooper, "Too Tall by Half: King Saul and Tragedy in the Hebrew Bible," *JPJ* 9 (Nov. 1997): 7.

315. Simcha Shalom Brooks. *Saul and the Monarchy: A New Look.* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 38-40.

316. Czovek, "Three Charismatic Leaders," 170.

Saul and his army are fighting a losing a battle against a formidable enemy, the Philistines. Because Saul is at odds with God, Samuel, David, Jonathan and Michal, Saul's life is out of control. In a moment of hopelessness and despair he seeks advice from the occult. His misery escalates when God, through Samuel's ghost, finally speaks, announcing that Saul and his sons will die the next day on the battlefield (1 Sam 28:16-19). Saul's death could not have been more tragic. Cheryl Exum writes, "if Saul's deterioration were entirely his own doing . . . [its] tragic power . . . would be greatly diminished."[317] Exum describes the tragic dilemma, "At the core of tragedy lies the problem and mystery of evil,"[318] made even more troubling in the Bible because of God's role, direct or indirect, in it.

For David Firth the tragedy in Saul's death is visible in textual "allusions to his earlier failure"[319] that anticipate the tragedy of his death. For example, "David was defeating the Amalekites at precisely the same time as Saul was being defeated by the Philistines,"[320] a community that plagued his reign from the beginning (1 Sam 30:1-31:13). Saul was not able to claim victory against the Philistines—even when David stepped up to the challenge and killed Goliath, the Philistine giant. Another example is the "Reference to Samuel's robe . . . [which] alludes back to the garment torn by Saul in 1 Sam 15:27, which in turn alludes back to the garment that Hannah would bring Samuel each year (1 Sam 2:19)."[321] Saul's "decision to disguise himself before approaching the medium . . . signal[s] the end of his own reign as king."[322] The nighttime venue of his meeting with the "medium . . . allows him to disguise his illegal actions,"[323] and serves as a sign of the depth of his despair.

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317. J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 9.

318. Ibid., 10.

319. David G. Firth, "The Accession Narrative (1 Samuel 27 – 2 Samuel 1)," *TynBul* 58, no. 1 (2007): 78.

320. Ibid., 77.

321. Ibid., 78.

322. Kenneth M. Craig Jr., "Rhetorical Aspects of Questions Answered with Silence in 1 Samuel

Although Saul's story is tragic, it is also true that he also had moments of success and triumph. Gregory Mobley observes that the stories in 1 Sam 9-14 present Saul in a much more positive light than the stories in 1 Sam 15-31.[324] Brooks also writes in defense of Saul, suggesting that "Saul was depicted negatively not because he was a bad leader, but because he was the first king."[325] His story is written to show "all that was perverse in kingship"[326] and why Israel should not have a monarchy.

Perversity in the kingdom is at its worst when Saul consults the medium of Endor. Assured that Saul would not harm her, the medium complies with his request for a séance. When he is summoned to the unlawful séance, Samuel lets Saul know that God has become his enemy, that he and his sons will die the next day in battle with the Philistines. Overwhelmed by the news, at first Saul is unable to eat. Persuaded by the medium, he changes his mind and partakes in a shared meal. Pamela Reis suggests that this is more than a "meal . . . [for] nourishment"[327] and "hospitality."[328] This simple meal has dire meaning for Saul and his situation. It implies a foreboding that intensifies the tragedy of Saul's story. Reis proposes that this meal represents his descent into the occult. This meal is not only a "pact with the woman that might save his life and the lives of his sons,"[329] but a "rite of divination,"[330] a "sacrifice and covenant"[331] designed to "safeguard . . . her life"[332] as well. Reiss suggests that "Saul risks battle only because he believes

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14:37 and 28:6," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 229.

323. Ibid.

324. Gregory Mobley, "Glimpses of the Heroic Saul," in *Saul in Story and Tradition,* ed. Carl S. Ehrlich (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 80-87.

325. Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy,* 175.

326. Humphreys "The Rise and Fall of King Saul: A Study of An Ancient Narrative Stratum, *JSOT* 18 (1980), 75.

327. Pamela Reis, "Eating the Blood: Saul and the Witch of Endor," *JSOT* 73 (1997): 4.

328. Ibid., 14.

329. Ibid.

330. Ibid., 17.

331. Ibid., 20.

332. Ibid., 19.

he has enlisted the protection of the infernal deities."[333] His desperate momentary communion with the occult may explain why Saul made no effort to avoid the battlefront for himself, or for his sons.

Of all the words spoken by God or by prophets on behalf of God to an individual, none is as tragic as the words of 1 Sam 28:16, "Samuel said, 'Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy?'" Through Samuel, the silent God finally spoke just long enough to announce that none other than God had become Saul's enemy (עָרֶךָ). The break with God is final. His desperate hope in the occult is sadly misplaced. There is no possibility of restoration for Saul. The forgiving God of Exod 34:6-7 has no mercy or compassion for Saul.

Sarah Nicholson traces this deterioration in Saul's relationship with God.

> The language of Yhwh's attitude towards Saul has become progressively stronger throughout the story: God repented of making Saul king, he rejected Saul, he has become Saul's enemy. Now that the word 'enemy' has been used, Saul cannot hope ever to achieve reconciliation with Yhwh. It seems his sin cannot be forgiven and Yhwh has now arrived at the point of causing Saul's death.[334]

Continuing, Nicholson notes that the context supports translating עָרֶךָ as "'your enemy.'"[335] Clarifying she explains, "There is, however a semantic problem with the word ערך used to convey the idea of 'your enemy.'"[336] Referencing S. R. Driver, she mentions that "צר from the root צרר . . . is a cognate of an Arabic word meaning 'to harm,' and this צר corresponds to the Aramaic ע ר,"[337] both of which Driver "rejects [because he] argues 'there is no

333. Ibid., 20.
334. Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul, 98.*
335. Ibid.
336. Ibid.

337. Ibid. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel, with an Introduction on Hebrew Palaeography and the Ancient Versions, and Facsimiles of Inscriptions and Maps* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1913), 217.

other trace of this word in Hebrew.'"[338] Nicholson agrees that the problem is related to "an error of transcription."[339] She also concurs with J. P. Fokkelman's assessment, "The last word . . . [is] an Aramaicizing variant of sar."[340] In addition to its use in 1 Sam, translated as enemy or enemies, the root צַר appears eleven times (Gen 14:20; Neh 4:11, 9:27 [twice]; Ps 139:20; Isa 1:24; Jer 50:7; Lam 1:10; Ezek 30:16, and Dan 4:19). The word צָרַר appears seven times (Esth 3:10, 8:1, 9:10, 24; Pss 7:4, 6; 23:5). Given its usage in these passages with similar connotations, I conclude that the translation "enemy" is appropriate.

Although the relationship between God and Saul reaches its breaking point, things did not start out that way. Saul was, after all, the one God chose for a difficult task. God's ambivalence toward Saul becomes clear through analysis of Saul's encounters with God's spirit in 1 Sam. These encounters seem to run from one extreme to the other. In a positive vein, not only is God's spirit behind Saul's victory against the Ammonites, Saul also "is the happy recipient of divine predilection . . . [so much so] that a proverb actually arises: 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'"[341] This proverb is an indication that the community affirmed his leadership and his connection to God. On other occasions, his encounters with an "'evil spirit from Yhwh'"[342] cause him so much distress that David is summoned to soothe him with music (1 Sam 16:14-16, 18:10-11). Nicholson examines Saul's encounters with God.[343] She writes, "The role of the divine spirit is crucial within the narrative. It is used to signify Yhwh's disposition towards those on whom he sends it. . . . Yhwh's actions and motives appear to conflict with one another."[344] During a

338. Ibid.
339. Ibid.
340. Ibid., 99. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses.* II. *The Crossing Fates (1 Sam. 13-31 & II Sam 1* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 611.
341. Ibid., 78.
342. Ibid.
343. Ibid., 77-112.
344. Ibid., 78.

private anointing meeting (1 Sam 10:6), with only Saul and Samuel present, Samuel prophesies that God's spirit will come upon Saul and he (Saul) will prophesy. This prediction comes true when Saul meets a group of prophets and begins to prophesy with them (1 Sam 10:10).

His next encounter occurs in ch. 11 when, within a month of the public proclamation of Saul's kingship, the people of Jabesh-gilead are threatened by the Ammonites. The men of Jabesh-gilead wanted to settle the matter peacefully. However, Nahash the Ammonite menacingly responded, "On this condition I will make a treaty with you, namely that I gouge out everyone's right eye, and thus put disgrace upon all Israel" (1 Sam 11:3). Buying time, the people of Jabesh-gilead answer that if no one is found who will defend them within seven days, they would agree. When Saul hears of the matter, he is furious. Chapter 11, verse 6 reads, "And the spirit of God came upon Saul in power when he heard these words and his anger was greatly kindled." Saul gathers an army, and the people of Israel rout the Ammonites, killing most and scattering the survivors. Assured that Saul has the ability to lead (earlier he had hidden trying to avoid being anointed) the community called for the death of anyone who objects to his kingship. Saul declares that no one (in Israel) should die on a day that God had given victory to Israel (1 Sam 11:12-15). At this point it looks like all would go well for Saul after all.

Saul's relationships to God and the prophet Samuel are inexorably intertwined. Problems in his relationship with Samuel are likewise problems in his relationship with God. The first clash occurs during a conflict that arises between Samuel and Saul over responsibility for a sacrifice (1 Sam 13:11-12). This clash bodes ill for Saul. Although he does not realize it, this conflict between himself and the prophet is the beginning of his tragic end. The difficulty is recorded in ch. 15 where Samuel gives Saul the responsibility for completely destroying the

Amalekites.[345] This destruction is to include not only the warriors, but women, children, and animals as well. After warning the Kenites to withdraw from among the Amalekites, Saul gains victory; however, he let King Agag and the best of the animals live. God tells Samuel that he regrets having made Saul king. Angry, Samuel prays all night. Whether he is angry with God or Saul, the text does not specify. Perhaps, Samuel is angry with both (1 Sam 15:10-11). When Samuel realizes that Saul let King Agag and the best of the animals live, he tells Saul that obedience is better than sacrifice and issues the fateful words "For rebellion is no less a sin than divination and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king" (1 Sam 15:23). Samuel kills Agag and does not see Saul again until the day of the séance. Initially unknown to Saul, after this incident, Samuel privately anoints David as king. Neither God nor Samuel is pleased with the situation. Chapter 15 ends sadly, "Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Sam 15:35).

Saul's anointing of David is immediately accompanied by two moves of God's spirit. First, there is the departure of God's spirit from Saul to David. Second, a "harmful spirit from the Lord" enters Saul (1 Sam 16:13-14). Nicholson explains, the "key to Saul's decline is his affliction by this evil divine spirit."[346] Clarifying, she references Driver: "Driver comments that ובעתתו is a strong word which occurs in prose only in this passage; elsewhere it is found in poetry, chiefly in the Book of Job."[347] Nicholson concurs with Fokkelman "that God is

345. Ibid., 86.
346. Ibid., 99.
347. Ibid., 102. Driver, *Hebrew Text,* 134.

responsible for Saul's misfortune: 'It is Yahweh who holds Saul captive.'"[348] Although God remains in the background, the story makes it clear that, as with Job, God has a role in Saul's troubles. The ghost of the prophet Samuel has the same literary function as the satan in the book of Job. Both signal the reader of God's part in their (Saul's and Job's, respectively) predicaments.

Concerned about Saul's well being, his servants notice how this spirit torments him and suggests a search for someone, a musician skilled on the lyre, whose music could soothe him. David, described as not only handsome (like Saul), but also as a courageous warrior, a man gifted with words (1 Sam 16:18), leaves home, joins Saul's household and becomes not only Saul's musician but also his armor bearer. The narrator observes that initially things between Saul and David went well, "And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer" (1 Sam 16:21). Sadly, however, the relationship deteriorates. Scripture records two attempts that Saul made on David's life (1 Sam 18:10-11, 19:9-10).[349] These attempts occur while David is playing music for Saul. The first attempt is attributed to "a harmful spirit from God" (1 Sam 18:10). The second attempt is also attributed to "a harmful spirit from the Lord" (1 Sam 19:9).

The reader might expect that at this point in the story, any encounter that Saul has with the spirit of God is negative. Yet, once more Saul is described as having an encounter with God's spirit that causes him to prophesy (1 Sam19:3). Although not attributed to a spirit of God (good or ill), "Saul's behaviour [*sic*] becomes increasingly disturbed, as do his relations with those who

348. Ibid., 103. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 134.
349. Ibid., 103.

are closely connected with Yhwh (Samuel, David and the priests). He has the priests of Nob slaughtered"[350] (1 Sam 22:9-23).

When David kills Goliath, the Philistine giant (something that Saul and his company were too afraid to do), David's success as Saul's armor bearer and military commander creates a growing tension in the relationship between the two leaders. This tension is symbolized by the fact that "David is no longer able to alleviate Saul's misery"[351] with his music. David is still a skilled musician, but Saul turns his focus from the beauty of the music to his ill feeling toward the musician. Insecure, Saul despises the women's admiration for David's military exploits. Feeling threatened by "the women's song, 'Saul has killed his thousands and David his ten thousands,' . . . Saul becomes obsessed"[352] with eliminating David, "his healer . . . whom . . . initially . . . [he] loved so much."[353] Saul can hardly think of anything else. His obsession is so great, he "neglects his battles with Israel's enemies to search for David."[354] He is determined to eliminate David because he sees him as a threat to his leadership and his dynasty. His attempts on David's life, along with estrangement from his son Jonathan (his heir apparent who made a covenant with David), and his daughter Michal (David's wife who helped him escape from her father Saul), drive him further into his madness and further away from God. Among his relationship failures, estrangement from God is the one that pushes him over the brink. W. Lee Humphreys explains, "As the human relationships with his retainers and family deteriorate, his isolation is underscored by a divine silence that in the end drives him to Endor and the spirit of Samuel."[355]

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350. Ibid., 104.
351. Ibid., 79.
352. Ibid.
353. John A. Sanford, *King Saul: The Tragic Hero: A Study in Indivuation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 68.
354. Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul*, 81.
355. Humphreys, "The Rise and Fall of King Saul, 79.

God's ambivalence toward Saul and preference for David is plainly visible. Despite Saul's desperate plea, God, who readily responds to David, remains silent. God affirms to Saul through "the drawing of lots[356] that Jonathan had eaten a bit of honey, unaware of Saul's decree not to eat. Saul would have killed his own son had not level heads in the community prevailed and insisted that contrary to Saul and God, Jonathan did not deserve to die for simply tasting a bit of honey.

It is clear that "despite Samuel's assertion of Saul's rejection Yhwh still tolerates Saul's status as [king and as] military leader."[357] God, it seems, prefers a process of "slow elimination."[358] Nicholson summarizes this ambivalence when she writes, "There is . . . great ambiguity concerning Saul's fate: how can he have been rejected by Yhwh from being king and yet his kingly function still be tolerated by Yhwh?"[359] Saul does not want to "step down from his throne"[360] and God does not insist. With two kings on the scene, one actual and one in-waiting, God "create[s] a situation of political [and personal] instability, which has the potential [of not only dethroning Saul but planting seeds that will] . . . lead to division of the kingdom."[361] Division takes place years later after the death of King Solomon and eventually leads to the Babylonian exile, which in turn brings about the end of the monarchy.

Loyalties in the kingdom are divided with some loyal to Saul, others to David. Saul is paranoid. David is anxious. Pressures mount and Saul, wounded in battle, takes his own life rather than fall into the hands of the enemy for "it would have meant disgrace for himself, his

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356. Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul,* 95.
357. Ibid., 86.
358. Barbara Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *BibInt* 11, no. 1 (2003): 5.
359. Ibid.
360. Susan M. Pigott, "1 Samuel 28: Saul and the *Not* So Wicked Witch of Endor," *RevExp* 95 (1998): 436.
361. Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul,* 90.

people, and Yahweh"[362]—a terrible price to pay for God's ambiguity toward Saul and the monarchy. How things had changed—"The king whom the Israelites had demanded to lead them in battle (1 Sam 8:20) would drag them instead to their defeat."[363] Boyd Barrick, presents an alternate view when he posits that "Saul died a coward's death . . . vainly begging an anonymous subaltern to dispatch him lest he be captured alive and tortured."[364]

A contemporary reader might surmise that Saul was desperately looking for love 'in all the wrong places.' Unable to find affirmation in any relationship, divine or human, he is, in the end, utterly alone—dying in "total isolation from both men and his god [*sic*]."[365] Little did he know that residents of Jabesh-gilead, cared enough to risk their lives to recover his body and those of his sons from the Philistines as an act of kindness because earlier Saul had protected them. Nicholson explains:

> This . . . is significant since Saul is a Benjaminite with Gibeah connections whose first action as king is to protect the people of Jabesh-gilead, the city that had not taken part in the battle against the Benjaminites and who consequently forfeited all their virgins in a fresh outbreak of civil war. The new king [Saul] of Israel is therefore rejoining the breaches between the groups that had fought one another before Israel had a king. Crucially, Saul enters into this rejoining of breaches at the prompting of the spirit of God, and after his victory against the Ammonites Saul refuses to have his opponents put to death.[366]

Saul's story comes to a tragic end, following his desperate encounter with the Medium of Endor. "Feel[ing] alienated"[367] and abandoned by God (1 Sam 28:4-6), despite the fact that earlier Saul himself had outlawed the occult, he consults a medium and requests that she bring up the spirit of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 28:8). Consulting a medium is horrific. It is even "more

362. Sanford, *King Saul: The Tragic Hero*, 118.
363. Pigott, "1 Samuel 28: Saul and the *Not* So Wicked Witch of Endor," 439.
364. W. Boyd Barrick, "Saul's Demise, David's Lament," *JSOT* 73 (1997): 29.
365. Humphreys, "The Rise and Fall of King Saul," 83.
366. Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul*, 100-101.
367. Reis, "Eating the Blood: Saul and the Witch of Endor," 5.

reprehensible"[368] because Saul himself is the one who banned the occult from the land (1 Sam 28:3). In his moment of unrelenting despair, "Saul, the one whose heart trembled with fear at the Philistine threat, was fearless when it came to disobeying Yahweh's law."[369]

Saul's story is inevitably connected to the stories of those around him. The tragedy of Saul's life is designed, in part, to make David, who had his own ambitions, troubles and weaknesses, look like a hero. In reality, though, "David and Saul . . . [are] foils for each other,"[370] each with his own struggles and challenges. Yet, with their stories intertwined and juxtaposed to one another, the text repeatedly favors David, a "man after his [God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14b). Like a sibling constantly compared and found wanting, the text gives the impression that no matter the situation, Saul is not equal to the task.

In many ways, Saul is in a quandary. He finds himself with in a "position . . . [with lots of responsibility with little] authority." [371] Instead of being able to act on his own with authority and independence, he is too paralyzed to take definitive action. Saul is expected to do the best he can and at the same time "yield to the authority of Samuel."[372]

Finally, in a matter of life and death, "Saul acts for himself."[373] At his encounter with the medium of Endor Saul "learn[s] something painful."[374] In this final scene "stunted dealings between king and deity do not change very much at the end, do not reverse in any dramatic way. Saul does not call out for God and God does not make any new moves"[375] toward reconciliation with Saul. There is a sense in which in the end, Saul cooperates with God. Unlike most humans,

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368. Pigott, "Saul and the *Not* So Wicked Witch of Endor," 437.
369. Ibid., 438.
370. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 20.
371. Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition*, 33.
372. Ibid.
373. Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) 464.
374. Ibid.
375. Ibid.

he was told when and where he and his sons would die. One might think that having been told he and his sons would die on the battlefield the next day, Saul would do anything he could to avoid going to battle or putting his sons in harm's way. Not Saul, he doesn't resist; he cooperates. After failed attempts to connect with God, he does not resist. In effect, he sides with God, his enemy.

John Sanford sees Saul as a person on a tragic journey toward individuation. He explains, "Individuation is the . . . lifelong process . . . that seeks to bring about the development of a whole personality."[376] Saul's desperate search for God at the séance with the medium of Endor was not just a search for guidance, it was a misguided despairing attempt to connect with God. His attempt to connect with God without Samuel was a step toward an "indivuation"[377] that always eluded him. According to Sanford, Saul's endeavor to communicate with God "on his own . . . [was an unwelcome] challenge to the authority structure established by Samuel"[378] who did his best to "uphold the old and constrict the emerging new"[379] structure and leadership style. Given the ambivalence of God and Samuel, it is no wonder that "the new order is unable to take root."[380] Sadly, the monarchy carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. Like Saul who was unable to imagine his life without kingship, Samuel could not imagine not being in control. As a result, "Samuel has his own self-interest in the king's failure."[381]

Saul's visit to the medium of Endor was an expression of his desire for a "greater relationship"[382] with God. His desire to communicate with God persists, even though "God has never spoken directly to Saul and the means for indirect communication are not only dwindling

376. Sanford, *King Saul: A Tragic Hero*, 122.
377. Ibid.
378. Czovek, "Three Charismatic Leaders," 173.
379. Ibid., 180.
380. Ibid.
381. Moshe Reiss, "Samuel and Saul: A Negative Symbiosis," *JBQ* 32, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 2004): 42.
382. Sanford, *King Saul: A Tragic Hero*, 124.

but also changing sides."[383] Despite being ignored by God, when Saul saw Samuel, he "bowed in obeisance,"[384] signaling his respect for Samuel and for God.

Job and Saul both experience the silence of God. Unlike Job who talks until he could talk no more, except for intermittent attempts, Saul gives up the struggle. God eventually answered Job, perhaps because he talked so much. Saul and God stopped talking to each other. Saul's story is a reminder that encountering God has its own risks. His story is a reminder that every story does not have a happy ending. Once Saul and God clash, there is no hope. Saul's tragic ending is tragic not only for himself, his sons, and his people, but also this is also a tragic story about God. Saul's tragedy is God's tragedy because God is clearly complicit in the story, sending a harmful spirit upon Saul (1 Sam 18:10, 19:9). If Saul is not in relationship with God, neither is God in relationship with Saul. Lack of communication not only stifles relationships, but it also ends them. God is Saul's last hope. If God does not come through, who will? If the effects of having God as enemy in the life of an individual are this devastating, what happens when God is an enemy to an entire community?

Lamentations 2:4-5

Given that Lam is Israel's communal lament over its losses during the time of the Babylonian exile, it is not surprising to find God as enemy language in this book. God is identified as the enemy (אוֹיֵב) in Lam 2:4-5:

> [4] He has bent his bow like an enemy,
> with his right hand set like a foe;
> he has killed all in whom we took pride
> in the tent of daughter Zion;
> he has poured out his fury like fire.

383. Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable," 21.

384. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, E .E. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 217.

> [5] The Lord has become like an enemy;
> he has destroyed Israel.
> He has destroyed all its palaces,
> laid in ruins its strongholds,
> and multiplied in daughter Judah
> mourning and lamentation (Lam 2:4-5).

The communal nature of Lam is a reminder that "when any part of . . . [a community] is injured, the whole body really does suffer and calls for compassionate attention, intervention, and healing."[385] This book itself is just such an intervention. Lamentations poignantly reflects the "misery and distress"[386] of loss, knowing that ultimately, God is its enemy. God is the reason for Israel's trouble. Surprisingly, throughout all five chapters, "the human perpetrators – the Babylonians – are never named. . . . YHWH [alone] . . . is . . . the soldier drawing his bow and training it on his own city (2.4-5; 3.12-13)."[387] The loss is so great, no one but God could be responsible.

The emotional burden that Judah felt when its capital city Jerusalem and its Temple fell to the Babylonians could not have been greater. Tod Linafelt comments, "A more relentless brutal piece of writing is scarcely imaginable."[388] Concerning Israel's memories of this time, Claus Westermann writes, "These laments were preserved in the memories of the survivors, and they were written down."[389] They portray the horror of a terrible time.

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385. Nancy C. Lee. *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From UR to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 195.

386. Johan Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, eds. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Boston: Brill, 2003), 411.

387. Edward L. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," in *The Problem of Evil and Its Symbols in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (New York: T and T Clark International, 2004), 38.

388. Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

389. Claus Westermann, *Lamentations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 232.

Lamentations, as a whole, consists of gut-wrenching, heartfelt grief over the destruction of Jerusalem[390] written within the constraints of the Hebrew alphabet. Although impossible to capture in English translations, "the Hebrew alphabetic acrostic is . . . the most striking feature of the first four songs. Even the 22 verses of the final song are a conscious echo of the Hebrew alphabet's 22 letters."[391] The songs are "representative of the breakdown of meaning"[392] in the community. Examining the reasons for the breakdown, Elizabeth Boase writes, "The breakdown in meaning comes from two avenues; the divine causality behind the events, and God's ongoing silence in the face of the current suffering."[393] The silence of God leaves the community hanging—longing for healing and wholeness. The silence of God means not only that God does not comfort Jerusalem, but also God does not "speak out in his own defense,"[394] nor does anyone else. Much like Saul and God, Israel and God are at an impasse. Israel's appeal to God remains unheeded.

Kathleen O'Connor calls God's silence "The Missing Voice."[395] God's voice, she writes, is the "One voice . . . who could proclaim light, hope, and a future."[396] Yet, God is silent. God does nothing to alleviate Israel's suffering. Commenting on God's silence, she posits, "The book's deepest yearning is for the missing voice, the Absent One, the God who hides behind the clouds."[397] Contrary to the psalmists, whose plaintive cries God often answers, in Lam God is hauntingly silent. As frustrating as it may be, for Israel and the reader, this silence depicts "a

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390. I listened to Lam on *The Bible Experience*—a dramatized reading of the biblical text by 400 African American celebrities. I could feel Jerusalem crying out as I listened. Sometimes I could hardly bear to continue.

391. Renkema, *Lamentations.* trans. Brian Doyle (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998) 49.

392. Boase, "Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering," 456.

393. Ibid., 456.

394. Frederick Sontag, "The Defense of God," *Modern Theology,* 1 no. 4 (July 1985): 292.

395. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and The Tears of the World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1970), 15.

396. Ibid., 84.

397. Ibid.

brilliant restraint that breathes power into the book."[398] If God were to intervene, the severity of the situation might go unnoticed. There is no recognition of the community's pain or its humanity. Israel is left alone to bear its sorrow and its situation alone. The lack of response portrays God as more cruel to the community than to Job to whom God does eventually respond. The remnant does return to rebuild the nation, but the exilic community does not know what the future holds. For now, there is nothing to do but give voice to the collective pain of a people estranged from its God.

O'Connor affirms the power of God's silence:

> Any words from God would endanger human voices. They would undercut anger and despair, foreshorten protest, and give the audience only a passing glimpse of the real terror of their condition. Divine speaking would trump all speech. The missing voice of God leaves suffering exposed. . . . God's silence in Lamentations leaves wounds festering, open to the air and possibly to healing. The benefit of exposed wounds is that they become visible and unavoidable.[399]

God's silence leaves room for Israel to have its say. The longer God is silent, the more desperate and forlorn the cry. Although God eventually answers Job, here, God does not respond to the community. There is no relief for the anguished cries of the community in pain. The emotional intensity of Lamentations's five poems precludes any possibility of denial or disregard of the community's agony. Bergant suggests that there are at least four audible voices in Lam: (1) the narrator, who reports the disaster; (2) Daughter Zion, the city itself, personified as a weeping mother; (3) the man, a representative figure of the typical sufferer; and (4) the poet, who gives Israel its voice.[400] Once their pain is exposed, the "The voices of Lamentations urge

398. Ibid., 85.
399. Ibid., 85-86.
400. Bergant, *Lamentations,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 15-16.

readers to face suffering, to speak of it . . . to honor the pain muffled . . . [that is] crying [out] for . . . attention."[401]

Through its cry of excruciating, incomprehensible, unrelenting pain, Lam is addressed to this ever silent God. The lament is more than a cry of pain. It is the voice of "resistance." [402] It is a voice that "protest[s] . . . boldly and publicly stating that YHWH has acted against [the city] . . . with excessive violence and anger." [403] In protest and determination to be heard, "Israel asserts its voice, its selfhood, regardless of the consequences. In the daring honesty of unedited speech, Israel reclaims its dignity, making possible a viable future with YHWH."[404]

The lament is designed to keep communication open, even when one of the conversation partners—God, is silent. Though God is silent, these laments "were intended to be heard, first and foremost, by the One to whom they were directed as prayers, by the One who is directly addressed in them: God"[405]—the same God who is the source of the trouble, the same God who, it was believed could reverse the suffering. In an almost schizophrenic plaintive cry, not unlike the desire abused persons have for continued relationship with an abuser, Israel, like Job, longs for a hearing before God (Job 13:22, Lam 5:22).

The words of Lam convey not just a cry of pain, not just a protest, but also an accusation against God for being so merciless, unconcerned, and uncaring. Johan Renkema writes, "the poets' [*sic*] are aware that this inhuman reality must be a source of great tension in YHWH and they hope that he [God] will be unable to endure their plight"[406] (Lam 2:20-22). Or as he phrases

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401. O'Connor, *Lamentations and The Tears of the World*, 95.

402. Robert Williamson, Jr., "Lament and the Arts of Resistance: Public and Hidden Transcripts in Lamentations 5," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, eds, Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo, 67-80 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

403. Ibid., 80.

404. Ibid.

405. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 86.

406. Renkema, *Lamentations*, 70. There is a general consensus among scholars that Jeremiah did not author

it later, "The realiszation [*sic*] that, in the midst of this disaster, God has actually turned against himself, begins to feed their hope that he [God] will finally turn their sorrow and affliction around . . . even . . . though there can be no absolute certainty"[407] that God will do so. Lamenting without restraint, the author(s) appeal to this tension in YHWH, hoping, believing that YHWH's anger, wrath, and rejection will end and that YHWH's compassion will prevail.

In a work titled *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations,*[408] Carleen Mandolfo argues convincingly that Lam is Zion's response to a silent God. She posits that with God silent, "Daughter . . . Zion is denied any subjectivity and moral agency because [as] in the prophetic texts God is unwilling to enter into genuine dialogue with her."[409] Explaining her perspective, she "argue[s] that it is hermeneutically and theologically illuminating (and ethically satisfying) to read Lam 1 and 2 as Zion's response to the closed and finalized portrait painted of her in the prophets, as her attempt to reclaim agency."[410] Insightfully she observes that contrary to what one might expect:

> Zion's complaint makes almost no specific request of YHWH. Unlike Job she [Zion] does not even demand a response. Rather self-expression seems to be both the function and the *telos* of her discourse. The only explicit request she makes comes at the end of Lam 1, when it seems the injustice of her situation gets the best of her and she pleads with YHWH to wreak the same punishment on her enemies that she had to endure.[411]

Asking neither for comfort for herself nor for God to make sense of what has happened, her plea for vengeance is a request that blames neither God nor herself. Mandolfo clarifies that the nature

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Lam. Most usually, the poet is described as one who stayed in Israel while the nation faced the catastrophe of the Babylonian demise (587 BCE).

407. Ibid., 410.

408. Carleen R. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogue Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

409. Ibid., 3.

410. Ibid.

411. Ibid., 103.

of the "request . . . shift[s] the blame away from YHWH. With talk of vanquishing enemies, God is in his comfort zone."[412] Is it any wonder, therefore, that God does not answer?

Even so, the silence of God is unbearable. "Five times in Lamentations we are told that Zion has no one to comfort her"[413] (Lam 1:2, 9, 16, 17, and 21). Although the poems in Lam provide no resolution for the crisis, they do provide a means of expressing the emotions associated with it. Westermann reflects, "Just as pain and suffering are characteristic of human existence . . . so also the expressing of pain is intrinsic to life as we know it. Lamentation is the language of suffering."[414]

Lamentations opens with the wailing of the city, personified as a weeping widow in 1:1-2. Wailing is occasioned by "The fall of Jerusalem . . . a clarion call to . . . re-thinking Hebrew religion . . . [a response to a] catastrophe [that] could well have been fatal."[415] In the Psalms, the specifics of the stress generally are unnamed, "vague and only instinctively perceptible." [416] To the contrary, "the dreadful horror of Lamentations is quite clearly related to the downfall of Jerusalem and Judah in 587 and the period following immediately thereafter."[417] Lamentations is the cry of a community "Disabused of all illusions."[418] The wailing is a deep anguished cry that will not be silenced because "the loss of community with Yahweh and . . . the shame and reproach of defeat"[419] is too great to be ignored. Like a child whose incessant questioning finally solicits a response, the nation refused to silence its pain, a pain intensified by

412. Ibid., 105.
413. Ibid., 104
414. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 89.
415. Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), 63.
416. Renkema, *Lamentations*, 69.
417. Ibid.
418. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 65.
419. Ibid., 77.

"the reproach of the enemy and neighbour [*sic*] who delight in mockery and revel in the punishment of Israel."[420]

This was no ordinary loss. It was the death of a nation, the death of a people, and the death of faith in God as deliverer. If Israel did not exist, who would take a stand for worship of their God? Israel's loss would be a loss of blessing for all the earth. The magnitude of defeat "was of such world-shaking import for Israel that it could be described as the Day of Yahweh."[421] The concept of the Day of Yahweh allowed Israel to connect stories of its past, the troubles of its present, and its hopes for future. Leaders lived in exile. Cities lay in ruins. The Jerusalem Temple was no more. Famine, like a vise, gripped the land. It seems that the destruction was complete. The desolation of the people mirrored the desolation of the land.

It was indeed the end of the world Israel knew even though life continued and "history was still in process."[422] Is there any hope? Can anything be done to change the situation? Is anyone listening? Does anyone care? Where is God? What happened to God's promises? Is this God too weak to defend even a small nation like Israel? Is there any possibility to rebuild? Is there anything left to preserve? Who would carry on if everyone who remained died of starvation? What would become of the next generation? Where are the leaders who would take Israel to its promised, yet, unfulfilled future? There would be no answers until the time of mourning was complete. The Day of Yahweh is a powerful metaphor that allows biblical Israel to grieve its present troubles and examine its "past [while simultaneously calling for God's judgment] . . . upon the enemy nations in the future."[423] Legacies of the past, realities of present, and visions of the future held the community together in the midst of trial and turmoil.

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420. Ibid., 78.
421. Ibid., 84.
422. Ibid.
423. Ibid., 85.

The wailing continues in 2:4-5, bemoaning the almost unbearable thought of God's acting like an enemy. In 3:38, there is a depiction of anguish caused by knowing that, ultimately, both good and bad come from God. The few brief words of comfort in 3:21-26 may seem to usher in a hoped for restoration, but these verses are such a small part of the book, hope for something better might seem like a cruel joke. Six short verses can not erase or compare to the magnitude and horror of all that has happened. Knowing that God had a hand in the matter makes it even more difficult to come to terms with the situation. No wonder the wailing is so pitiful, so pathetic.

Almost from the start in 1:5, the lamenter makes it plain that God is the source of the suffering. Making the matter even more explicit, the lamenter reiterates again and again (1:14-15, 17-18; 2:1-2, 5, 7-8, 17, 20; 3:37-38; 4:11, 16) that God is responsible for Jerusalem's troubles. Renkema addresses the problem, "Given the fact that YHWH to all intents and purposes is the only God in the faith of Israel, the idea that bad things also come from Him has to be reckoned with."[424] This reckoning means that a "question is raised as to the relationship between this suffering, the people who are forced to endure it, and YHWH."[425] The experience of loss was particularly painful because for centuries, temple theology had promised God's unswerving care would protect Jerusalem from each and every foe. Temple theology gave the false impression that Jerusalem was invincible, especially since only Judah was all that was left after an earlier onslaught by Assyria. Judah owed its "stability . . . [to the continuing existence of] the Davidic dynasty."[426] With its leaders, dead or in exile, temple theology—a "deeply rooted dictum of faith had been profoundly discredited."[427]

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424. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 410
425. Ibid.
426. Ibid., 414.
427. Ibid.

Temple theology is the communal side of retribution theology, in which prosperity and a pleasant life are to be expected if one is obedient to God. A life full of troubles is the lot of anyone who sins and is disobedient. The biblical text simultaneously accepts and rejects both temple theology and retribution theology. O. Clark Fielding affirms the ability of the biblical text to hold contradictory viewpoints when he writes, "It is one of the marvels of the Old Testament that it contains not only the over-simplifications of the Deuteronomic standpoint, but also their rejection by those who had suffered too much to be able so lightly to justify the ways of God to man."[428]

While the blessings of temple theology were thought to be unconditional and independent of any action on the part of the nation, retribution theology is based on an explicit system of do's and don'ts that begins with the Ten Commandments ascribed to Moses in Exod. These teachings were later expounded upon in Deut, a book written to encourage holiness and ethical dealings in the community. The summary of blessing and cursing in Deut 27:1-30:29 suggests that quality of life is determined by Israel's response, positive or negative, obedient or disobedient to God.

Madipoane Masenya affirms that retribution theology and temple theology are really two aspects of the same issue.[429] In both, one is apt to identify with and hope for good things in life. In retribution theology, blessings are expected in the life of an individual and/or the nation in return for living righteously. In temple theology, blessings are expected for the entire nation of Israel due to God's unfailing protection. Both are attempts at a pleasant predictable life. Neither perspective is willing to consider that life is largely unpredictable, that trouble comes even in the

428. O. Fielding Clark, *God and Suffering: An Essay in Theodicy* (Derby: Peter Smith [Publishers] Limited, 1964), 61-62.

429. Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Jeremiah," and "Job: An African Reading" in *The African Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Hugh R. Page, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 147-156 and 237-241.

life of the righteous, and that good is possible even in the life of the unrighteous. Given the dualistic nature of this type of thinking, since God is thought to be the source of blessing, neither easily names God as the enemy, even when trouble arises. Both may describe God's actions as those of an enemy, but directly referring to God as the enemy is quite rare.

On those rare occasions when this image is used, it provides a metaphor for reflection as well as a means of coping with disastrous turns of events. While simultaneously addressing its ultimate cause, the wrath of God—a wrath that depicts just "how deeply God hates sin,"[430] the divine is "identified as the force behind the destructive acts directed against the people of God."[431] The lament was a means of coming to terms with this wrath of God—a wrath, "not . . . [believed to be] permanent"[432] or irreversible. The words of Lam are a call for "God's mercy . . . [despite having been led] to the brink of extinction."[433] This is not just an abstract intellectual matter. It is a matter of life and death, a matter of "profound existential distress"[434] that "raised the question of the relationship between their God and the misery with which they had been confronted."[435] Steadfast love and truth do not meet in such circumstances; righteousness and peace do not kiss contra Ps 85:10. Edward Greenstein explains:

> Divine wrath functions in ancient Near Eastern literature and beyond as a mechanism for initiating a process that leads to placating a deity. The underlying assumption is that bad things happen as a result of a god responding to opposition to the divine will. People seeking to alleviate their suffering perform acts that in their understanding will mollify the angry deity. Divine anger in this scheme can be just a response to injustice. But it can also be excessive and irrational. . . . Lamentations articulates a great deal of anger. . . . If it turns out that the anger is multifarious and intense, then it may be concluded that the articulation of anger against the deity is a means of calling into question the justice of God's punishment and the justness of God. [436]

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430. Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed. *African Bible Commentary: A One Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 850.
431. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 223.
432. Ibid., 224.
433. Ibid., 226.
434. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 415.
435. Ibid.
436. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," 32-33.

Divine wrath is often a response to sin, but this time divine wrath seems to go too far "for while sin is occasionally mentioned in Lamentations, that sin is never specified."[437] When sin is mentioned, the reference to the sin of the ancestors as in 5:7 sometimes has priority. This "vagueness . . . goes hand in hand with an alternative vision . . . of sin . . . namely, the dual focus on the transgression and its consequences, whereby the accent can be placed on either element."[438] In Lam, the wails of the distraught city are clearly focused on the suffering, not on the transgression. With suffering in the foreground and sin barely visible, this "treatment of sin . . . both identifies sin as the cause of God's actions . . . but also denies any sense of correspondence between sin and the suffering experienced."[439] The suffering is thought to be vastly out of proportion for any sins that might have been committed. Greenstein explains, "The idea that YHWH's punishment of Judah is way out of proportion is expressed . . . in 4:6, where the penalty imposed on the Judeans is suggested to be even greater than that of the most sinful city of all time, that of Sodom."[440] Sodom is mentioned as an indication that Jerusalem's suffering is thought to be "significantly more catastrophic."[441]

While the sin is not specified, what is specified are the devastating effects of "the catastrophe [that] are described [in great detail]: the siege of the city, the famine and disease that kill many and lead the survivors to desperate acts. The divine fire that burns temple and city . . . has no clear justification.'"[442] Of all the images of destruction in Lam, perhaps the most shocking are those connected to the children. Mandolfo describes the scene when she writes, "The cities' experiences as a whole . . . resemble a woman who is made bereft of her children, and who is left

437. Ibid., 34.
438. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 416.
439. Boase, "Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering," 451.
440. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," 38.
441. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 417.
442. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," 34.

unprotected by male kin. The effects of sin and powerlessness . . . dominate their emotional horizon."[443] Images "of compassionate women driven by the starvation of the siege to cook their own children for food"[444] in 2:20 and 4:10 and of "shriveled breasts that can no longer suckle the infants and the dying children in the city, (2.11-12, 19; 4.2-4)"[445] are designed to tug at the heartstrings—much as pictures of starving children do today. For Greenstein, the vivid picture of the "cannibalization of the children is . . . a case of divine wrath gone to the extreme – a terrible excess of 'justice', which is no justice at all."[446] These extremes of cannibalization and shriveled breasts were the result of "Jerusalem's . . . distress . . . the most profound element thereof being a terrible famine."[447]

Experiencing God's wrath to such an extent, where even basic needs go unmet, is just the opposite of what one expects at the hands of "A God who shows compassion and mercy (Lam. 3:32)."[448] This dichotomy is not based just on Jerusalem's experience, "The grounds of the tension . . . are to be found in the tension present in YHWH himself."[449] As noted previously, this tension appears as far back as God's self-description in Exod 34:6-7 wherein God summarized the divine character to Moses, noting that compassion and mercy are part of God's nature as is judgment. Hoping against hope for God's compassion and mercy to bring restoration, "The wretchedness they . . . were experiencing was so intense that it was impossible for them to square it with the God they had come to know."[450]

The God they had come to know was a God whose compassion and mercy outweighed manifestations of divine judgment. For example, not once but twice, in Exod 32:1-14 and Num

443. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion,* 106.
444. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," 36.
445. Ibid., 37.
446.Ibid.
447. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 412.
448. Ibid., 419.
449. Ibid.
450. Ibid., 427.

13:1-14:38, God relented, reversing a decision to kill the Israelites. In both instances, at Moses's pleading, God relinquished plans to destroy the Israelites and begin a new nation with Moses. In 2 Sam 24:16 and 1 Chr 21:15, this God reversed the divine decision to destroy Jerusalem after David's census. As recorded in 2 Kgs 20:1-6, 2 Chr 32:24, and Isa 38:1-21, this God gave Hezekiah a second chance at life. Surely, this God would once again take pity on Israel and prevent the Babylonian takeover, but that was not to be.

The lamenter felt some consolation from the fact that God "did himself injury by rejecting the [very] people he had chosen, by destroying Zion [the city] that he himself had built and by allowing the oppression and affliction of human beings, something very far removed from 'his heart' (Lam. 3:33)."[451] This is the tension reflected in the love of God versus the justice of God.

The lamenter focuses on the suffering, not the sin.[452] "The image of a [weeping] widow . . . at the beginning of the chapter [1], does not imply guilt."[453] Instead, the imagery of the weeping widow is an indication that not only has God "Betrayed [and] abandoned"[454] Jerusalem, but that also "there is no one to help her."[455] If God does not (or can not) help all hope is lost.

The lament is not just a means of expressing grief and eliciting empathy, the lament is a "vehicle for 'confronting' God"[456] This is not just a matter of "fate or coincidence, the people's suffering is directly related to the actions (or lack thereof) of God."[457] Despite the fervent outcry of the community, God still does not answer. If God remains silent, if God does not respond, the building up of the community from the days of Abraham and Sarah is all in vain.

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451. Ibid.
452. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," 35.
453. Ibid.
454. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 411.
455. Ibid.
456. Greenstein, "The Wrath of God in the Book of Lamentations," 32.
457. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 413.

In the book of Psalms, laments are almost always accompanied by words of praise and/or thanksgiving. The psalmists work though their problems and find a way to praise God. In the five chapters of Lam, there is only one verse of praise, 5:19.[458] In this situation, who can (or wants to) praise God? Who wants to give thanks? Give thanks for what? For death? For famine? For destruction? For devastation? No, this is not a time for praise. This is a time for lament, for complaint, for protest against God. Instead of praise, the lamenter appeals to God again and again, in vain, for relief and admonishes the community to do the same (1:11, 20; 2:18-19; 5:1, 21).

In the face of mass devastation, God's silence depicts a God who does not care—not even about the chosen ones. Greenstein puts the matter succinctly when he writes, "In general one can say that the images of God in Lamentations portray the deity in a rather unflattering light."[459] Yet, if God were to speak, what would God say? According to the prophets, this loss is Israel's fault. Any reminder of past disobedience would only make matters worse. Any word of hope could be misconstrued. In times like these, silence is the best answer. Yet, silence was not what Israel wants or needs to hear. The silence of God in Lam presents a stark picture in which "the God who destroys the city and the God who ordinarily defends and protects it are one and the same."[460] With God silent, the city continues to languish with no end in sight.

Posing negative images of God, such as God as "*enemy*," is a means of coming to terms with negative realities of life. There are too many losses, too many sad stories. One may long for a "happy ending,"[461] but that is not to be.

> The pain is insufferable and it is God who has inflicted that pain. At the point that it is believed that God has gone too far, God's justice ceases to be just. There is no happy

458. Renkema, *Lamentations*, 41.
459. Ibid., 38.
460. Ibid., 41-42.
461. Ibid., 42.

> ending in Lamentations – barely a glimmer of hope [in 5:21-22]. . . . The hope will have to be that God will at some time exhibit a more proper justice.[462]

Lamentations draws much of its power from its ability to "overtly question the appropriateness of the punishment meted out to the city/people (3:42; 4:6; 5:7)."[463] Boase observes, "The book does not attempt to answer all the questions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, nor does it say the final word. . . . In the end it finishes as it starts—in pain-filled anticipation of the divine voice and divine comfort."[464] Though there is no happy ending, Lam "closes with a poignant [rhetorical] question"[465] in which the community confronts God in an "appeal to God against God"[466] in 5:20-22 that leaves open the possibility that God, the enemy, may yet respond with mercy, compassion, and restoration: "Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure."

Exodus 23:22

Exodus 23:22 is part of God's extended message given to Moses on behalf of the Israelites at Mount Sinai subsequent to the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-31:16). In 23:20-22, God promises a leader, land (Canaan), and victory over opponents (the indigenous people who already live in the land). In 23:22, the divine promises to be enemy (אָיַבְתִּי) and adversary (צַרְתִּי) to all who oppose Israel: "But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." The key phrase, "then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries" (וְאָיַבְתִּי אֶת־אֹיְבֶיךָ וְצַרְתִּי אֶת־צֹרְרֶיךָ)

462. Ibid.

463. Boase, *The Fulfillment of Doom? A Dialogic Interaction Between the Book of Lamentations and the Pre-Exilic/Early Exilic Prophetic Literature* (New York: T and T Clark, 2006), 242.

464. Ibid., 243.

465. Ibid.

466. Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" 428.

is an indication of God's favor. Provided Israel follows the divine lead, God promises to take Israel's side in any conflicts with its neighbors. Douglas Stuart explains that in this passage (Exod 23:20-23), "the angel and Yahweh were one and the same."[467] This passage summarizes the expectation that the relationship between God and Israel was to be one of "loyalty to God by Israel and loyalty to Israel by God."[468]

God refers to the divine self as an enemy/adversary to Israel's opponents. Benno Jacob explains that the "verbal form" [469] I will be an enemy, (אֶיְבְתִּי) occurs only here. Stuart suggests that given the reality of "human imperfection, this kind of expectation is hard to follow, and it is not difficult to predict that Israel might fail to keep . . . [God's] commands fully. In effect, then a need for divine grace was created implicitly by such demands."[470] Israel felt matters had been unfairly reversed when God opposed not only other nations, but Judah and Jerusalem as well (Amos 1:-2:16).

Numbers 22:22

Numbers 22:22 is part of the story of Balaam, hired by Israel's Moabite foes, who changed his message of cursing into a message of blessing after an encounter with the Lord. In this passage, Balaam encounters both God and an angel of the Lord (sometimes thought of as a manifestation of God). Whether the scene speaks of God or an angel of the Lord, it is clear that God is the one directing all that happens. Jacob Milgrom clarifies, "The angel acts as the Lord's agent and never initiates any action on his own."[471]

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467. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2006), 543.
468. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 252.
469. Benno Jacob, *Exodus* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1992), 732.
470. Stuart, *Exodus*, 543.
471. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 190.

God's anger about Balaam's proposed journey results in God's becoming Balaam's adversary/satan (שָׂטָן): "God's anger was kindled because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him" (Num 22:22). With an ambivalence similar to that toward Saul, God's instructions to Balaam change from a commandment not to go with the Moabite representatives (Num 22:12) to a commandment to go with them (Num 22:20). Then, once Balaam is on his way, God becomes angry. In what is perhaps one of the strangest passages in the Bible, a donkey saw the manifestation of God before Balaam did. Protecting Balaam and herself by avoiding the angel of the Lord, tired of being beaten by Balaam, the donkey opens her mouth and talks in order to defend herself. In this case, God is acting as expected, as protector of Israel against the Moabites.

Dennis Cole clarifies, "That God would become angry and engage one of his servants on a journey directed by him follows the enigmatic pattern echoed . . . in the lives of Moses . . . and Jacob."[472] During Balaam's encounter with the divine, "God confronted . . . his rebellious state of mind—that state of mind that prevented him from seeing God's emissary in the road three separate times."[473] Dennis Olson adds "Joshua"[474] to the names of Moses and Jacob in his list of persons who had similar encounters with God. In this instance a female donkey recognizes encounter with the divine. Three separate times she recognizes what the prophet misses (Num 22:21-26).

Isaiah 63:10

Isaiah 63:10 appears in 3 Isaiah. This is part of a prayer of petition (Isa 63:7-64:19). The prayer recalls that God has blessed Israel with many acts of mercy and compassion. It depicts a

472. R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 389.
473. Ibid.
474. Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers.* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 144.

close connection between God and the community wherein God so identifies with the people that when the community is troubled, God is troubled. Despite God's kindness, the community rebels and God becomes the enemy (אוֹיֵב). The relationship is broken because of the community's disobedience. As with Lamentations, this prayer recognizes that God has become an enemy to the community because of its rebellion.

Recalling deliverance from Egypt and the blessing of God's spirit, the people call on God to be good to the community again. Recognizing God as Father, the petitioners wonder out loud why God "lets" (Isa 63:17) them wander away from God and God's teachings. Pleading with God not to abandon them, the community urges God to break the divine silence and restore the divine/human relationship. In this passage God is enemy, not to Israel's foes as promised in Exod 23:22, but to Israel.

Gary Smith explains, "the rebellion of the people led to God 'changing, turning' . . . from [being] a Savior (63:8) to being an enemy. . . . Thus instead of having steadfast covenant love, compassion, and goodness toward Israel, he [God] fought against them."[475] Similarly, Westermann comments that Israel's rebellion "causes God himself to change: he changes into his chosen people's enemy. The reason for this is his wounded holiness. . . . [and] things cannot go on as they are."[476] Paul Hanson writes that the wounded God, "Rejected by those he loved, the grief-stricken God responds with the passion of one who was deeply committed to the relationship: God 'became their enemy' (63:10)."[477]

475. Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66* (Nashville: B and H Publishing Group, 2009), 673.

476. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 388.

477. Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66.* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 236.

Isaiah 63:10 is one of the rare references to God's spirit in the Hebrew Bible. Other passages include Num 11:16-26, 1 Sam 16:14, Neh 9:20, Ps 51:11, and Ps 139:7.[478] Of note is "Ps 139:7 [which] connects the Spirit with the presence of God,"[479] contrary to Isa 63:10 in which mention of the Holy Spirit is a reference to God's absence.

Jeremiah 30:14

In Jeremiah, God as enemy language occurs in the midst of an extended depiction of Israel's restored future (Jer 30:1-31:40). Though surrounded by words of restoration, Jer 30:14 describes God as an enemy (אוֹיֵב) due to the community's rebellion. William L. Holladay's remarks make it clear that "Yahweh is involved in the damage the enemy has done to the people."[480]

F. B. Huey explains how it is that God has become an enemy to the beloved community. He notes that the nation's "allies (lit. 'lovers' cf. 22:20) had deserted Israel. . . . Judah had depended on many allies in the past, especially Assyria and Egypt. . . . The allies had failed in the past, but the people had not learned to put their trust in the Lord rather than in political allies. As a result, the Lord was treating Israel as an enemy."[481]

Commenting on Jer 30:12-17, John Bracke notes, "Jeremiah announces to God's people that they are abandoned and without support. . . . Still worse, this poem is clear that it is God who has inflicted the wound upon Judah."[482] He observes that the reference to God as enemy is designed to "emphasize God's harsh judgment and the hopeless condition of the people. . . .The

478. Smith, *Isaiah*, 672.
479. Ibid.
480. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 175.
481. F. B. Huey, *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 264-265.
482. John M. Bracke, *Jeremiah 30-52 and Lamentations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 6.

political and theological realism of these verses is blunt about God's judgment and leaves little room for optimism about the future of Judah."[483]

Personal Perspective

On many occasions, one is apt to hear someone commenting, "I would not serve a God who . . ." followed by a description of some type of divine "enemy" behavior. Whether explicit or implicit, a review of the biblical text indicates that, for whatever reason, sometimes, even if rarely specified, God acts in ways that are enemy-like. In these situations God acts in the very ways that one might have described saying "I would not serve a God who . . .". As unsettling as these images may be, they are part of the biblical text. In some instances, God is perceived to be the enemy either because God is silent or because God fails to act with favor toward an individual or community. In other instances, God's words and/or actions, even through an intermediary—whether human, animal, or angelic—are interpreted as being those of an enemy.

Of the six instances reviewed in this chapter, in two passages (1 Sam 28:16 and Lam 2:4-5) God's silence is that of an enemy. The remaining four instances (Exod 23:22, Num 22:22, Isa 63:10, and Jer 30:14), show that God's words are those of an enemy. What is striking is the variety of encounters in which God is thought to be the enemy. What is even more striking is the fact that each of the six occurrences is directly or indirectly related to times of war, the worst of times. Saul was in the throes of war with the Philistines (1 Sam). Israel lamented losing a war to Babylon (Lam). The promise of Exod is applicable to war. In Num, Balaam is caught in wartime negotiations between Israel and its enemies, Moab and Midian. The passages in Isa and Jer are part of the biblical corpus concerning the consequences of war and the consequences of the

483. Ibid., 6-7.

Babylonian exile. In the worst of times, God is viewed as the culprit who acts and speaks against Israel.

When God is silent, it is a testament of faith (or the height of desperation) for one to continue to praise, cry out to, argue with, or otherwise seek to communicate with an absent God—a God who does not answer—a silent God. Terrien writes about the significance and meaning of the silence and absence of God in his book, *The Elusive Presence.*[484] Whether in the life of an individual or in the life of a community, God's absence and God's silence are likely to be perceived negatively. Do the silence and/or the absence of God necessarily mean that God is an enemy? While the silence of God need not be negative, the problem is that in the case of an invisible God, silence is perceived negatively because "the lamenter has been cut off from the source of . . . life. Not only has he [or she] been deprived of the protection he [or she] expected from the Lord of history, but he [or she] has also been dispossessed of his [or her] divine filiality."[485] In moments of distress, it is easy to forget that the absence of God is "presence deferred."[486] If Saul and the lamenter bemoaned the silence of the "Hidden God" [487] as did the writer of Ps 22, then perhaps Balaam and the Israelite community (with the prophetic words of Isa and Jer) in mind, can be thought of as bemoaning the presence of the "Haunting God"[488] as did Job (e.g., Job 3:1-28) and the writer of Ps 139. The tension in these texts reflects not only a tension in humanity but also a tension in the One in whose image humanity is created as expressed in Exod 34:6-7. How can there be seasons of and reasons for lament if they are not first in the mind and heart of God?

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484. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978).
485. Ibid., 322.
486. Ibid., 323.
487. Ibid., 321-326.
488. Ibid., 326-331.

Since the word enemy is seldom used explicitly for God, but is frequently used in reference to humans, it seems that ancient writers of the Hebrew Bible may have had the same reluctance to consider God as enemy as do people today. Like Job, who stood on the precipice of blasphemy, biblical writers stood on their own precipice—seldom crossing it. Yet, sometimes, situations were so grim, so hopeless—they dared to cross. Their musings remain part of the biblical text because life is not always agreeable. The preacher of Ecclesiastes was right—there is a time for everything. One of the beauties of "enemy" language is that it is there when needed. Otherwise, if God is silent, and humanity is silent, what happens?

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD AS ENEMY: AN IMAGE OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The book of Job is an artful presentation, a prose prologue and epilogue with a long poetic center that surrounds thought-provoking ideological conflicts, contradictions, contrasts and paradoxes. One can see the contrast between the patient Job in the prose section and the impatient Job in the poetic core. The patient Job "accept[s] . . . his reversal of misfortune."[489] The impatient Job protests it. The book makes its points through a variety of literary genres, including lament (without the usual request for deliverance), lawsuit, petition, hymns, debate, oath of innocence, and wisdom teachings.[490] Literary devices include irony, sarcasm, repetition, mythical illusion, and inclusion.[491] This mix of ideological conflicts, genres, and literary devices contributes to the ambiguity of the book and allows it to address problematic theological issues.

Whether seen as comedy (Athalya Brenner,[492] William J. Whedbee[493]) or tragedy (Humphreys[494]), the variety of interpretive perspectives on the book of Job is a reflection of ongoing interest. Bruce Zuckerman presents an important insight in his book *Job the Silent—A Study in Historical Counterpoint*:[495]

> It may be appropriate to see (or hear) the book of Job—built as it is, over time—as not unlike a fugue. The tradition begins with one theme; then, as time goes on, another theme is scored on top of it, thereby forcing the original theme to take on a new harmonic role; then further themes are added in succession, again requiring the themes that precede to

489. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 28.

490. John E. Hartley, "The Genres and Message of the Book of Job," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on The Book of Job*, ed. Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 65-78.

491. Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job," 35-49.

492. Athalya Brenner, "Job the Pious?" in *The Poetical Books—A Sheffield Reader,* ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 298-313.

493. Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

494. Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition.*

495. Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent—A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

> give way and take a different role . . . the various layers of Job vary or tend to oppose one another, [yet] the contrapuntal relationship is still maintained. [496]

Like Zuckerman and Brackenbury Crook,[497] Carol Newsom also utilizes a musical metaphor, polyphony, to describe the movement in Job in *The Book of Job, A Contest of Moral Imaginations.*[498] Ideological movement is characteristic of the multiplicity of interpretations of Job. Again and again as the story weaves through ideas about conflict, the complaints of Job, and God's role in the story. Erickson comments:

> The difference between the characterization of God and the enemies in Job and Lamentations is that the poet of Lamentations maintains a working distinction between the foreign enemy armies and God. Job dissolves that distinction by omitting complaints about human enemies almost entirely. In Job's speeches there is no outside party to carry any of the weight of responsibility for the cruel and unjust treatment of Job. The culpability belongs to God alone.[499]

Scholars widely accept that, as with other biblical books, diverse perspectives surface. The Joban poet is not one person, but likely many. It is difficult to date this book. Although the core story of Job may be quite old, it does not appear in the canon until after 200 BCE,[500] Job is an important book because it explores the "mysterious core"[501] of life, both divine and human.

Ideological Criticism and Problematics in the Text

Interpretation of sacred texts is affected by changing ideological criticism, suitable to the needs of different times. An ideological approach allows one to consider a broad range of matters related to what is in, behind, and in front of any tome. Looking behind the text, one sees that the prologue and epilogue comprises an ancient story of testing and reward for patient endurance. In

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496. Ibid., 178.

497. Brackenbury Crook, *The Cruel God: Job's Search for the Meaning of Suffering* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 20.

498. Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job, A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

499. Erickson, 32.

500. R. Laird Harris, "The Doctrine of God in the Book of Job," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on The Book of Job*, ed. Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 157.

501. Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 230-231.

the poetic middle of the book, including chapter 28 (the poem on where wisdom is to be found), one finds conversations among Job, his friends, Elihu, and God as they considered the implications of the identities of God, humanity, and the relationship between the two. Looking in the texts, one recognizes that there may be historical connections, but the texts themselves represent a combination of memories and imagination that express belief in one God.

Looking in front of these sections with questions one brings from varying times and cultures causes one to realize that the writings have theological depth and emotional breadth to engage ongoing interpretation and conversations through the ages. Each reading community gleans what it is useful to the questions of its time. In the case of the book of Job, its international setting speaks to the writers' desire to make connections outside the community of Israel and to think beyond its traditional boundaries. The very names (2:11) of the friends of Job (Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite) suggest an international community that can be seen as an indicator that ethnicity was not barrier for Job.

In discussion of the image of God as enemy in Job, it is important to recall some of the ideological problematics in the text even though they are not the focus of this project. First, it is well known that the Hebrew of Job is the most difficult in the Hebrew Bible. Many of its words appear only in this book. This difficulty makes an obviously ambiguous book even more indefinite.

Next, it is important to be cognizant of other problems, including (1) the authors' endorsement of slavery, (2) sexist view of women, (3) elitist disdain for the poor, (4) privileges attendant on power, especially divine power, (5) causal connection between moral rectitude and prosperity[502] (6) enslavement of twice as many people,[503] (7) Job's self-imprecatory mind-frame

502. Crenshaw, "Some Reflections on the Book of Job," *Review and Expositor* 99 (Fall 2002): 589-595.

reinforcing the idea of "God as an unjust bully,"[504] and (8) use of rhetorical questions that increase Job's moral standing and put God on the defensive.[505]

The prose story comprises the writer's starting point for deliberations about God. The story centers on sudden changes in Job's idyllic life. Of course, some scholars, such as David Wolfers in *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job*, argue that Job serves as a representative of the community as a whole and that his losses allude to the Babylonian exile.[506] As Brenner observes, the poetic section was added to the traditional story as a way of expressing disagreement with the traditional wisdom of the day.[507]

Despite Job's desire to embrace a larger world, his testimony indicates that he longs to return to his status as the greatest in all the land. Issues related to possession of or lack of possession of material resources, that is, classism, are very much a part of the story. In ch. 30, even as Job sits in the dung heap, it is clear there are people he considers to be unworthy of sitting with the dogs of his flock. This use of *dogs* (Job 30:1) is a put-down of a group of people whom Job disdains. The disappearance of Job's wife's from the text after her words to Job in the prologue (2:9) and the fact that there are no other female characters in the book of Job point to gender issues and a dismissal of women as important conversation partners. These examples imply that classism and sexism play a part in Job's thinking.

As the story begins, in 1:3 the author describes Job as "the greatest of all the people in the east." Job is the quintessential leader. His greatness includes family, wealth, leadership in the community, and international connections. Job is clearly a powerful man who has ordered his

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503. Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 57.
504. Chin, "Job and the Injustice of God," 93.
505. Ibid., 97.
506. David Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).
507. Brenner, Job the Pious?" *JSOT* 43 (1989): 37.

world to meet his expectation of himself as a moral, ethical man. Conventional wisdom knows that when wealth is in the hands of a few, those who have less lead lives of severe economic want. Job's defense makes it clear that he is the powerful one that others look up to. He doesn't seem to leave room for others, except as an extension of himself and his role in the community. One wonders, did Job's economic wealth come at the expense of others? Did Job possess political power at the expense of others? From a communal perspective, these concerns would make Job less than heroic. Perhaps Job is in denial and has an inflated self-perception. Perhaps things are not as they seem. Although "Job's restoration does not obliterate his innocent suffering,"[508] it does re-establish his position as the greatest man in his community. With a twofold blessing, his position is even greater than it was before. Yet, his willingness for his daughters to share in his inheritance (Job 42:15) indicates that he is a man who sometimes lives beyond the conventions of his day. His daughters, though not his sons, are named in the story ((42:14).

Living with the Image of God as Enemy

As the story unfolds, Job's experience of unexplained reversals defies the usual explanation of divine retribution provided in the covenant model. With the idea of God's role as initiator of Job's troubles, indeed the idea of God as enemy, Humphreys gets to the crux of the matter when he asks, "How does one live with the savage god?"[509]

This basic question of "How does one live with the savage god?"[510] raises a multitude of questions as the book examines the premise that the relationship between God and humanity is complex, encompassing diametrically opposed portraits. This complexity emerges through the

508. Thiel, *God, Evil, and Innocent Suffering,* 26.
509. Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition,* 98.
510. Ibid.

multifaceted portrayal of the characters and their response to God as enemy. Job, the wife of Job, his friends, Elihu, God, and the satan— each has positive and negative characteristics. The portrayal of God and each of the characters in Job with positives and negatives fuels the complexity in the book and provides a window into his or her own relationship with God and how each copes with the savage God.

Job

Job's positive characteristics are present in the opening scene. In Job 1:1 the narrator describes Job as one who "was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." The text portrays Job as a righteous man—one whose actions and words are right, even his reactions to a series of major reversals that befall him in rapid succession—loss of material possessions, simultaneous death of his ten children during a windstorm, a debilitating illness, and estrangement from his wife. What else could go wrong?

This series of reversals in the opening chapters shows that Job's troubles get progressively worse. Before he can get a handle on one problem, here comes another and another. The reversal from being a person who has everything to one who has nothing creates a crisis that overturns the traditional idea that the world is orderly. Yet, Job copes commendably, until the burden gets to be so great he finds himself in a full-blown spiritual crisis, trying to make sense of it all. Job's world is thrown into chaos because his "conception [of God's justice] . . . that the weak should be protected, the upright should be rewarded, and the wicked should be punished"[511] no longer works. While in the throes of his spiritual crisis, Job becomes the skeptic's skeptic, one who has questions about God, humanity, and the relationship between the two.

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511. John Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 75.

Despite his piety in the prose of chs. 1 and 2, after sitting silently with his three friends for seven days, Job speaks from his despair. The poetic section begins with his cursing the day he was born in 3:1. His words of longing for and glorifying death in ch. 3 are so startling to his friends that their good intentions of being a comfort are quickly lost in theological arguments that deteriorate into painful unnecessary false accusations. These accusations portray Job in a negative light as one who is not righteous. If this portrayal proves correct, the satan's comments and questions about Job's righteousness in 1:9-11 and 2:4-5 are on target.

Job's response to God as enemy was to ask questions and struggle with the idea. His battle is long and arduous. His experience presents him with new information about God that he could neither deny nor ignore. The struggle cost him dearly. Every relationship, human and divine, strains. Seven days of silence give Job time to experience the depth of his "nothingness,"[512] come terms with his losses, and consider the unthinkable, that God has become his enemy.

Scholars often ponder why Job does not discuss his losses or ask God for restoration. I submit that seven days of silence allowed him time to grieve his losses. Having lost everything—family, material goods, and health, only one matter remains—his relationship with God. Job understands the role that the Chaldeans and the Sabeans had in his losses. He knows that nature sometimes strikes unexpectedly, leaving loss and devastation in its wake. As disappointed as he is with his wife, he knows that she too experiences the weight of all that transpired. She too grieves the death of their children and their economic loss. How helpless she must feel seeing her beloved suffer from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, a poignant reversal of the path of blessing, from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet. Expecting death, all he wants now is to know where he stands with God. Firmly believing that God is the source of all, good and

512. Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence*, 41-42.

bad, why has God turned against him and his family? How could everything go so wrong so quickly? Why God, why?

The Satan

Even the satan, who is the divinely appointed adversary of God and humanity, has positive characteristics. The satan is the first to ask God hard questions and is always obedient to God.[513] Hard questions are necessary for unveiling life's hard lessons. To skim over them is to miss much of what is valuable in life. Failure to ask difficult questions leads to shallow living. The relationship between Job and God would have remained superficial if Job had not been willing to dig deeper. The satan's questions give Job an opportunity to face his own questions.

The Bible portrays obedience to God as a positive human characteristic. The more obedient one is, the more righteous one is. Though his attitude and stance is contrary to God, the satan obeys God, never going beyond the boundaries that God sets. In the end, the satan follows God's commands to the letter, not once but twice in the prologue (Job 1:6-12, 2:1-6). Does the satan not appear in the epilogue because of a feeling that he had made his point? Does he not appear because he knows he lost? Does he not appear because there is nothing left for him to say? Does he not appear because God no longer wants to confront or be confronted by the satan?

The satan's response to God as enemy is to question humans and the divine. Despite his "contentious relationship with God,"[514] as a member of the heavenly council, the satan is privy to information about God and humanity unavailable to most. Uncertain about God, humanity, and the relationship between the two, the satan's perspective involves a hermeneutic of suspicion, a lack of trust, and theological doubt. Job's questions, on the other hand, are based on trust and personal experience.

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513. Craven, conversation with author, Fort Worth, TX, August 1, 2009.
514. Thiel, *God, Evil, and Innocent Suffering*, 21.

The Wife of Job

The wife of Job has a powerful one-liner that seemingly aligns her with the satan. In 2:9 her taunt to him is also an outcry of her pain, "Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.'" After all she too, directly or indirectly, suffers the very same reversals that Job experiences. Her presence, in this frame is a testament to the fact that though obviously distressed, at least up to this point, she stood by Job. She is still on his mind in 19:17 when he mourns the fact that his breath is repulsive to her, "My breath is repulsive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family." She remains on his mind until the end because he mentions her in his final speech, his self-imprecatory defense in 31:9-10, "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door; then let my wife grind for another, and let other men kneel over her." Though brief, these references to her indicate that not only does Job still care for her, but also he cares about being faithful to her and about her being faithful to him. Like Job's friends in the dialogues, in the prologue, her emotional and spiritual distance outweigh the physical presence. Her pain is so great, she puts a wedge between herself and Job, between herself and God.

Except for illness, she suffers a change in her life no different than Job's. However, unlike Job, she chooses to reject God. Feeling the effects of God as enemy in her life through Job's life she advises turning against God. Her advice for Job to curse God and die signaled that relationship with God seemed pointless. Not that she doubts God's existence, but she wants no relationship with a God who has a negative side. Unlike Job who experiences God's negative side, yet still longs for relationship with God, the wife of Job gives up on God. Her advice to him mirrors her own feelings and relationship with God. Unwilling to consider further what the

changes in her life might mean for her relationship with God and with Job, she disappears from the story. She may be absent, but she is never far from Job's heart.

The Three Friends of Job

As with the wife of job, the initial image of the three friends of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar is positive. In 2:11, they are willing to gather and travel considerable distances to be by Job's side. This effort alone would place them in the category of good friends who desire to show compassion and concern to Job when he is down. This image does not last, however, for their verbal responses to Job address their own theological insecurities, not those of Job and his situation.

One would expect that anyone responding to words such as those of Job in ch. 3 would offer some type of comfort, for his losses were great. Not Job's friends. Starting with the first round of three sets of speeches their words belie their initial image as good friends and show them to be false friends, or better yet, no friends at all. Eliphaz speaks first, not offering words of comfort, but words of confrontation. In 4:1-5, he asks Job why despite his ability to strengthen others in their times of trouble, he can not find strength in God for himself? However in 8:1-10, when it is his turn to speak, Bildad not only bombards Job with questions, he suggests that the children of Job, all of whom died in a windstorm, had sinned. Zophar has his own questions and wishes that God would speak and that God's wisdom would convince Job that his sins are so great he deserves even more punishment. In his speech in Job 11:1-12, Zophar implicitly ridicules Job, saying that foolish people get wisdom when a donkey becomes a man.

By the end of the first round of speeches, the friends are convinced, even if Job remains unconvinced, that Job is in denial, that he committed great sin—something horrible, something

worthy of being punished in this way. The arguments of the friends are part of a "worldview [that is] governed by static ideology and not by living faith. . . . Restricting themselves to the theory of retribution, they deny themselves the experience of mystery. Theirs may be a theocentric worldview, but it is narrow and restrictive and inadequate to deal with some of life's most pressing issues, to say nothing of the mystery of God."[515] Intuitively, they recognize that Job's accusations are a great risk in relationship with the divine. Unwilling to take the risk, or even consider it, though present, they leave their friend utterly alone. Like the wife of Job, they were physically present, but emotionally and spiritually they were far from Job. The reader may be asking, "With friends like this, who needs enemies?"

Unlike the wife of Job, who chooses to reject God, the three friends of Job choose to reject any new information about God. They encounter God as enemy through their connections with Job. Much like people today who off handedly say, "I would not worship a God who . . . ," the friends of Job decide to ignore and deny any expansion in their relationship with and understanding of God that goes against the grain of what they already knew. They prefer to discuss the God they think they know, rather than consider anything that Job might say. With closed minds, they chose to offend their friend. Not that God was too fragile, but their relationship with God was too fragile to deal with any complexity or ambiguity that the image of God as enemy might bring into their lives.

Elihu

Elihu is the surprise guest. Like the friends, he too experiences God as enemy through his relationship with Job. Though silent, he heard every word. Hoping to convince Job, he bursts on the scene with his egotistical intervention. Though younger than the others, the courage of his convictions prompts him to speak. Clearly, as seen in 32:6-7, he is unhappy with the verbal

515. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 26.

stalemate between Job and his friends. Though angry with Job and his friends, he feigns humility. He can not, however, contain his anger. His tirade begins in 32:8. By the time he reaches verse 16, he has berated not only the friends of Job, but Job as well. Elihu's view was similar to that of the friends, with one important exception, he did not want to blame Job—he chose instead to defend God. While he may have had more compassion for Job than the others, he too stood aloof from Job and his troubles. At least he had the courtesy to call Job by name nine times.

It is true that words of wisdom often come from the young. After three rounds of speeches, one may have hoped for better but that is not to be. Newsom credits Elihu with bringing the concept of "moral imagination"[516] to the forefront, however, his lengthy exposition in chs. 32-37 leaves something to be desired. No one speaks without stopping as long as Elihu—not Job, not his friends, not even God. His endless babbling leaves the reader hanging—still anxious to hear a word of reason, a word of hope. Despite his failure to persuade Job, his "last words to Job are ironic questions designed to force Job to acknowledge his own limitations before the wisdom and power of the creator. They are the same kind of questions that God will soon pose, questions meant to lead Job to the same conclusions."[517] Bergant observes:

> Just as no explanation is given for his appearance, Elihu departs from the scene not to return. This man is not like the others who have addressed Job. Although he too offered Job counsel, he is not reproached by God. While the others rebuked Job's demand that God appear in court, Elihu sets the stage for the appearance of God in nature. He does not condemn Job of sin but of misunderstanding. Thiszx defender of divine majesty challenges both the rigid articulations of traditional teaching and the shortsighted claims of personal experience. He goes on to maintain that even a dynamic wisdom, one born of the dialogue between tradition and experience, cannot explain the mysteries of life. Elihu prepares Job, the visitors, and the reader alike for the theophany of God." [518]

In his response to the idea of God as enemy, Elihu, like the friends of Job, chooses to

516. Newsom, *The Book of Job,* 207.
517. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 26.
518. Ibid., 27.

disregard any information that is contrary to what he knows of God. He does, however, remind Job that even within a traditional understanding of God, there is at least one other option to consider. Convinced that there are lessons to be learned in every life experience, he advises Job to reconsider. Earlier, Job responds to each of his friends. In contrast, Job makes no response to Elihu. He is through talking. With his self-imprecatory testimony of a life well lived, Job has nothing else to say.

God

Even more than Job, God also struggles with the tension in the divine. Perhaps God still wonders if creating humanity might have been a mistake. Eve and Adam had only one commandment to follow and they could not even do that. Except for Noah, it would have all been over anyway. Sarah and Abraham trusted God, but not enough to wait for the promised son Isaac, creating family tension with Hagar and Ishmael that would last for generations. Jacob was not able to control his large family. Not once, but twice, Moses prevailed and God decided to be faithful to Israel rather than start over with a Mosaic dynasty. None of the judges had the wherewithal to unite the nation. Samuel was unable to control his sons, creating the leadership void that would lead to monarchy. Saul was so ineffective, even his son Jonathan knew his dynasty had to be replaced.

David and Solomon both looked promising, but they too had their faults. Rehoboam's cruelty divided the nation. Ten of the twelve family groups decided to go their own way, but were absorbed by the Assyrian world empire. The two families who remained were not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of Babylon,[519] another ancient world empire. Could the remnant of an exiled people in Babylon start again? More than once God had been so disappointed in humanity, it seemed the divine would give up and destroy creation or Israel. All

519. This presumes a date after 587 BCE for the composition of Job.

along it seems God continued to struggle with the divine decision to create humanity. None had the kind of relationship with the divine that God intended. Maybe, just maybe, Job would be different. Maybe Job would get it right. God had to know, even if it meant dismantling Job's life to find out. This portrayal of the divine is so dissimilar, so unexpected, one wonders, is this the same God who created it all?

The positive view of God in the prologue is of one who approves of Job and receives the sacrifices he makes for his children. Yet, very quickly, this positive view turns negative. It leaves one wondering why God would permit the satan to wreak such havoc in Job's life since by God's own assessment, Job has done nothing but live an exemplary life. Implicitly, God becomes Job's worst enemy the moment God accepts the satan's challenging words in 1:12. When Job passes the first test of losing his family and possessions, the satan remains unconvinced and proposes a second test. Crenshaw explains that "the Adversary refused to concede that he has misjudged humanity."[520] This negative portrayal of God is unsettling, to say the least, for anyone who thinks of God only in terms of God's love for humanity. What is at stake is more than just the faith of one man. The relationship between God and humanity hangs in the balance. Crenshaw notes, the satan's challenge is a "cynical charge that Job's piety depended on favorable external circumstances [that] struck at the heart of ancient religion. . . . [It was] a radical denial of genuine religious devotion."[521]

Like Elihu, though silent, God hears the conversation between Job and his friends. "God's answer is the beginning of Job's restoration."[522] "The more one senses the believing fervor with which Job struggles to understand the God in whom he puts his trust, the more one is

520. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 102.
521. Ibid., 100.
522. Yehezkel Kaufmann, "Job the Righteous Man and Job the Sage," in the *Dimensions of Job* edited by Nahum H. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 70.

puzzled by God's answer."[523] God's response comes in the form of two speeches. God does not speak in the din of endless chatter. God speaks in a moment of stillness and quiet. Crenshaw explains the significance of the two speeches, saying, "The two faces of God manifest themselves in two distinct speeches from the tempest, each one of which reduces [the verbose] Job to silence. The first speech extols the mysteries of nature, while the second indirectly acknowledges the force of Job's attack upon God,"[524] and God's attack upon Job.

God's speeches affirm what Job knows about God. The first speech supports his understanding of the wisdom of God as creator and provides a rebuttal to Job's opening lament in ch. 3 in which he curses the day he was born. The second speech both supports and rebuts Job's understanding of the power of God to maintain the world, difficult though it may be.[525] Noticeably, neither response addresses the haunting questions of Job about the goodness and justice of God. The picture of God in the final chapters of the book presents a very different picture than that in the prologue. Diane Bergant comments:

> The speeches seem to provide another representation of God. Here, God speaks directly to Job in a way that calls for straightforward responses. . . . In the heavenly council God may have conceded to the Satan, but here God yields to nothing and to no one. This is the creator who alone understands and manages the entire sweep of creation, and who invites Job to contemplate its resplendence and complexity to the extent that he is able.[526]

God's response to Job from the whirlwind both critiques and affirms Job. God's critique of Job comes in the form of a multitude of unanswerable rhetorical questions. Yet, perhaps this approach is more like a series of "educational shock-tactics, as were the Socratic Dialogues."[527] In these dialogues God, contrary to the dialogues with his friends, Job said very little. God

523. Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism*, 149.
524. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 107.
525. Ibid., 108.
526. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 19.
527. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 117.

bombards Job with rhetorical questions designed to allow "him to see with the eyes of the divinity."[528]

Interestingly, God affirms Job, but not to Job, to his three friends. Not once, but twice, God says that the friends did not speak what is right. God commands sacrifices and advises that Job, with whom they vehemently disagree, will pray for them (Job 42:7-8). In contrast to the picture of God in the prologue as aloof and the picture of God as absent in the dialogues, the picture of God in the epilogue is that the divine is present, communicates with human beings, and requires obedience. Bergant comments, "This God is very demanding, setting high standards of truth and loyalty by which people will be judged. This is a God who makes the erring dependent on the devout and expects the righteous to speak on behalf of those who are at fault. . . . God leaves none of the major characters of this drama in distress. Job, who was put to the test, is vindicated; the visitors, who spoke falsely about God, are delivered."[529] Addressing these differences, Bergant continues:

> At first glance, it appears that the three different sections of the book each furnish a different representation of God, and some of the features of one seem to conflict with features of another. These differences may be just that, however, differences but not contradictions. In this book God clearly is understood as both beyond the realm of the natural world and intimately involved in it; as acting through intermediaries and acting directly; as susceptible to the schemes of others as well as beyond another's influence."[530]

Ambiguities in God's response leave the task of deciphering the reasons for God's reactions critiques, and affirmations to the interpreter.

528. Ibid., 123.
529. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 21.
530. Ibid., 21-22.

Ambiguity and Complexity
in the Divine/Human Relationship

As noted previously, one can translate five Hebrew words as *enemy* in English: צָר, אוֹיֵב, שָׂנְאָ, שׁוֹרֵר, and צוֹרֵר.[531] Only three of the five, צָר, אוֹיֵב, and, שָׂנְאָ, appear in the book of Job. Together, they appear a total of eight times. Of the eight occurrences, Job is the speaker in six (6:23, 13:24, 16:9, 19:11, 27:7, and 31:29), Eliphaz once (22:20), and Elihu once (33:10). The eight occurrences are distributed as follows: צָר appears in 6:23, 16:9, and 19:11 (the plural form is used in 19:11); אוֹיֵב appears in 13:24, 27:7, and 33:10; קִימָ appears in 22:20 (and appears only here in the Hebrew Bible), and שָׂנְאָ appears in 31:29.

The first hint that Job thinks of God as his enemy appears as a pun since the Hebrew word for enemy (אוֹיֵב) is similar to the name Job (אִיּוֹב). About the pun, Elie Wiesel comments, "More in bewilderment than in sorrow, Job turned to God: Master of the Universe, is it possible that a storm passed before You causing You to confuse *Iyov* [Job] with *Oyev* [Enemy]?"[532] Crenshaw explains, "Job suspected that God had become his personal enemy. Perhaps this is the sense of Job's name, which seems to mean 'enemy.'"[533]

From the moment of his opening soliloquy to the closing self-imprecatory defense of his integrity, Job makes it clear that, as he sees it, God is the source of his troubles, God is his enemy. Each time he speaks, his comments belie the fact that, as far as he is concerned, God is the one who is treating him as an enemy. Even in his responses to YHWH, Job never changes his mind that God is responsible for his monumental losses.

531. See p. 4.
532. Wiesel, *Messengers of God,* 222.
533. Crenshaw, *A Whirlwind of Torment,* 59.

With Job on the brink of blasphemy, the reader is likely to wonder about the justice of God, Why did God agree to "this supernatural wager"[534] between the divine and the satan at Job's expense?[535] The complexity and ambiguity created by the wager mirror the complexity and ambiguity of life. Matters get even more complicated and more ambiguous as the story unfolds, and remain so even when the story ends.

Although this project does not address ethics, it is one of the complicating factors in the book of Job. Ethics becomes a matter of concern whenever something good comes at the expense of another. Theodicy is an issue when the questions of evil, suffering and whether or not genuine relationship is possible between God and humanity. The satan too wonders whether genuine divine/human relationship is possible too for this is the basis of his challenges to God in 1:6-12, and 2:1-6, respectively.

Is it possible for a person to be a breath away from blaspheming God, yet receive God's praise? Surely, this is what happens in Job. Unlike Penchansky (who posits that Job's curse of the day he was born in ch. 3 is an indirect way of cursing God),[536] and John Wilcox (who posits that Job's moral bitterness propels him to say blasphemous things about God), [537] I submit that neither of these modes of honest communication makes Job guilty of blasphemy. Rather, I propose that Job does everything but curse God. He stands on a precipice, in danger of slipping off, yet he never crosses the line to blasphemy. The precipice is an intentional literary move on the part of the Joban poet who knows that if Job were to blaspheme God, the satan, not God would have won the day.

534. Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God,* 60.
535. Ibid., 45-46.
536. Penchansky, *Betrayal of God*, 47.
537. Wilcox, *The Bitterness of Job,* 51-97.

In 3:3, his first speech, Job opens by cursing the day he was born. Job's opening words portray the heart-wrenching despair of a man whose life has been turned upside down, of a man who has lost everything. Although he never mentions his losses, he has begun to come to terms with the extent of his losses. Though his words may have frightened his friends and made them uncomfortable, Job's mind is clear. "At first glance they did not recognize him: he had changed, they had not."[538] His losses have been nothing less than, as McCord Adams and Sutherland explain, "horrendous."[539] In anguish, he curses the day he was born, longing for his life to end before it began.

The wager that precipitates the drama of the book hinges on this idea of cursing God—no minor offense in the life of ancient Israel. Bergant explains, "To curse God is to assume divine power in order to diminish God. The effect of this can be nothing short of catastrophic. From God's point of view, it is blasphemy deserving of reprisal. From a human point of view, any possible diminishment of God might result in a diminishment of the very one who wields divine power. Thus, the one cursing could be trapped within the enactment of the curse itself."[540]

What horror the friends must have felt as they heard Job curse almost everything in life—the day of his birth, the night of his conception, his desire to have been left for dead at birth, his desire for miscarriage or abortion—everything about the essence of his life, but God. Is it any wonder that he and his friends are so far apart that without God's intervention in commanding Job to pray for his friends, their relationships would remain forever broken? Crenshaw notes this disparity:

> Job's insistence that God was at fault could hardly be reconciled with the friends' conviction that the Deity could not trample upon justice. They rested their case on the general truth that God rewards virtue and punishes vice, whereas Job based his argument

538. Wiesel, *Messengers of God,* 225.
539. McCord Adams and Sutherland, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," 297-310.
540. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 23.

> on the particular instance that he knew best, his own situation. Naturally, each position had much to commend it, which explains the copious arguments in defense of the general truth and the specific instance.[541]

Job's lament, his longing for death, and desire for a reversal of creation are critiques of God, to the point of blasphemy, as noted by some scholars. For example, Wilcox argues that Job curses God out of a sense of bitterness that "the world is *not* perfectly moral."[542] Disappointed with God and humanity's lot, Job must come to terms with life as it is, not as it was or how he wishes that it could be again.

Interestingly, unlike the laments of the psalms, Job does not seek deliverance from his troubles. He simply wants to express his agony and be heard. Each time he speaks, Job reiterates his main point, that God has become his enemy. He continues to converse with his friends hoping that they will eventually get it. He tries several approaches to convey his message. He solicits their sympathy, he argues against their perspective of God, he insults them, and he makes fun of them, yet to no avail.

If the lament of ch. 3 is an implicit assigning of blame to God, chs. 6-7 leave no doubt that Job sees God as perpetrator of his troubles. In Job's "accusatory lament,"[543] in response to Eliphaz's first speech, Job complains in 6:4 that God's arrows have landed on him. In chs. 9-10, Job's response to Bildad's first speech, Job suggests (in 9:22) that God cares little whether or not one is wicked or a person of integrity. In chs. 12-14, Job's response to Zophar's first speech, Job is bewildered by the God who is simultaneously too close (God's presence) and too far away (God's silence), who puts his feet in shackles (13:23, 27).

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541. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 110.
542. Wilcox, *Bitterness of Job*, 217.
543. Leo Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 142.

In chs. 16-17, Job's response to Eliphaz's second speech, Job describes in no uncertain terms exactly what God, the "divine tyrant,"[544] has done to him (Job 16:7-14). "Chapter 16 is an attack on God, which largely takes the form of a lament-type accusation against enemies. The enemy is God."[545] The lamentation "ends with a cry of despair."[546] In ch. 19, Job's response to Bildad's second speech, Job again describes what God has done to him, noting that God's actions prove that God thinks of Job as his enemy and that even his 'so-called' friends are agents of God (19:8-22). In ch. 21, Job's response to Zophar's second speech, Job makes it plain that his compliant is not against a person, but against the divine (Job 21:4). Chapters 23-24, Job's response to Eliphaz's third speech, summarizes what God has done to him (Job 23:16). In chs. 26-27, Job's response to Bildad's third speech, Job takes an oath in the name of the very one who has mistreated him (27:2). Throughout the progression of the dialogue, "the theological development is enhanced by psychological shading"[547] as Job moves in and out of doubt and faith, longing for death and seeking God, despair and expectation.

God's Differential Treatment of People

To be sure, "In the Old Testament there are . . . dissidents like the writers of the books of Jonah, Job and wisdom literature who did not see foreigners as a threat. . . . In the Old Testament these ideas stay, however, in the margins."[548] For much of Israel, however, outsiders were a threat to the community. While some of the enemy language concerns individuals and groups that are part of the Israelite community, much of the enemy language in the biblical text is related to groups of people outside the community.

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544. Ibid., 144.
545. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 65.
546. Ibid.
547. Ibid., 53.
548. Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology* 91.

Mignon Jacobs considers troubling aspects of "the portrayal of God's differentiated treatment of people, including God's people and the Babylonians."[549] Contrary to many "interpreters [who] readily highlight the hopeful future and minimize the promised demise of the disfavored,"[550] Jacobs suggests that the "text challenges any reconceptualization [*sic*] that ignores its characterization of the multiple dimensions of God's character."[551] These dimensions include a God who, depending on the situation, favors and disfavors people, sometimes favoring and disfavoring the same people at different times. The "scope of [God's] favor and disfavor"[552] reaches far and wide. This relationship manifests itself in God's relationship to Israel and Babylon. God occasionally favors one nation and not the other and vice versa. Sometimes God is angry with Israel. Other times God is against the nations that surround Israel and the empires that overpower it. Yet, it is said that God is no respecter of persons. These portraits of God's anger point to aspects of the negative side of God.

Favor and disfavor come with high costs, however. Someone gets blessed and someone experiences loss. Blessing for both seems to be an oxymoron. Jacobs explains, "Jeremiah 29 extends the perspectives of chs. 24-28 and depicts God's plan, including the wellbeing and *hopeful* future of God's favored people. Yet, the reassurance to this people is immediately juxtaposed to the planned demise of the disfavored others."[553] It appears that God's favor almost always comes at the expense of someone else. For example, God's favor granting freedom for the Israelites and providing land for them causes destruction to the Egyptians and Canaanites. God's favor toward Babylon included devastation for Israel. God's favor toward Israel meant

549. Mignon Jacobs, "Favor and Disfavor in Jeremiah 29:1-23: Two Dimensions of the Characterization of God and the Politics of Hope," in *Probing the Frontiers of Biblical Studies* eds. J. Harold Ellens and John T. Greene (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 131.

550. Ibid.

551. Ibid.

552. Ibid., 139.

553. Ibid., 131.

devastation for Babylon. Jacobs observes, "The positive outcome for one group . . . [and] the negative outcome for the other suggests the inevitability of the outcome."[554] God, the enemy, may as likely strike inside Israel as outside it. The consequences of God's favor and disfavor are related to the interconnectedness of humanity. What happens in one nation affects what happens in another. This principle is as true in the ancient world as it is today.

Scenes of favor are displayed in the lives of individuals as representatives of the entire community just as they are in national life. Jacobs notes how this happened in a confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah:

> Chapters 27-28 report Jeremiah's . . . confrontation with Hananiah the prophet. . . . What is at stake in this confrontation is the validity of two competing ideologies regarding God's people and God's involvement on the world stage. On the one side are the prophets and Hananiah, the anti-Babylonian contingent who advocate [temple theology] that God would restore Jerusalem within two years by bringing back the temple vessels, as well as King Jeconiah, and the exiles from Babylon. . . . This promised restoration of the cultic implements would secure the loyalty of the priests and thus garner support for . . . [their] agenda. Hananiah broke the wooden yoke that Jeremiah was carrying and declared the Babylonian yoke broken. On the other side is Jeremiah, the pro-Babylonian advocate who claims to be speaking God's word to the people and priests. He also speaks of restoring the people to Jerusalem but prophesied that God was using Nebuchadnezzar to subdue all the nations, including Judah. . . . The closing verse of 28 . . . defines the ideological lines and perspective. Hananiah is an enemy of . . . [God's] message and he dies as a confirmation of the Jeremiah's prophecy. . . . [Hananiah's death is the dramatic way in which] God validates Jeremiah.[555]

Many are reluctant "to characterize God as selecting and rejecting, favoring and disfavoring"[556] people. Yet, the biblical text is replete with stories of God's favor and disfavor toward an individual or a nation. Acts of favor and disfavor, Jacobs declares, are "simply . . . [descriptions of] an inevitable part of relationship dynamics."[557] Similar to relationships among human beings, relationships with God are subject to high points and low points. High points are

554. Ibid., 154.
555. Ibid., 136-137.
556. Ibid., 141.
557. Ibid.

periods of blessings. Low points are times of loss. Although retributive theology may account for some of these events, it does not account for all. Much of what happens can not be ascribed to the logic of justice. In reality, much is contrary to justice. God's logic, it seems defies explanation. According to Jacobs, disfavor is the lot of those "who challenge God's plan and perspectives."[558] Favor is the lot of those who comply with God's vision. For Jeremiah, as with much of the Hebrew Bible, favor and disfavor is an either/or matter. While an individual's or a nation's standing with God might vary over time, there were only two options. The existence of two options both simplified and complicated matters. On the one hand, the two options simplified matters because there were only two alternatives. On the other hand, the two options complicated matters because, as with Job, the two options did not fit every situation. Some would say, it is simply a matter of God's prerogative which is not to be questioned.

Blessing and cursing is a matter of "divine prerogative to favor or disfavor, to select or reject whomever and for whatever reason."[559] Divine prerogative, however, is problematic because it contains much that is unethical and unjust. For example, war is atrocious in any circumstance. God's complicity in and approval of war causes one to wonder, "Why God, why?" God's favor and disfavor often seem quite arbitrary.

Regarding the matter of favor and disfavor, Jacobs suggests that "the dynamic nature of God's interaction with humanity negates any notion of a static favor."[560] One might wish for continuous favor, but that is not to be. God's favor and disfavor weave in and out supporting some, rejecting others. God favored and later rejected Saul. As with Israel, God sometimes destroys and sometimes blesses Egypt. Favor and disfavor, in part, seem to be related to divine

558. Ibid.
559. Ibid., 153.
560. Ibid., 154.

"determination"[561] to establish worship of one God in all the earth and the accompanying human resolve to do so. The fact that at times, Israel and Babylon alternately experience favor and disfavor is an indication that "Potentially, every human is subject to God's favor and disfavor, selection or rejection."[562]

In "Toward an Old Testament Theology of Concern for the Underprivileged,"[563] Jacobs observes that God's "concern for the underprivileged is represented throughout the Old Testament by . . . the theology of justice and the theology of hope."[564] In the world of the Bible, the underprivileged are people with few material possessions including the poor, the sojourner, widows, orphans, servants and slaves, and the oppressed.[565]

Jacobs explains that "underprivileged and privileged statuses are not mutually exclusive."[566] At different times in one's life, one might be counted among the privileged, and at other times one could be counted among the underprivileged. The biblical boundaries between privileged and underprivileged are fluid, not fixed.

Cursing the Day of One's Birth

Erickson notes that Greenstein refers to Jeremiah and Job as the "theological dissidents"[567] of the Hebrew Bible. Quoting Greenstein, she explains, "the most radical of [the]

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561. Weems, *Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 190.

562. Jacobs, "Favor and Disfavor in Jeremiah 29:1-23, 155.

563. Jacobs, "Toward an Old Testament Theology of Concern for the Underprivileged," in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium: Form, Concept, and Theological Perspective,* eds. Wonil Kim, Deborah Ellens, Michael Floyd, and Marvin A Sweeney (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000).

564. Ibid., 205.

565. Ibid., 208-215.

566. Ibid., 216.

567. Erickson 27-28, referencing Edward L. Greenstein, "Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job," *PSB* 27 (2006): 238-58. See also Greenstein, "Jeremiah as an Inspiration to the Poet of Job," in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffman* (ed. J. Kaltner and L. Stulman: JSOT Sup 378: New York T & T Clark International/Continuum, 2004), 98-110.

theological dissidents, prior to Job is Jeremiah."[568] Both question God. Similar to many scholars who raise their voices against the status quo of the contemporary world, both speak against popular traditional theologies, representative of the status quo of their day. Despite the eons that separate them, Job, Jeremiah, and scholars today know what it is to speak of realities that many would prefer to ignore.

Job speaks against retribution theology, and Jeremiah speaks against temple theology. Retribution theology is a belief that there is a direct correlation between one's actions and one's circumstance in life—good things come to those who do well in life and bad things come to those who do evil.[569] Job understands that while this may be true in many situations, it was simply not applicable to his situation; he knows in his heart, and God knows it too, that he is "upright and blameless" (Job 1:1, 1:8, 2:3). Both God and the narrator know he is an obedient truthful servant of God.

Tom Milazzo writes, "Job is innocent and righteous. Yet neither innocence nor righteousness is enough to change his fate."[570] Though Job knows not why, he knows that life is more complex than can be explained by retribution theology. "The prologue, the dialogues, and the epilogue all expose the limitations of the theory of retribution, which is really an example of religious yet human wisdom."[571] Bergant summarizes the issue:

> Retribution may be the grounding for justice, a requirement for the stability of any social group, but harmony within the physical universe depends on other laws. If this is true about the natural world, how much more is it true of supernatural reality? If God is omnipotent . . . then no law can circumscribe God's activity. If the acts of God are inexplicable, then no theological testimony can capture God's reality. Theological

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568. Ibid.

569. Deuteronomistic blessings and curses (Deut 27:1-30:29) suggests that obedience and disobedience to God determine quality of life, both individual and communal. In the NT this principle is known as "sowing and reaping" (Gal 6:7).

570. G. Tom Milazzo, *The Protest and the Silence: Suffering, Death, and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 119.

571. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 35.

> assertions are testimonies to the experience of God, they are not exhaustive definitions of God's essence.[572]

Job's experience of what the mystics call the dark night of the soul convinces him that this explanation is not the end of the story. He comes to understand that, contrary to the theology of retribution, being blameless is no protection from trouble. Life for Job is bigger than retribution theology.

Jeremiah knows that there is more to life than temple theology. Temple theology is a belief that God always protects and provides for the nation of Israel—regardless. The Mosaic covenant and the promise of a continuous davidic line seems to ensure that the nation, the temple, and the king are immune to the consequences of behaving badly, especially since Northern Israel had been defeated by Assyria more than a century before and only Judah remained. God is a God of mercy and compassion who can be counted on to come through in a crisis. Yet, Jeremiah knows that temple theology is not the whole story.

In contrast to retribution theology, which is based on Mosaic law, the concept of temple theology is based on God's covenant with David in 2 Sam 7, which follows several stories about David: David's capture of Jerusalem (5:6-10); David's defeat of the Philistines (5:17-25); and David's success in bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (6:12-23) after a failed attempt to do so (6:1-11). Second Sam 7 depicts David's telling the prophet, Nathan, of his desire to build a temple for God. After Nathan affirms David's desire, God instructs Nathan to tell David that his descendent (Solomon), not David, will "build . . . a house" [573] (temple) for the Lord. God will build a "royal house, a dynasty of kings"[574] for David. God promises that David will be

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572. Ibid., 35-36.

573. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Bellingham: *Logos Bible Software*, Libronix Digital Library System, CD-ROM, 3.0f).

574. Ibid.

known world-wide (7:8-9); Israel will have stability, prosperity, and peace (7:9-11); God's blessings for David's son will outlive David (7:12); David's dynasty will never end (7:16-17). These promises, which comprise what is known as the davidic covenant, were interpreted to mean that Jerusalem and the temple were invincible. Belief in the invincibility of Jerusalem and the temple are often referred to as "temple theology." Yet, both were destroyed during the Babylonian conquest, ending the davidic dynasty.

Job speaks from the view of wisdom. Job's wisdom is born of experience. It does not stop with the tradition and knowledge of the ancestors. There are some things that Job knows for himself, things learned from a devastating life experience. Job's wisdom is a lived wisdom, not a wisdom handed down from others. Jeremiah speaks from the wisdom of a prophetic view. He is able to look at current world affairs and see that Judah does not stand much of a chance against Babylon, the world power, the empire of his day.

Experientially, the greatest connection between them is that both men experience such agony that each curses the day of his birth (Job 3:3, Jer 20:14). One might ask, "How is it that both Job and Jeremiah reached such a point in their lives?" Each curses his day of birth because of the social death that he experiences as a consequence of an encounter with the negative side of God. Job wonders why God treated him like an enemy (Job 19:11). Jeremiah wonders why God deceives him and his nation (Jer 20:7, 4:10). Unlike Saul, whose last encounter with God led to suicide (1 Sam 31:1-6), Job's and Jeremiah's experiences with the negative side of God takes them both to the edge of despair. Both are rejected and derided by their communities. Both experience God as less than beneficent.

Good relationships are a vital part of being human. Social death represents distance and

disconnection from one's community. When these connections are lost, severed, or non-existent—whether by circumstances outside one's control, by one's own choosing, or by a combination of factors—people undergo significant emotional stress. This emotional stress, if intense and/or prolonged, can also lead to spiritual crisis. This is exactly what happens to both men.

Jeremiah experiences social death because of God's instruction to live as a single person with no family connections to wife or children (Jer 16:1-2). In a day and time when family life was the norm, this would have been a great tragedy for Jeremiah. Job, shaken by the simultaneous death of his ten children and estrangement from his wife and community (except for his three friends and Elihu, neither of whom understood him) likewise experienced social death. Being taunted and rejected and out of relationship with nearly everyone, left both Job and Jeremiah bereft of relationships that normally would have brought much joy to their lives. Jeremiah suffered because he had no family. Job suffered because his children were no more, and his relationship with his wife was strained. Their family situations, though quite opposite, cause them to curse the day they were born (Job 3:3, Jer 20:14-18). Regarding their relationships with God, Job curses due to the silence, that is, the absence of God. Jeremiah curses due to the presence, the voice of God, for in Jeremiah, the voice of God and the prophet's voice were one. Their relationships with God are just the opposite. Job hears too little from God. Jeremiah hears too much.

Job and Jeremiah know what it is to protest the injustices of their time. Protest, more often than not, leads to social death. Social death describes a situation in which individuals live estranged from everyone in their communities. Job encounters social death when multiple personal losses cause him to lose his social position as the greatest man of the east (Job 1:3) to

being an outcast on the fringes of society (Job 30:1-19). Jeremiah experiences social death when his community, Israel, did not want to hear his warning of national loss to Babylon (Jer 20:7-10).

Both Job and Jeremiah cope with their theological crises and their situations by exercising the Womanist tenets of: "radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, self-love, and critical engagement."[575] Radical subjectivity allowed both Job and Jeremiah to acknowledge their own experiences and resist the popular theologies of their day (retribution theology and temple theology, respectively). Job, Jeremiah, and Womanist scholars alike refuse to allow someone else to define them or tell their story. This refusal is the basis of their integrity.

Job exercised traditional communalism through his efforts to provide for the needs of his community. Jeremiah's prophetic words of warning to his community, though unwanted and unheeded, were designed to reestablish traditional communalism in Israelite society. Job's protest that God was the source of his troubles and Jeremiah's protest that God had deceived him were expressions of self-love. Their protests allowed them to be honest about their feelings before God. Job's disagreement with his friends and Jeremiah's challenge to false prophets are evidence of critical engagement.

In the spirit of critical engagement, Job and Jeremiah were willing to make their voices heard and to listen to others. Their willingness to hear the views of others without conceding their own gave them courage to be true to themselves. Job and Jeremiah speak as loudly today as they did long ago. Job opens a door for asking difficult questions. Jeremiah reminds us of human responsibility for social justice. Womanist scholars, and many like them, are willing to build on Job's open door and Jeremiah's concern for all to create a space for living in accordance with a spirit of wholeness, love, and justice that honors the humanity of all persons.

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575. Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 6.

The (Almost) Final Words of Job

Although Job knows he must find a new way to relate to God, ironically, Job will not find a new approach to God without God's help. In chs. 29 and 30, he carefully lays out his case, the evidence upon which he will make his oath of innocence in ch. 31. Leo Perdue explains: "This lengthy soliloquy consists of two parts: an accusatory lament addressed to God (chaps. 29-30) and a series of 'oaths of innocence' (chap. 31) that represent Job's legal defense against the accusations of his wrongdoing by the friends."[576]And what was Job's evidence? It is the evidence of a life well-lived—a life in which even God found no fault.

Chapters 29-31 summarize Job's view of his situation. Job's opening words in chs. 29 and 30 differ significantly from the picture of Job presented in previous chs. The wisdom poem of ch. 28 with its "distinct . . . language, subject matter, and tone"[577] prepares the reader for Job's change from struggling against his lot to affirming "his past life, . . . a detailed and unflinching recognition of his present misery . . .[with] a spirit of acceptance which is not to be confused with approval."[578] Brown comments, "As the climax of Job's discourse, Job's bold words in chs. 29-31 are unequaled in their persuasive power: They silence friends and ultimately provoke God."[579] Those who say one should never question God will have to think again, for "it is in his protest that Job in the end commends himself to God."[580] Cox confirms the difference between Job's perspective and that of the friends, "The friends have presented the theoretical 'God' of theology; Job for his part insists on presenting the existential God of human experience."[581]

576. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 163.
577. Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind*, 47.
578. Gerald J. Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 201-202.
579. Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 81.
580. Ibid., 82.
581. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 58.

The friends are "afraid that Job's argument will destroy . . . [their] own faith because it represents a denial of traditional theology."[582] Unlike Job, whose conversation with his friends is punctuated by conversation with God, the friends talk about, but never to, God. They know about God, but seem not to have experienced God. Job on the other hand has experienced the best and worst in God. "Job's theological adventurism has led him outside the orthodox camp."[583] He was willing to engage in a relationship with God, even if it meant experiencing the negative side of God. His willingness to engage in a relationship despite possible negatives is matched only by God's willingness to test him.

As James Zink explains, chs. 29-31 are the words of a dying man, a man who desires, but does not expect vindication.[584] They follow ch. 28, which "highlights the failed attempts on the part of both Job and his friends to account for his suffering."[585] Job may not know everything, but one thing he knows for sure is that nothing in his life is so horrible as to warrant what has happened to him.

In a change from the pattern in the previous two cycles, order breaks down, and presumably Zophar does not speak a third time. Rather, Job again insists that God has done him wrong in 29:11. He has not given up his struggle with the dilemma of God as the source of both good and evil in his life (Job 2:10). This is the classic dilemma of worship of one God. For his part, Job insists on his innocence in no uncertain terms. Contrary to the satan's expectations, his "defense makes quite clear that his righteous acts are free of ulterior motives."[586] He has lived up to the ethical standards that worship of one God demands.

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582. Ibid., 63.
583. Ibid., 64.
584. James Zink, "Impatient Job: An Interpretation of Job 19:25-27," *JBL* 84, no. 2 (June 1965): 152.
585. Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 70.
586. Ibid., 78.

After twenty-six chs. of seemingly endless debate (chs. 3-28), Job finally stops trying to convince his friends of his innocence. He concedes that the narrow paradigm of his friends simply does not permit them to consider the possibility of his innocence. His friends are his last hope for help from others. With no external help, Job must rely on his own internal resources if he is to survive.

He begins by letting his memories comfort him. In *The Skeptics of the Old Testament: Job, Koheleth, Agur,* E. J. Dillon describes Job's reminisces in ch. 29 as a "soothing melancholy that softens and subdues his wild passion."[587] His reflections prepare him for his unexpected encounter with God. In chs. 29 and 30, Job vividly describes his life as a contrast between the best of times and the worst of times. Despairing of his present situation, Job presents his case to his hearers—God, the friends, no one in particular, and anyone who will listen. His reflections are his response to his friends' accusations. These two chs. consist of "blunt contrasts"[588] as Job "declares himself in effect to be the incarnation of both wisdom and abomination . . . the living exhibit of chaos in the universe."[589] In ch. 29, Job reminisces about a happy time in his life. In ch. 30, he reflects on his pitiful present. Chapter 31 is a litany of self-imprecatory strophes intended to prove Job's innocence. In *Job*, Whybray notes that chs. 29-31 "elicit sympathy for his case and to persuade God."[590]

Earlier Zophar angrily tells Job that even with all of his losses God has been merciful for he deserves even more disaster. In ch. 31, Job envisions things getting worse while simulta neously imagining reintegration into the world he once knew, that is, imagining the re-creation of

587. E. J. Dillon, *The Skeptics of the Old Testament: Job, Koheleth, Agur* (London: Isbister and Company, Ltd., 1895), 80.

588. Terrien, "Job as Sage," in *The Sage in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East,* eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 232.

589. Ibid., 235.

590. Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 125.

his ideal world, even though he (as far as he knows) is dying. There are many ways to view his imprecatory announcements. Newsom's list of five categories of Job's self-imprecatory oaths is useful: (1) sexual ethics and general morality (vv. 1-12), (2) justice and social obligation (vv. 13-23), (3) ultimate allegiance (vv. 24-28), (4) social relations (vv. 29-34), and (5) land ethics (vv. 38-40).[591] Crenshaw observes that "Between Job's two curses a dialogue with three friends takes place."[592] In other words, Job's two curses [ch. 3 and ch. 31] comprise an *inclusio* of Job's first and last words, framing his theological debate with his friends. Job begins by cursing the day of his birth and ends by cursing himself, but he does not curse God.

In the end, Job needs his enemies (human and divine) to help him come to terms with the realities of his life—past, present, and future. People attract and are attracted to what they need in life. This manifestation of Job's fears is apparently just what he needed to grow in his understanding of the relationship between God and humanity (3:25). Could it be that his fear became a self-fulfilling prophecy that he needed to live through in order to expand his understanding of God, life, and himself?

Translation of Job is difficult because many of its words appear only here in the Hebrew Bible. Verse 4 in ch. 29 ("when I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent.") is an example. The Hebrew reads as follows:

29:4 כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי בִּימֵי חָרְפִּי בְּסוֹד אֱלוֹהַּ עָלֵי אָהֳלִי׃

Variously translated as autumn,[593] winter,[594] early time, youth, autumn, prime[595] the context of "my prime" (חָרְפִּי) refers to a time when life was good for Job. Changes in English in the

591. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 195.

592. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 104.

593. *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, CD-ROM, version 3.0f. (Logos Bible Software, 2000-2007). *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, CD-ROM, version 3.0f. (Logos Bible Software, 2000-2007).

594. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, CD-ROM, version 3.0f. (Logos Bible Software, 2000-2007).

meaning of “autumn” from a season of harvest and blessing to decline of life make “autumn” permissible yet inadequate to capture the meaning of what Job wants to convey—a time that was the “best of times” for him, his family, and his community.

Verse 24 in ch. 30 (“Surely one does not turn against the needy, when in disaster they cry for help.”) is, according to Marvin Pope, “one of the most difficult in the entire poem.”[596] The Hebrew reads as follows:

30: 24 אַךְ לֹ֣א־בָ֭עִי יִשְׁלַֽח־יָ֑ד אִם־בְּפִידוֹ לָהֶן שׁוּעַ׃

Most of the difficulty, Pope explains, comes from “send the hand against”[597] (יִשְׁלַֽח־יָ֑ד), which normally appears in its usual “hostile sense . . . [in which] By implication, Job accuses God of assaulting him while he is helpless and imploring help.”[598] Norman Habel further explains the extent of difficulty in translation when he notes that “this verse is so obscure that some editors do not attempt a translation.”[599] Translators often emend it, Habel says, as in the “LXX . . . [where] ‘I’ [is substituted for] ‘he’” [600] which Habel translates as: “I did not strike the poor when they cried out to me in their disaster.”[601]

As a consequence of the ambiguity of the subject—God, he, one, I—translation varies significantly. A sampling of contemporary translations of 30:24 that follow illustrate the difficulty:

NRSV “Surely one does not turn against the needy, when in disaster the cry for help.”

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595. A Philip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith, *A Reader’s Hebrew Bible (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 1301.

596. Marvin Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 223.

597. Ibid.

598. Ibid.

599. Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985, 416.

600. Ibid.

601. Ibid., 414.

NJB **"**Yet have I ever laid a hand on the poor when they cried out for justice in calamity?"

NET "Surely one does not stretch out his hand against a broken man when he cries for help in his distress."

NASB "Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand, or in his disaster therefore cry out for help?"

It is easy to see that translations are affected by tradition and theology.

The Silence of God

In the biblical text, God may be silent for any number of reasons: "anger . . . [or perhaps an opportunity] during which reconciliation can take place. Or it implies that God has simply given up on the individual or nation who brought on the act of concealment."[602] Although Job does not realize it, the silence of God provides the room he requires, the "theological freedom"[603] he needs to explore his relationship with God. In a sense, this is Job's last stand.

Job understands God's silence to be problematic for two paradoxical reasons. On the one hand, God is too close. On the other, God is too far away. Crenshaw explains, "Job complains because God is too near and also grieves over the fact that the deity has withdrawn into the heavens. . . . Job imagines that God has become his enemy."[604] It is, however, more than a matter of imagination. The idea that God *is* his enemy is as real for Job as the death of his children, the estrangement from his wife, the rejection by his community, and the accusations of his friends. Crenshaw writes,

> Job is absolutely sure that God destroys the innocent and sinners alike, for no other explanation made sense of his own suffering. Indeed, he even maintains that God maliciously mocks those who have fallen victim to underserved misery, and implies that a conspiracy exists between God and the forces of evil. From beginning to end Job refuses to yield an inch in his conviction that God has made a grievous error in Job's case; this certainty of his own innocence leads him to interpret God's conduct as malice. God, it follows, has become Job's personal antagonist. . . . He dares to accuse God of

602. Crenshaw, *A Whirlwind of Torment,* 61.
603. Griffin, *Evil Revisited,* 21.
604. Crenshaw, *A Whirlwind of Torment,* 61.

> creating him solely for the purpose of catching him in an evil act, which would justify subsequent punishment.[605]

Whether it signals presence or absence, God's silence becomes part of the mistreatment of Job. Perhaps God is silent, hoping against hope, that Job will not let his troubles defeat him, that Job would not let go of his integrity or his relationship with God. God is silent, listening to every word, hoping that confidence in Job is not misplaced. Perhaps God is silent, listening, knowing that the satan questioned the integrity of both Job and Yahweh. Job insists that he has treated others well, even if God has mistreated him.

> God consistently remains in the background, guaranteeing the efficacy of Job's behavior. . . . Job's defense unpolemically makes the claim that righteousness is the result of, not the means for, divine blessing. Implied is that gratitude has directed Job to act in these ways. Explicit is the denial that self-interest has been the underlying motive behind Job's integrity. . . . Job's rehearsal of the past clearly acknowledges God's role in the formation of character, which leads to a life of gratitude and opportunity, but one in which self-interest plays no role. . . . Job explains his conduct is a *response to* rather than an *occasion for* divine beneficence."[606]

Knowing what is at stake, perhaps God is silent, listening to Job's every word, anxiously hoping that Job does not slip up. There is no reason for God to respond until everyone else has finished speaking. When God speaks, even more so than when Job spoke in his community, people most often stop talking and listen. While God is listening, for a moment, "Job's lament begins to give credence to the satan's charges. Indeed, the next natural step for Job would be to curse God and end it all."[607]

God's silence nearly pushes Job to blasphemy. Initially, it seems that imagining vindication as a future event, even after his death, is enough. However, Job comes to understand that vindication after death would be no consolation. Crenshaw observes, "Memory of [his] precious relationship with God evokes an astonishing declaration: God will remember me when

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605. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 105-106.
606. Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 79.
607. Ibid., 63.

it is too late, eventually longing for the faithful servant."[608] Job wants more. Job wants to be vindicated in this life, not after death. Crenshaw notes,

> Job's lament unfolds a curious situation that bristles with irony. On the one hand, he endeavors to escape God's constant vigilance, while, on the other hand, he longs to find God, who conceals the divine self from a faithful devotee. Job cannot believe God capable of such personal antagonism, although his eyes tell him that such misfortune can come only from God. Death alone will afford relief . . . so he earnestly begs God to look away for a brief moment into which the messenger of death can insert itself. The realization that death cancels any opportunity to vindicate himself gives Job renewed resolve to find God at any cost, for only by doing so can he obtain the divine declaration of innocence.[609]

This is a perfect setup for not only accusing God of injustice, but for having God speak and act in unjust ways. The preponderance of questions in this text sounds much like the voice of an angry parent or an angry spouse. This preponderance signals trouble on the home front, and in the book of Job it reflects trouble in the relationship between God and Job, between God and humanity.

So what did Job do? He responds as best he can. He appears before God in an imaginary courtroom where speculation gives way to realization. This is a meeting that Job simultaneously dreads and anticipates. Job is certain that God would not be silent in a situation as dire as his. His despair was all the worse because of his expectation that the biblical God not only has a voice, but that God is a "God who speaks."[610] God's persistent lack of response to Job, despite the direness of his situation and the depth of his cry, is the reason why Job desires an encounter with the divine. He is exasperated by the idea that God could, but will not speak on his behalf.

The silence of God, sometimes referred to as the hiddenness of God, drove him deeper and deeper into the pit of despair. This silence was not just any silence. After all, silence was what he wanted from his friends. Their silence would have been welcome. No, the silence of

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608. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 106.

609. Ibid., 107.

610. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Silence of the God Who Speaks," in *Divine Hiddenness*, eds. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K.Moser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 216.

which Job despairs is the silence of God. His was a despair brought on by an existential descent into nothingness.[611] Job finds the silence of God to be intolerable. Nicholas Wolterstorff clarifies the problem, saying, "The biblical silence of God is the nonanswering silence of God. It's like the silence of the parent who doesn't answer when the child asks 'Why? Why did it happen? Where were you?' It's the silence with which the poet of Psalm 83 pleads with God to speak, 'O God, do not keep silence; do not hold thy peace or be still, O God!'"[612] Such a silence can leave a wound so deep even time can not heal it. Job suffered enough. He is certain that if God has any compassion at all, the divine will not leave him utterly alone, despite his protests to the contrary.

The questions that torment Job traverse beyond asking just for the sake of information. No, the questions Job asks "put biblical faith at risk. [613]" Job found that he, like "the psalmist [stood alone] before the non-answering silence of God."[614] If it were possible, he would have done something to "alleviate and forestall"[615] the events that had so radically changed his life—his good life.

Was the ability to experience misery and pain "Part of what God found good about the way God created"[616] the world? Job could not help but ask. He could not let the matter rest. He had to "confront the biblical silence of the biblical God."[617] Like Jeremiah for whom God's word was like fire shut up in his bones, Job had to protest the agony of his situation. How could

611. Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence*, 41-42.
612. Wolterstorff, "The Silence of the God Who Speaks," 215.
613. Ibid., 216.
614. Ibid.
615. Ibid., 220.
616. Ibid.
617.Ibid., 227.

he not protest after years of believing in a God whose "self-characterization . . . [was] not that of a God who passively accepts things going awry."[618] Had he been mistaken?

Job confronted in his personal life what Israel confronted in its communal life. Images of God as helper and God as enemy, though contradictory, stand together, unreconciled. Latvus explains:

> The development from the early deuteronomistic texts to the late priestly insertions illustrates how the concept of God always reflects contemporary historical and social questions as well as the pre-occupations of the writers and their ideological backgrounds. During the process the content in the concept of God has turned practically upside down: DtrH proclaimed God as a merciful helper of Israel but later writers made him either enemy of the people or supporter of one Israelite party against the others.[619]

Job, though innocent, encounters a wrathful God. Even God seems to know it was for no reason that the divine agreed to the wager. So the two images of God, beneficent to humanity and opposed to humanity stand together, in an unresolved tension—a tension that remains in Job.

Based on an understanding of multiple layers of redaction in the Hebrew Bible (DtrH, DtrP, and DtrN)[620] Latvus adds:

> The structures of DtrN-theology relate the concept of God to the question of justice. Exile represented the hard realities of life which were undeniable and so real that the whole idea about God as protector of Israel was threatened. Because they did not want to give up the idea of the powerful God who also guaranteed justice on Earth [*sic*] they had to rationalize the meaning of exile and say that it was caused by the anger of God which in turn was caused by the idolatry of the Israelites. This logic saved most of the traditional beliefs but made God's nature twofold: loving and wrathful."[621]

Job continues in a relationship with God despite his negative experiences.

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618. Ibid., 228.

619. Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology*, 88.

619. Ibid., 85-86. For Latvus, DtrH represents a layer of redaction by editors whose primary concern was Israel's dependence on God, DtrP represents a layer of redaction focused on priestly matters, DtrN represents a layer of redaction with emphasis on law.

621. Ibid., 87.

The Nuanced Response of Job

As observed by Jack Miles, God's words to Job are God's "last words"[622] in the Hebrew Bible.[623] If that were true, it would be remarkable for God to address these words to someone God knows understands the divine to be the ultimate source of his troubles. The book of Job would be the bearer of an important message for the entire Hebrew Bible, not just the key to the closing scenes of the book.[624] Miles's observation is interesting, however, God does speak later in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in 2 Chr 1:7 God says to Solomon "Ask what I should give you" to which in 2 Chr 1:10, Solomon replies, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people; for who can rule this great people of yours?" A few verses later, God again speaks, granting Solomon's request (2 Chr 1:11-12).

Miles's point regarding Job's last words, however, is insightful. As Miles explains in an endnote,[625] many misconstrue Job's last words in 42:2-6. Miles observes, "Unfortunately, a traditional interpretation based on a silent correction of the Hebrew text . . . has managed to change into repentance a reply that should be properly understood as irony responding to sarcasm."[626] Miles examines the problem. Although the verb in 42:6, אֶמְאַס (I despise), has no object, from the time of the "Septuagint . . . A reflexive object such as 'myself' or 'my words' has traditionally been supplied because translators believed that the sense of the verse required one."[627] When the verb stands alone and no object is added, "any supposed recantatory [*sic*] sense in the passage vanishes."[628] Supplying an object creates distance between אֶמְאַס (I despise) and the next word, also

622. Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 314.
623. This is a reference to the books of the OT in the order in which they appear in the TaNaKH.
624. Miles, *God: A Biography*, 314.
625. Ibid., 425-430.
626. Ibid, 314.
627. Ibid., 426.
628. Ibid.

a verb וְנִחַמְתִּי (“either ‘I am sorry *about*’ . . . or ‘I am sorry *for*’” [629]). Miles explains, “The two verbs are to be read as hendiadys—that is as a single action expressed through two verbs as, in English ‘break down and cry’ or ‘rise and shine.’”[630] The two verbs parallel the two nouns עַל־עָפָר וָאֵפֶר (about or for dust and ashes).[631] Of the verb, אָמְאַס (I despise), Miles states, “Job earlier (19:18) uses the same verb to characterize the instinctive revulsion that children feel when they see his disgusting body.”[632] The Hebrew reads:

19:18 גַּם־עֲוִילִים מָאֲסוּ בִי אָקוּמָה וַיְדַבְּרוּ־בִי׃

Using the same verb even earlier in 9:21,[633] Job leaves no doubt that he finds his current life appalling when he says:

9:21 תָּם־אָנִי לֹא־אֵדַע נַפְשִׁי אֶמְאַס חַיָּי׃

The nuance is significant, for according to Miles, “What is primary is whether or not God succeeds in forcing Job’s attention away from God and back upon Job himself. If God can force Job somehow to stop blaming God and start blaming himself, God wins. If God can not do that, God loses. In contemporary political language, the question is whether God can make his opponent [Job] the issue.”[634] Miles explains, “Despite spectacular effort, God, in my judgment, fails in his attempt to do this, and Job becomes as a result the turning point in the life of God, reading that life . . . [is] a movement from self-ignorance to self-knowledge.”[635] Miles clarifies, saying,

> If God defeats, Job, in short, Job ceases to be a serious event in the life of God and God can forget about his garrulous upstart. But if Job defeats God, God can never forget Job, and neither can we. The creature having taken this much of a hand in creating his creator, the two are henceforth, permanently linked.[636]

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629. Ibid.
630. Ibid.
631. Ibid.
632. Ibid., 425-426. “Even young children despise me; when I rise, they talk against me” (Job 19:18).
633. Ibid., 427. “I am blameless; I do not know myself; I loathe my life” (Job 9:21). NET translates the verse as: “I am blameless. I do not know myself. I despise my life.”
634. Ibid., 429.
635. Ibid., 430.
636. Ibid.

Job's response is more complex than what is thought of as repentance. His new understanding incorporates all that his experience has taught him about the realities of life—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Defiance as a Way of Coping

John Briggs Curtis also address Job's nuanced response. Curtis writes, "The conception of a penitent, contrite Job, who dissolves before the presence of the Almighty, is so widely held that virtually any modern translation or commentary could be cited for support. The language itself does not support such a conception. Rather, the Job, who gives the one final speech to Yahweh, is more insolent than repentant."[637] Rather than repenting, Curtis suggests that Job's response in 42:6 is "'and I am sorry for frail man'—a rendering far removed from the traditional view that Job in abject penitence wallows in filth before the overwhelming display of divine arrogance. Job does not repent. Rather, he is sorry for a humanity that has to tolerate such a god."[638] Bergant comments, "This is the fate of human creatures, and there is nothing to do but accept it."[639] In his opening lament, it is clear that "Job does not see much hope in this life for wretched human beings."[640] Having seen the world from God's perspective, he does not change his opinion. In fact, it is confirmed.

Not only is Job saddened by humanity's lot, but in the end, Curtis suggests, Job "totally and unequivocally rejects Yahweh"[641] and that "Job's last words to God are words of loathing and renunciation of the deity himself."[642] Job rejects God for he found the divine to be "transcendent

637. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *JBL* 98 no 4 (D 1979): 499.
638. Ibid., 501.
639. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 28.
640. Ibid., 30.
641. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," 497.
642. Ibid, 509.

and remote . . . [having] lost all touch with humanity . . . unable even to perceive that for the innocent sufferer a real problem exists."[643]

Perdue writes of "a defiant Job [who] expresses his opposition to a cruel Yahweh and feels compassion for humans who are forced to live under the tyranny of an abusive lord."[644] Earlier in 24:22 and 26:12 Job "acknowledged . . . [the] power"[645] of God. In light of his newfound knowledge and insight he concludes that "Yahweh is unjust."[646] He finds God to be one who has power, and abuses it. Perdue explains, "Job's issues are not the sovereignty of Yahweh, but rather theological and ethical in scope. Is Yahweh a deity of justice? Has he misruled the universe? Should he abandon his cosmic throne? Should he continue to be worshipped, and if so, on what basis?"[647]

Job's defiance pushes the cognitive dissonance of the book to a head. For, despite his disappointment in and disagreement with this newfound reality, he remains in relationship with God. Kalman introduces the "the idea of faithful rebellion"[648] to describe Job's unrelenting confidence that he does not deserve what has happened to him. Job brings his relationship with God to the brink in 42:3-4 when he boldly repeats essentially the same question that God asked Job "earlier . . . in [God's] first speech (38:2)."[649] Job's response leaves God speechless for God does not respond to Job. God does not speak again except to instruct Eliphaz to make a sacrifice for himself and his friends. Adding insult to injury, God tells him (Eliphaz) that Job, whom he and his friends have treated so badly, will pray for them (cf. Job 22:27 where Eliphaz tell Job he needs to learn to pray). In the end, according to Perdue, "It is Yahweh who has been judged

643. Ibid., 511.
644. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 126.
645. Ibid.
646. Ibid.
647. Ibid., 125.
648. Kalman, "With Friends Like These," 252.
649. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 125.

guilty, not the mortal Job, for the voice from the whirlwind has been condemned by his own words."[650]

Even with God as divine enemy, Job still desires a relationship with God. How else could he continue to seek an audience with God? How else could he hold on to his integrity despite disagreement with his wife (1:9-10), and abandonment by family, household, friends, and community (19:8-22)? How else could he, in the end, pray for his friends—the very friends who so viciously verbally abused him? How else could he come to terms with and "mourn what it means to be human"?[651] In his humanity, it is "striking . . . not just that he misunderstood God, but that he had misunderstood himself, for he had failed to understand himself in the order of things."[652] Job needed his human enemies, his friends, to propel him to a new understanding of God. He needed God, his divine enemy, to impel him to a new understanding of God, himself, and humanity.

Humor as A Way of Coping

Humphreys raised the question, "How does one live with the savage god?"[653] For Job, one way of living with "the savage god" is to poke fun at his friends. Like comedians Lenny Bruce and Dick Gregory, who looked at the injustices of contemporary life through the lens of humor, Job, in the midst of contemplating God as his enemy, takes jabs at his friends because of their inability to consider, let alone see or understand life, from Job's perspective.

Yet, even the ability to mock his narrow-minded, stuck-in-a-mold friends, could not detract from the depth of his spiritual crisis. The magnitude of Job's losses makes him one of the most troubled characters in the Hebrew Bible. Brenner puts his troubles in perspective when she

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650. Ibid., 126.

651. C. Fred Alford, "Job, Abjection, and the Ruthless God," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 96, no. 3 (June 2009): 445.

652. Ibid., 453.

653. Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition*, 98.

writes, “Job . . . is an ironic exaggeration of the concept of conventional piety.”[654] Job’s unconventional piety is summarized in Job 1:1 by describing him as “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (תָּם וְיָשָׁר וִירֵא אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מֵרָע). “At the outset Job appears like a man fulfilled: wealthy, hospitable, influential, enjoying an excellent reputation at home and abroad.”[655] Job is a man who has everything.

The description of his troubles “in two parallel pairs [wherein] In each of the pairs one catastrophe is inflicted by humans, the other is a random calamity seemingly caused by nature”[656] is evidence of the legendary nature of this tale. Although the story has a patriarchal setting, the book of Job does not point to any particular historical period. The legendary nature of the story makes it amenable to the use of humor as a means of subtly reinforcing key ideas. When Job and his friends make fun of each other’s point of view, they simultaneously draw attention to the seriousness of their conversation. In other words, the book of Job, which addresses some of the most difficult theological issues of the Hebrew Bible, suffering, nature of God, nature of humanity, nature of human/divine relationship,[657] and theodicy utilizes exaggeration to add some levity to Job’s tragic situation.

Despite the tragedy of Job’s situation, he and his friends mock each other as they discuss things neither of them understands, providing a perfect setting for mirth in the midst of calamity—a setting for comedy in the midst of tragedy. Like two sides of a coin, like the comic and tragic faces of a theatre mask, Job’s dilemma brings him to the brink, the point where comedy and tragedy merge—the point where he doesn’t know whether to laugh at his friends or cry for himself.

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654. Brenner, “Job the Pious?” 37.
655. Wiesel, *Messengers of God,* 215.
656. Brenner, “Job the Pious? 44.
657. Choon-Leong Seow, “Consequences of Job—The Early Period and Medieval Christianity” (lecture, Kelly Center, Fort Worth, Texas February 11, 2009).

Whedbee comments "the poet has built a rambling discursiveness into the dialogues which seems to heighten the sense of chaos."[658] Job's spiritual dilemma derives from a situation wherein "his . . . human friends have become his enemies . . . and God . . . his one-time friend . . . has become his foe." [659] This rambling includes light-hearted jabs such as Job's comment in 13:4 on the ineffectiveness of his counselor-friends, "As for you, you whitewash with lies; all of you are worthless physicians." Objecting to their 'know-it-all" attitude, in 12:2 he tells them, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you."

Even in his misery, Job found a sarcastically humorous way to let his friends know exactly how he felt about their counsel. Their ability to offer only confrontation when what Job needs is comfort means that his friends are of little value. God's absence compounds Job's feeling that God can no longer be counted among his friends. Job's persistence in holding on to his relationship with God, despite all that he goes through, implies that his need for God is so great he will tolerate any relationship with God as enemy and any injustices that might accompany the relationship, rather than have no relationship at all. Job's answer is that he needs God, even if God is his enemy.

Another humorous touch in the midst of this great tragedy occurs when, apparently present though not introduced beforehand, Elihu appears though totally unexpected. Whedbee comments. "We expect God – and we get Elihu!"[660] His unexpected appearance utilizes a literary "tactic of delay and digression . . . [designed to] catch the reader by surprise."[661] Unlike many who dismiss Elihu as an usurper, Brown suggests, "Elihu was written into the book of Job in order to salvage the friends' argument from a radically new perspective one that emerges from a

658. Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 236.
659. Ibid.
660. Ibid., 243.
661. Ibid.

new generation of Joban readers. . . . Elihu's sermon is clearly meant to reorient Job in his plight, to call him back to his youth. Job is beckoned to place himself in the subject position of Elihu, the ideal youth."[662]

Even as the book draws to a close, Job's questions never receive an explicit answer. Many find this lack of resolution almost unbearable. Whedbee, however, contends that "comedy can tolerate such ambiguity; indeed comedy often revels in it."[663] This tolerance of ambiguity allows Job to pray for his friends, return to his community, and rebuild his life. This uncertainty is born of the tension "where the problems [of life] are not fully and satisfactorily resolved, where the contradictions and incongruities remain."[664]

John Moore Bullard observes that the book of Job "exhibits nearly every type of humor to be found anywhere in the Bible."[665] Like the books of Ruth and Jonah, Job takes an unconventional stand "against . . . unthinking orthodoxy."[666] The light-hearted touches may make the conclusion that perhaps both Job and his friends "stood in need of correction"[667] easier to digest. Bullard, like Whedbee, posits that "The recognition of . . . humor in Job may be a key to solving the enigma of the conclusion,"[668] where orthodoxy of the prose and the counter movement of the poetry exist together in an unresolved tension in the same story. The inclusiveness of tragedy and comedy in the book makes it plain that while it is permissible to raise questions, "God's theodicy" [669] is, in the end, inexplicable. Whedbee writes:

> The comic vision does not necessarily eliminate evil and death; it is not incorrigibly and naively optimistic; it does not shut its eyes to the dark, jagged edges of life in this world.

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662. Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 84-85.
663. Ibid., 25
664. Ibid., 26.
665. John Moore Bullard, "Biblical Humor: Its Nature and Function," PhD diss., Yale University, 1961), 181.
666. Ibid., 189.
667. Ibid., 182.
668. Ibid., 188.
669. Ibid., 183.

> In fact many would argue that it is precisely because humans have experienced suffering that they have a sharpened awareness of comic incongruity. Comedy therefore may incorporate rather than ignore the haunting riddles of life.[670]

Comedy puts the tragedy in great relief and makes the story of Job even more poignant and unforgettable.

A good sense of humor is essential to being able to cope effectively with the ups and downs of life. Conrad Hyers writes, "The Bible pokes fun at human pride and pretension, selfishness and greed, and the myriad other sins to which flesh and spirit are heir."[671] A good sense of humor and the ability to laugh at oneself and with others about the human condition is "fundamentally an act of celebrating"[672] life. Job's situation, however, is too tragic for him to laugh at himself, so he laughs at his friends (Job 12:2, 16:2).

Recognizing biblical humor requires that one see both "*tragic* absurdities and *comic* absurdities"[673] in life and in the biblical text. Hyers explains.

> The uniqueness of comedy is the way in which life is lived, regardless of the immediate circumstances. Comic heroes are defined by an ability to cope with life's lows as well as highs, in large part because they have considerable flexibility and are not trapped by an absolute seriousness. They represent a spirit that is determined to introduce playfulness, lightheartedness, and laughter into life as a whole. They therefore exemplify a resiliency of spirit that may be down but never out. They are able to celebrate life not only when everything is coming up roses but when everything is coming up dandelions, or perhaps coming up with nothing at all.[674]

What Edwin Good says concerning the ironic vision of the Hebrew Bible is true also of its comic vision in the book of Job. It lends itself to "a perception of human life as it is lived and a vision of life as it ought to be lived."[675] Humor provides a way to address "the dialectical

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670. Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 260-261.
671. Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 6.
672. Ibid., 14.
673. Ibid., 32.
674. Ibid., 35.
675. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press,), 243.

ambiguities"[676] that are an inherent part of life. Even where humor is present, it is so subtle that it does not detract from the depth of the agony or the breadth of the dilemma within Job's soul. In fact, it increases and magnifies the tension with the story, leading to Job's conclusion that although human beings (Sabeans and Chaldeans) and nature (fire and whirlwind) had a role in his losses, ultimately, God is still the source of his troubles. The reader knows, even if the wife and friends of Job do not, that Job's assessment is correct. Focused on God's positive traits, they do not "shift blame for suffering and evil . . . [from] human beings" to God. Job focuses on God's negative traits and is able to shift blame for his situation to God, despite the repeated urgings of his friends.

The book of Job affirms the complexity of the divine/human relationship. On the one hand, there are good days with God—the days that Job longs for in 29:1-5. On the other hand, there are days when one curses (3:2) and laments (42:6) being human. Life is complex, full of contradictions and paradoxes—so too the divine/human relationship. How could it be otherwise?

Personal Perspective

I propose that Brueggemann's hypothesis of "orientation, disorientation, reorientation" as presented in his book, *Praying the Psalms*,[677] provides an effective way of looking at Job, the progression of the book, and the response of the reader. This progression parallels the movement of the book of Job and Job himself. Orientation and reorientation describe the plot of the prologue and outcome of the epilogue, respectively. Shattering of orientation describes the perspective of the reader's initial contact with the prologue. The epilogue offers the reader reorientation and resolution. Disorientation is a description of Job's experience and the poetic section of the book. Disorientation represents the book's capacity to be unsettling to the reader.

676. John E. Benson, "The Divine Sense of Humor," *Dialog* 22 (1983): 195.
677. Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press), 1993.

Re-orientation represents the place where Job, the book, and the reader "get it." "Getting it" carries with it the possibility of learning a new life lesson. Once fully gleaned, this new lesson carries the potential to change one's perspective of God, self, and life.

For Job, this new lesson means incorporating rather than denying or rejecting what he experienced. In the midst of his losses and his spiritual dilemma he enlarges his understanding of God, life, and himself. Similarly Crenshaw observes, "the book Job becomes a drama consisting of three episodes: God afflicts Job, Job challenges God, God challenges Job. Another way of stating the drama is the hidden conflict, the conflict explored, and the conflict resolved."[678]

The phrase "walking dead" describes someone who has experienced the social death of soul murder. This "murder" disconnects a person from other people and the world around them. Disconnected from family, friends, God, and the entire community, Job experienced the life of the walking dead. If Job were to make the next step in his life, he had to be willing not only to tell the truth, but to face the painful, unpleasant difficult truth about himself, his situation, and humanity—neither of which was as knowledgeable, as powerful, or as good as they would like to be.

One might wonder how Job worked through his spiritual crisis given that the movement through orientation, disorientation, and reorientation was not easy. The "four tenets of womanist ethics" [679] inspired by Alice Walker's definition of Womanist[680] as delineated by Stacey Floyd-

678. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 99.

679. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 8.

680. Alice Walker used the term *Womanist* in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1983), xi-xii . Her definition follows: **Womanist** 1. From *womanish*. (opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*. 2. *Also*: a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional

Thomas in her book, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*,[681] provide a lens for analyzing Job's move through disorientation and being outside the community to reconciliation with God, friends, family, and being restored to his community. These tenets are "radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, and critical engagement."[682]

The concept of radical subjectivity requires that the African American woman tell her story and that of her people. This telling of the story requires a recognition of and confrontation with the self that requires honesty, yes painful honesty, about the world, life, and oneself. This type of honesty allows one to come face to face with reality, no matter how difficult. It provides the basis for letting go and moving on. Job's refusal to allow someone else to define him or tell his story is the basis of his integrity.

This willingness to be radically subjective is a basic requirement for having "real" conversation. Job's friends could not live with "real" conversation and Job could not live without it. In his refusal to be consumed by his friends' lack of "real" conversation about their theology, his determination to hold fast to his integrity, and his sense of self, Job exhibits a radical subjectivity that his friends just can not handle.[683]

Traditional communalism insists that the African American woman recognize that she is not just an individual, but rather she is an individual in community with other people. Although

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flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time." 3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*. 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. Inspired by Walker's work, Katie Cannon adopted the term 'Womanist' in 1985 for academic study in the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) as the voice of women of African descent in her book, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

681. Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics.*

682. Ibid., 8.

683. Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 258.

community begins with her own family (spouse, children, parents, other relatives, as applicable) and her own African American people, it extends to all humanity. The roots of this communalism begin with African traditions that enslaved Africans brought with them to this country. The legacy of communal consciousness, as evidenced by continued practice of African Americans has been a corrective to the rugged individualism[684] of North American feminists' focus on gender issues and to Black Theology with its focus on racism.

While the reader may see Job as guilty of a severe case of egotism in his relationship with his community, Job himself is convinced that he has treated everyone with kindness and fairness. From his perspective, he lives in a balanced interdependence with everyone in his community. Indeed, the fact that his community, those to whom he has extended kindness, have turned against him is part of his grief and pain. Yet, in the epilogue after he prays for his friends, traditional communalism is an essential factor in his restoration as he reconnects with family and community.

Redemptive self-love is a matter of attitude toward oneself. This is an attitude of positive self-regard wherein a woman values herself. Valuing oneself means maintaining the balance between doing what is needed to reach a goal without compromising oneself or one's values. It means living a life of integrity for the sake of self and community. This is a positive self-regard, a positive self-love that knows that one can not redeem oneself. This knowledge is the reason for Job's desire for an umpire, a redeemer, a witness to make his case before God. Despite having to wait for an answer, in effect, Job makes his own case before God. Job's sense of self, that is, his redemptive self-love, enables him to maintain his integrity, despite the taunting of his friends. His sense of self, made it possible for him to face God alone, without umpire, redeemer, or witness. Lack of an intermediary is an indication of Job's belief in himself and in his God.

684. Craven, conversation with author, Fort Worth, TX, August 1, 2009.

Critical engagement is the willingness to critique traditional and non-traditional views as well as the status quo, in whatever forms they might take. It is a willingness to engage in conversation with the ideas and concepts of others. Engagement requires pointing out places of agreement and disagreement with an argument or viewpoint while noting its strengths and weakness. Engagement means allowing others to critique one's own views and to learn from others as well. Critical engagement benefits all involved because through engagement "iron sharpens iron" (Prov 27:17). Job is eager to make his voice heard and to listen to others. He is willing both to share his ideas with his friends, let them critique his ideas, and listen to and critique their ideas as well. By submitting to Job's intervention on their behalf before God, the friends implicitly concede a willingness to consider that Job was right, and they were wrong, after all.

Job's movement from being an outsider is "characteristic [of the] plot-line of comedy, where catastrophe is typically followed by restoration, penance by festivity, and alienation from society by reintegration into society."[685] The book closes with Job's relationship with God renewed, yet it is a relationship born of insights from an horrific experience. Job has learned to live with loose ends. Questions about divine justice hang in the air, unanswered and unresolved. Social justice takes a turn for the better when Job reconciles with his community and extended family even as divine justice remains uncertain. Life goes on for Job as he begins again and starts a new family, ever cognizant of the family that is no more. He is a changed man, a generous man whose legacy includes leaving an inheritance not only for his sons (as is the custom), but for his daughters as well.

684. Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 258.

Job sees both positive and negative in God. Unlike many who prefer to dismiss images of the negative in God or have no relationship at all, he saw and continued to hope, trust, and believe. Job found his way through a time of profound disorientation with defiance and humor. He held on to his integrity and embraced life in its fullness. He would have it no other way.

CONCLUSION

Herbert Lefcourt writes, "In the world of the wise there are no absolute solutions to the open-ended questions of life."[686] This is certainly true of the book of Job. If one is looking to Job for definitive answers to questions on theodicy, the nature of God, the nature of humanity, and the like, one will be sorely disappointed, for Job closes with the questions it raised still unresolved. Like an unresolved dissonant chord that forever hangs in the air and in one's memory, the unresolved cognitive dissonance in Job resounds with its own cacophony of dissident voices—voices that refuse to be controlled, voices that refuse to be silenced.

With so many conflicting voices in the forefront, the book of Job does not answer any questions. Instead it challenges readers to examine and broaden their understanding of God, humanity, and themselves. In the same way that God challenged Job to see a bigger picture, so the author(s) of Job challenge(s) the reader to engage a broader perception of life.

It is likely that the book of Job is a product of the period of the Babylonian exile or "Templeless Age." [687] Having lost a war to the Babylonians, with leaders exiled in Babylon, and the nation and the temple in ruins, Israel is at a crossroads. It seemed that Israel's life was over. The magnitude of these losses turned Israel's religion and its identity on its head. Crenshaw comments:

> Now the thesis that Job exemplified is that the spiritual crisis in his life was no private affair, but represented a decisive stage in Israel's dealing with its God. The belief in divine justice threatened to collapse because of the burdens placed upon it by historical events. The older simplistic understanding of divine providence hardly reckoned with powerful empires led by deities other than the Lord, nor did it take sufficiently into

686. Herbert M. Lefcourt, *Humor: The Psychology of Living Buoyantly* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001), 37.

687. Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the "Exile"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). Middlemas argues that that "Templeless Age" is a better reference since it is a reminder that the Judahites were scattered to other countries, not just Babylon.

> account the status of individuals making up the collective whole. The convenient explanation for suffering—that adversity arose as punishment for sin—may have sufficed for a brief interval, but eventually this idea produced a mighty outcry.[688]

As a consequence of struggling with this reality, in what can be thought of as a stroke of genius, Israel turned its memories of theodic crisis, national reflection, and mourning into a sacred text that spoke words of comfort, conviction, correction, challenge, and change to its own community in its own time and to communities around the world for generations to come.

Wolfers describes the theology of Job succinctly when he writes, "The Book of Job contains religious innovations . . . so far in advance of their time that neither Judaism nor Christianity has yet been willing to fully absorb them."[689] These innovations include a look at the negative side of God and a view of God as enemy. The writer(s) of Job has (have) successfully questioned the very foundations of biblical faith. The author(s) has (have) raised questions about the role of the God of good things in Genesis and the role of God, if any, in relationship to evil. The writer(s) has (have) managed to capture the irony that God is the ultimate agent of Job's troubles and shown that Job's true piety comes not from following the rules but from willingness to be in relationship and honest before God. By the end of the story, it is clear that Job is a person of faith, even at the worst time in his life. There is plenty room for questions, even when there are no answers. Maybe that's why the book of Job is in the canon.

There is indeed a role for a skeptic and for Job in the community of faith and in the world. As with Davies's explanation of multiple memories *within* the text, Joban scholars have multiple approaches to the question theodicy in the biblical text. Their diverse interpretations provide multiple memories *of* the text. Process theology allows each to stand on its own and contribute to the whole. Interpretation is richer, not poorer, when many voices share their

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688. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 105-112.
689. Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness,* 17.

knowledge in the conversation. The book of Job lends itself to ongoing conversation about the frailties of life. Future conversations on Job, memory, theodicy, and God as enemy will provide new insights about this provocative book. One of the beauties of this book is its portrayal of "Doubt . . . [as] basic to Job's thinking."[690] In the contemporary world where doubt is so widely accepted, it is sometimes easy to forget that when Job was written, his perspective that it is possible for the innocent to suffer was "revolutionary . . . [for] Biblical thinking, up to the time of Job, expressed the idea that there is a direct relationship between human suffering and death and the human sinfulness that caused it."[691] Yair Hoffman agrees, and expresses the idea succinctly when he says:

> The daring required, against the background of the belief system inherent in the Bible, to suggest the possibility that even God has no suitable answer to the problem of the suffering of the righteous in the world, is clear. . . . This assumption forms the basis for the outlooks upon which are based the exhortations in the Torah and the prophetic literature, the historiographic thinking in the Bible, and the biblical eschatology.[692]

Hoffman affirms that: "the message of the book of Job is that there is no solution to the problem of God's justice."[693]

The book of Job is part of telling the whole story, the unfinished story of Job, the open-ended story of God, and humanity. While Job doesn't necessarily like what he hears and sees of God and life, hence his defiance, he does come to terms with what is. Perhaps he would agree with Dermott Cox who wrote, "God has so arranged it that splendor and suffering are inseparable."[694] Furthermore, Job's "knowledge is inadequate to control it or make sense of it."[695] Many say that Job's submission indicates Job's repentance, but this is not so. If Job does

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690. Israel J. Gerber, *Job On Trial, A Book for our Time* (Gastonia, NC: E. P. Press, Inc., 1982), 73.
691. Richard E. Singer, *Job's Encounter* (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1963), 146.
692. Yair Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection*: *The Book of Job in Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 250-251.
693. Ibid, 252.
694. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 101.

submit, it is only to an unpleasant risky reality. Cox describes it this way, "The 'submission,' however, is not to authority or power, but to mystery."[696] Job does not question the power and wisdom of God; he questioned God's use of that power in ways that are less than beneficent to humanity. For him, the mystery even includes "the liberty that God has inserted into creation—freedom implies the capacity to do wrong."[697]

The book of Job presents a theology that is not expressed in any other biblical book. Job simultaneously believes and trusts God even as he doubts and questions God. Perhaps Terrien said it best. "There is faith at the very core of his unfaith."[698] Job learns to be a peace with doubts and unanswered questions.

The presence of this book in the biblical text "affirms Job's dissenting voice of pathos, a voice that conventional wisdom would rather muffle."[699] As sacred scripture, it is evidence that even the voice of the skeptic can be useful as a means of exploring and encouraging faith. Through repetition and a tight literary structure, the author has managed to create a forum wherein questioning the status quo is not only acceptable, but also it becomes part of sacred scripture and of skeptics and the faithful for generations to come.

From his first word to last word, it is clear that Job thought of God as his enemy. It is easy to write his perspective off as just a metaphor for his feelings at a time of intense despair and spiritual crisis in his life. I submit, however, that the image of God as enemy is not just a literary device for a chaotic time in someone's life. On the contrary, God as enemy is a metaphor

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695. Ibid., 101.
696. Ibid., 106.
697. Ibid., 107.
698. Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence*, 188.
699. Brown, *Character in Crisis, 69.*

designed to say something about negatives in God and in God's relationship to humanity. Surely it shocked its ancient audiences just as much it does audiences today.

Job fully understands that "By questioning God's character . . . [he] casts his own character into question."[700] "He was willing not only to question God, but to defend himself to the end. Even as the book draws to a close, Job's questions and his defense remain visible for everyone to see. He held his own, in part because his "suffering has *empowered* him . . . [even though he is] now among the disenfranchised."[701] The power of the pain is the power that propels one toward healing. Job's pain was powerful for he hurt mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually all at the same time.

If he were to survive, Job had to find a path to a new future story.[702] It was a path that he had to walk alone. It was the path of a different drummer—a drummer whose beat only he could hear. He gave up on the idea of trying to convince anyone of this side of God. People saw what happened to him, but they could not see beyond what they could see with their physical eyes. They could not see the spiritual implications of Job's righteous life. So yes, Job gave up on his expectation of having a relationship with anyone who could empathize with him. There was no point in trying to convince his friends, or Elihu for that matter. In the end, the path called for restored relationship with everyone who had rejected him and his ideas. He had to learn to live with the fact that not only was God his enemy, but also that no one would ever fully understand him or his journey. There would always be unfulfilled spaces in his relationships with others, and he would just have to learn to live with that.

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700. Ibid. 73

701. Ibid.

702. Andrew D. Lester, *Hope: Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 1-152.

While he does not repent or like what he hears, "In his last response to God, Job admits that he has been converted to God's view."[703] His encounter with God necessitated a theological "shift from an anthropocentric point of view to a cosmocentric worldview [that] requires not only a new cosmology . . . but also a reexamination of many, if not most of the tenets of . . . faith."[704]

For Job, embracing life in its fullness meant coming to terms with the loss of property, simultaneous tragic death of all of his children, loss of health, estrangement from his wife, loss of relationship with God as he knew it (knowing that God initiated the troubles in his life even though he was blameless), strained relationships with his friends, and rejection by his community. Embracing life in its fullness also meant creating a new future story despite his losses. He had to start over and enter a new phase of life and an understanding of God big enough to encompass his experiences with God, the good and the bad. Kinet explains:

> Job has come to know a God who is different from that God he has believed in hitherto. . . . He started off believing in the familiar (and calculable) God of his friends' theology. Now he encounters a hostile God who considers the standards of justice valueless. Job does not want to give up the God he has believed in; yet he is reluctantly compelled to recognize the God he has experienced in suffering. So he hopes, believes and demands that the God of his faith will vanquish and again supersede the violent and unjust God of his experience. He claims the restoration of the picture of God he had believed in.[705]

One of the key insights from Job is "the importance of human experience in the shaping of theology. Job's experience was judged theologically unsuitable because it was unconventional."[706] Yet, experience had always been part of Israel's understanding of God. "Genuine theology is never divorced from experience, however; it develops as a way of understanding it, or dealing with it, of shaping it. The more original the experience, the more distinctive the theology. The book of Job shows how the singular experience of one individual

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703. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 44.
704. Ibid.
705. Kinet, "The Ambiguity of the Concepts of God and Satan in the Book of Job," 33.
706. Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature,* 45.

can challenge a theological tenet of a group." [707] How could the friends understand Job's position? Since, they did not experience the kinds of losses Job experienced, they could not identify with his situation or his understanding of God.

Rather than reject new knowledge, Job's story speaks to the need to examine and incorporate it. Bergant surmises, "New experiences and new insight must not only be evaluated in the light of traditional teaching, they must also critique the claims of that teaching."[708] As with Job's friends, many are surprised to know that "God's approval is given to the one who claims that theology is limited and not to those who insist that it is adequate as it stands."[709] New experience yields new theology. New theologies in the twenty-first century witness this reality. Certainly, Job's "story shows that, while people may be subject to the limitations of societal and theological perception and articulation, they must not cling to these limitations when corrective insights present themselves."[710]

Theodicy and related issues were presented, but never resolved in the biblical text. In other words, the answer is that there is no answer. Not only does the reader come to this conclusion, "Job begins to realize *that there are no answers,* and, slowly at first, he begins to slough the commonly held theological beliefs about God,"[711] though he doesn't as yet have a new understanding to replace his previous beliefs. "The whole represents a harsh transition from doubts *about* God's way of dealing with his creation to a direct accusation *against* him of the criminal misuse of power."[712]

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707. Ibid., 46.
708.Ibid., 47.
709. Ibid.
710. Ibid., 48.
711. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence,* 55.
712. Ibid., 56.

People want to know "What is the final answer?" In Job, as in life the answer is, there is no answer. The lack of a resolution at the end of Job signals that Job was an attempt to present multi-faceted conflicting understandings of God. This lack of a final answer may seem to be loss, but it is not. It paves the way for new understandings and dimensions of faith. Covenant theology, temple theology, retribution theology, and creation theology exist side by side. Process theology makes it possible to see and live with the tension and ambiguity of this dialectic.

Presenting an alternative to traditional theology was risky. The "school of storytellers, poets, sages and editorial scribes who worked for perhaps as long as a dozen generations on a single theme"[713] knew the importance of supporting and preserving theological risk and innovation. The preacher of Ecclesiastes was right—there is a time for everything, even a time to think the unthinkable, to think of God as enemy.

The reader must continually discern not only what is and is not transferrable from biblical texts to the contemporary world but also how the application is to be made. Job's story is a reminder that questions and doubt are part of the journey of faith. Questions, even if unanswered, lead to an enlarged understanding of God and humanity—an understanding that is big enough to embrace life in its fullness, a fullness that includes the blessings and realities of life.

It is clear that the book of Job presents a complex God capable of relating to an incredibly complex world. The negative side of God, including the image of God as enemy, was Israel's way of taking the unpleasant realities of life seriously. Over time, this image became part of a life of faith. This image became part of sacred scripture and was intended to reflect the character of God.

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713. Terrien, *Job: Poet of Existence*, 26-27.

In 1952, J. B. Phillips challenged his generation to rethink its concept of God with his book, *Your God is Too Small.*[714] Cox expresses a similar idea when he writes, "Were God to meet man [or woman] thus, on man's [or woman's] terms alone, in a courtroom dominated by human reason, he would have to abdicate his own nature for he would be accepting man's limited conception of him."[715] The need to rethink perception of God, for the sake of the individual and the community, is as great today as it was in Phillips's generation. Conversation can be a source for an enlarged understanding of God and humanity in the twenty-first century just as it was in the time Job was written.

Further investigation of this underexplored image of God is ripe for further analysis in an age when many perspectives dot the intellectual landscape, any of which can be mined for insights into the negative side of God and the image of God as enemy. The image of a compassionate, merciful God contains a vision of all that is best in life. Likewise, the image a judgmental, vengeful God encompasses a vision of all that is worst in life. Combining the two images to an n^{th} degree portrays a God like the one in the Hebrew Bible—a God who is compassionate and just. The two images clash and the cognitive dissonance remains.

The image of God as enemy is fruitful enough to engage conversation for generations to come. I invite readers to join me in this deliberation. I invite others on the journey of exploring further the image of God as enemy in Job along with other images of the negative side of God in the Hebrew Bible as a means of discovering a God big enough and complex enough for today's world.

714. J. B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952).
715. Cox, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 115.

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