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12-31-2000

# "One to Hear Me" An Exegetical Analysis of Job 31:1-7,35-37 which Explores the Presence of God in the Context of Human Suffering

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# “One to Hear Me”

An exegetical analysis of Job 31:1-7, 35-37  
which explores the presence of God  
in the context of human suffering

A seminar paper presented to the faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Department  
of Exegetical Theology in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Masters of  
Sacred Theology

by

Christopher J. Bramich

September 2000

**TEXT: Literal**

- 1 A covenant I have cut with my eyes so I will not look intently upon a virgin.
- 2 So what is the portion of God from the upper parts?  
and (what is) the heritage of the Almighty one from the high places?
- 3 Is it not calamity to the unrighteous one?  
and disaster to the workers of iniquity?
- 4 Is it not the case that He sees<sup>a</sup> my ways<sup>b</sup> and all **my steps<sup>b</sup> he numbers<sup>a</sup>**?
- 5 If I have walked with falsehood and have hastened upon deceit my foot,  
6 Let Him weigh me in a just balance so God will know my integrity.  
7 If **my step** has turned aside from the way or if after my eyes my heart has gone,  
or if a spot has cleaved to my palms,  
35 O that I had a hearing one for me! Here is my signature. Let the Almighty one  
answer me! O that I had the indictment the man of my adversary has written.  
36 Surely, upon my shoulder I would bear it. I would wear it as a crown.  
37 The **number of my steps** I would declare to him, as a prince, I would approach him.

**TEXT: Colloquial**

- 1 I have made a covenant with my eyes so I will not look intently upon a virgin.
- 2 And what is the portion of God from the upper parts and the heritage of  
the Almighty one from the high places?
- 3 Is it not calamity to the unrighteous one and disaster to the workers of iniquity?  
4 Does he not see my ways and number all my steps?  
5 If I have walked with falsehood and hastened my foot upon deceit,  
6 Let Him weigh me in a just balance so God will know my integrity.  
7 If my step has turned aside from the path or if my eyes have gone after my heart,  
or if my hands have become defiled,  
35 I wish that I had one to hear me. Here is my signature. Let the Almighty one  
answer me! I wish that I had the indictment my accuser has written,  
36 Surely, I would bear it upon my shoulder. I would wear it as a crown.  
37 The number of my steps I would declare to him, I would approach him as a prince.

## INTRODUCTION

*Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my Faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.<sup>1</sup>*

The words of concentration camp survivor and noted author Elie Wiesel leave an indelible mark on the collective conscience of all humanity. Spoken in the context of quintessential atrocity and injustice, Wiesel's story describes a scene far beyond the threshold of evil in the very heart of darkness itself. The book's title, *Night*, is a fitting description. The absence of light reflects not only the hiddenness of the crimes, but also the tenebrous nature of the people who committed them.

Understandably, the ensuing trials at Nuremburg sought to reestablish the world's sense of justice by chastising a number of the Nazi perpetrators. Society was morally outraged and the post-war years of 1946-1947 became the time to set an ecumenical precedent for genocide. Despite the many convictions at Nuremburg, however, a lingering sense of culpability unable to be resolved through human justice remained. Beginning coterminously with the first Nazi crimes committed against humanity, many of the Jewish victims lamented along with Wiesel asking, "Where is the divine mercy? Where is God?"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel, preface to *Night* (New York: Avon, 1960), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

Echoed throughout history whenever there has been inexplicable catastrophe or suffering, the issue of theodicy has consistently remained a mystery. Such transcendence, however, has scarcely kept theologians and philosophers from attempting to solve this divine conundrum. From the fourth century Platonist Celsus<sup>3</sup> to the more modern Rabbi Harold Kushner,<sup>4</sup> many have sought to address the presence of evil in a world where God claims to be good. In evaluation, have such arguments proved to be sufficient in their conclusions? Hardly.

While human logic and reason have presented several hypotheses, human experience often proves such inductive reasoning to be unsatisfying. The possibility that God is not omnipotent or is unjust only exacerbates an already existing feeling of helplessness. Equally as offensive is the explanation that suffering is the result of divine punishment for human transgression. Not only are such conclusions distasteful, but they offer little comfort in the midst of a life shattering event.

In the Book of Job, the blameless and upright man from Uz is faced with rationalizing his own calamity. Growing up in a community that believed the righteous prospered and the wicked were cursed,<sup>5</sup> Job is unable to explain his own predicament. Arguing from a perspective of divine retribution, his three “friends” accuse him of committing some sin that

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<sup>3</sup> In *Contra Celsus*, Origen refutes his opponent’s belief that God is the author of evil. Celsus’ premise is based on logic. He believes that only an evil God is capable of creating a world where evil exists. In this work, Origen quotes a number of questions posed by Celsus that attack God’s fairness. Specifically, “Why does He send secretly and destroy the works which He has created,” and “why does He employ force, persuasion and deceit,” Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 597-598.

<sup>4</sup> Kushner writes about God, “I recognize His limitations. He is limited in what He can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom,” Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 134.

<sup>5</sup> In Job 8:20, Bildad says, “Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers.” Similarly in Job 15:20, “All his days the wicked man suffers torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for him.”

has elicited God's wrath. After several cycles of debate, Job grows frustrated and realizes the futility of further discussion. In a final effort to establish his inculpability and exact an answer, Job "takes the stand" by swearing an imprecatory oath that vows innocence from a litany of offenses.

This study will provide the reader with an exegetical analysis of Job 31:1-7 and 35-37 which explores the presence of God in the context of human suffering. Passages found elsewhere in Job will be connected to chapter 31 to elucidate the book's storyline and major themes. Lastly, a discussion of Job's theological relevance will consider the book's significance in the wider framework of the Old and New Testaments.

### **SYNOPSIS OF GRAMMATICAL AND LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS**

The most significant syntactical problem of the selected pericope is the exegesis of verse 35. Specifically, the third colon presents an array of translational options that results in numerous and contradicting interpretations. A potentially significant portion of this difficulty is the ׀ which begins the third colon. Far from being an obvious decision, translating the ׀ and determining its function relative to the clauses which follow and precede it is pivotal.

Another notable linguistic issue of verses 1-7 and 31-35 is the absence of the first four verses in the LXX. Though listed in *Ralph's*, each verse is separately preceded by the symbol ❖ which is indicative of an omission. *Origen's Hexapla* indicates that the symbol refers to Theodocion's translation and reveals that the verses are only present in his Hellenistic rendering of the Hebrew.<sup>6</sup> Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy further cite that verses

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<sup>6</sup> Fridericus Field, *Origen's Hexapla*, vol. 2 (Germany: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1964), 54.

1-4 are problematic in the Masoretic text because they are not governed by the ׀ particle characteristic of the other protasis clauses of Job 31.<sup>7</sup>

## STRUCTURE

The verses of the selected pericope can be grouped together as follows: 1-4, 5-7(8), 35-37. In terms of internal progression, verse 1 begins with a vow regarding Job's sexual ethics. Verses 2-4 follow with a series of rhetorical questions which explain why Job would not have committed such a sin. Specifically, what is man's divinely given "lot?" What is the result of making a poor lot? Does God not see whether or not Job is making a poor lot? In the context of the rest of the chapter, the number of offenses which follow verse 4 suggest the question to God, "Haven't you seen all of these sins of which I am innocent?"

Verses 5-34 and 38-40 reflect Job's attempts at self-justification. Believing that suffering is the punishment for sin, Job's testimony questions the lot God has given him. Frustrated and confused, he demands the Almighty to account for Himself. Beginning in verses 5-7 (8), Job delineates the second of such transgressions. Picking up the language of verse 4, Job denies that he has walked with falsehood or has permitted any of his bodily members to stray from God's way. These refutations of Job predominantly consist of ׀ plus a verb form and are seen throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Verses 9-34 continue with the designation of 11 additional transgressions. In verse 35, Job expresses his desire for a reply and makes an ambiguous reference to a scroll. The final two verses conclude with a description of what Job would do with the scroll and how the possession of it would make him act towards God.

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<sup>7</sup> Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 528.

As an additional note to the framework of chapter 31, the rabbinical scholar Robert Gordis argues that the list of transgressions enumerated by Job form a double heptad.<sup>8</sup> He cites several instances found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Ecc 3:2-8; Amo 3:3-8) and indicates that the presence of a list of sevens firmly establishes the structural unity of this chapter (thus negating the previously mentioned claim of Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy). Furthermore, since the number seven gives an indication of completeness,<sup>9</sup> Job's dual usage of the numeral emphatically stresses the totality of his innocence and confirms the narrator's initial description of him in 1:1.

### CONTEXT

Chapter 31 of Job is often grouped together with the two preceding chapters. It functions as the conclusion to the third cycle of speeches which are exclusively monologues. One notable characteristic of this section of Job is the conspicuous absence of any reference to the friends. Other than Elihu in chapters 32-37, the only "litigants" present from now on are Job and God.

In chapter 29, Job reminisces about his "former life." He reflects back on his earlier days of glory when God blessed him and men revered him. Chapter 30 begins with the transitionary phrase *וַעֲתָהּ* that emphasizes the dichotomy between his former and present state of existence. Previously, he was well-respected by the entire community. Now, Job is mocked even by the sons of the lowly. Furthermore, his calls to God remain unanswered.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes* (New York City: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 542.

<sup>9</sup> George A. Buttrick, ed., *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 295.

In chapter 31, Job utters his final words to שָׁדַי. Harkening back to chapter 22, much of Job's response seems to focus on defending himself against the final accusations of Eliphaz. Specifically, in 22:6-11, Eliphaz portrays Job as a violator of social justice. He accuses Job of leaving men naked, sending widows away empty handed, and refusing hospitality to the weary. The sins of which Eliphaz accuses Job are not stated in the Decalogue, but they do appear in Exodus in the context of other social regulations (cf. Exo 22:21, 22, and 26-27). Potentially aware of such a list, Eliphaz explains Job's punishment by contending that he has been an oppressor of the helpless (22:10-11).

In order to defend his integrity against such allegations, Job takes the stand to respond to the charges. Swearing that he has not committed any sin that would have caused the prosperity and splendor of chapter 29 to become the despair of chapter 30, Job 31 provides the reader with a summation of Job's life until now. With the offering of his signature at the conclusion of this chapter, Job seals his confession with boldness and bravado.

Following chapter 31, a fourth counselor, whose name translates as "He is my God," makes an appearance. Appearing inexplicably, the text indicates that Elihu had been there listening all along (32:11-12). The idea that he comes to function as the מוֹכִיחַ might at first seem attractive, but is nevertheless untrue since neither Job nor אֱלֹהִים respond to him. True to his name, however, his speeches do correct both Job and the friends and prepare them for the entrance of God in verses 38-42.

As Hartley indicates, though the plot necessitates a response from יְהוָה, His advent still comes as a surprise.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Yahweh's reaction to the conflict is not what either side

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<sup>10</sup> John E Hartley, *The Book of Job*, The International Commentary on the Old Testament

expects. Leaving the speeches of both Job and his friends unanswered, Yahweh interrogates Job's (man's) ability to understand creation. Lacking even the remotest wisdom to understand such wonders, who then, is Job to dispute with Yahweh?

## EXPOSITION

Verse 1 begins with the familiar Old Testament theme of "making a covenant." Seen nearly 300 times in the Old Testament, בְּרִית most commonly refers to the covenant between God and Israel (Deu 4:13) and the ark of the covenant (Num 10:33). In some notable exceptions, בְּרִית is used to denote a contract between two people (1 Sam 23:18). Even less common is the use of בְּרִית to refer to a covenant between a living being and a "non-living" entity (Job 31:1, Jer 33:25, Isa 28:15).

The only other place in Job where בְּרִית is found is in 40:28. Referring to an agreement between Job and Leviathan, BDB contend that this instance of the word is indicative of servitude.<sup>11</sup> While the word's appearance in 31:1 also possesses such connotations, BDB merely define it as an "agreement" or "pledge."<sup>12</sup>

English versions translate the next word, עֵינַי, as "my eyes" (NIV, RSV, KJV).

Prefixed to עֵינַי, the ל functions to specify a relationship between a superior and an inferior.<sup>13</sup>

A comparable usage appears in 2 Kings 11:4 where Jehoiada makes a covenant with the

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(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 487.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 136.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>13</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *Job*. The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and company, Inc., 1965), 200; also S. R. Driver and George Gray. *The Book of Job*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 262.

Carites. Similarly in Job 31:1, the ל conveys the sense of mastery that Job has attained over this organ of his body. The significance of this self-control becomes evident in the second clause to the verse.

Used in Job more than any other book of the Old Testament (15 of 74 times), the phrase וַיִּמָּה begins the second clause. Traditionally, it is translated as “and how” (NIV, RSV). Other instances of וַיִּמָּה in the book of Job reflect a similar rendition depending on the nuance of the ו. <sup>14</sup> As one might expect, the NIV and other English versions render the second clause, “And how can I look upon a virgin?”

In distinction, the grammarian Gesenius claims that the וַיִּמָּה of 31:1 indicates the “indignant refusal of a demand.”<sup>15</sup> Instead, he offers, “And I will **not** look upon a virgin.” Pope argues that the וַיִּמָּה present in 16:6b can be translated the same way.<sup>16</sup> The LXX translation of καὶ οὐ accompanied by the Vulgate’s *non* provide additional support for Gesenius’ interpretation.

In either case, the meaning of the verse is not significantly affected. If rendered as an interrogative, it reflects the hypothetical impossibility of committing the deed. Translated as a negative, the meaning stresses emphatic denial. Indeed, the options are noteworthy, but not necessarily critical.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 315ff. for a discussion on the wide variety of meanings.

<sup>15</sup> W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. By E. Kautzsch, 2nd English ed. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 471.

<sup>16</sup> Pope, *Job*, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 15, 201.

The final word of 31:1 also displays some degree of controversy among the commentaries. The Hebrew בְּתוּלָה is rendered “virgin” by many scholars.<sup>17</sup> However, some offer that the בְּתוּלָה may be a reference to the idol Venus or Anat, the virgin consort of Baal.<sup>18</sup> In weighing the two, the first option is much more likely. Although idolatry is mentioned in Job (31:26-27), it is far from being a dominant theme. Furthermore, the commentators only suggest the interpretation; none one of them is particularly insistent about it.

Thus, the opening verse of chapter 31 emphasizes that Job has kept himself free from sexual sin. Even more so, he has not even looked upon a virgin. In a culture where the eye sometimes represents the inclination towards evil (Psa 119:37, Isa 33:15), Job claims that he has not merely controlled his behavior, but even the desire which gives birth to it. Habel notes that such a level of piety is consistent with Job’s earlier efforts of offering sacrifices on behalf of the possible sins his children may have committed (1:5).<sup>19</sup>

In verse 2, Job again opens with the familiar וַיִּמָּה. Contrary to the first usage, in this instance the phrase does retain the interrogative translation of “So what?” More than making a transition between verses 1 and 2 the ו at the beginning of the sentence actually connects two.

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<sup>17</sup> Driver, *The Book of Job*, International Critical Commentary 262; also *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 552.

<sup>18</sup> Robert A. Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary (United States of America: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1993), 298; also Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (Great Britain: SCM Press, 1985), 425.

<sup>19</sup> Habel, *The Book of Job*, 431.

The following word, חֶלֶק, is used 4 times in noun form in the book of Job. Spoken once by Zophar, twice by Job, and once by Yahweh, the word always refers to a share or inheritance given to a person (or animal) by Yahweh. In the first two appearances, the portion refers to what He gives the wicked man (20:29, 27:13). In Job 31:2, it functions in a similar matter when connected to the following verse.

The Hebrew, אֱלֹהִים, appears in a construct chain with חֶלֶק. Significantly, אֱלֹהִים is used 49 times throughout the Old Testament (in this form) with 37 of those instances occurring in Job. Even more interesting, the LXX translates אֱלֹהִים as ὁ κύριος (16 times) in the first 27 chapters of Job (except 3:4). Yet, from chapter 29 onward (excluding 31:6, 33:26) the predominant translation is ὁ θεός (8 times). The remaining appearances of אֱלֹהִים are translated with a pronoun or implied in a verb form.

Outside of Job, the LXX renders every other instance of אֱלֹהִים as θεός. Somewhat of an enigma, the commentaries are surprisingly silent about this relatively rare reference to the Deity. Botterweck and Ringgren makes no special observations about אֱלֹהִים other than to say that it is generally interchangeable with אֱל and אֱלֹהִים.<sup>20</sup> Seen randomly in the Torah, Nevi'im, and Kethuvim, it is difficult to form any sort of conclusion regarding Job's use of this name for God.

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<sup>20</sup> G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 272.

In the second colon of 31:2, a style of poetry becomes apparent that may have been unexpected from the prose beginning of the first verse. Specifically, the second colon of verse 2 parallels the first colon in the following manner:

Colon A:	מִמַּעַל	אֱלֹהִים	חֵלֶק	וְמָה
Colon B:	מִמְרָמִים	שָׂדֵי	נַחֲלֹת	וְ(מָה)

Divided into four parts each, the bicola correspond to one another exactly. Expressing a paradigmatic relationship, colon B expresses the same thought as colon A. The repetition of this question from Job seems to emphasize the contrast between God on high and the lot He gives to man below.

In analysis of the passage's overall interpretation, Job follows up his commitment to sexual ethics with a question that ponders the meaning of a life lived under God. In association with verse 3, Job believes אֱלֹהִים fixes a heritage for each person on earth related to his deeds.<sup>21</sup> While Eliphaz formerly stated his belief that God's view from the heights was obscured (22:12-18), Job knows full well (cf.31:5) that he is visible to the Almighty. Beginning here with the general category of man, verses 3 and 4 quickly narrow the scope of Job's inquiry to conclude specifically on himself.

Verse 3 commences with the interrogative הֲלֹא which is expectant of a positive answer. Serving as the bridge to verse 4, Job's words seem to resemble the earlier ones of his friends that equated sin with suffering. Since they exhibit the same kind of parallelism present in verse 2, one might expect the repetition of thought to emphasize the degree of

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<sup>21</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 410.

conviction (as in Psalms or Proverbs). However, in light of his inability to explain his own suffering, the dual inquiries of verse 2 seem to accentuate Job's rising doubt. They signal the desperation of a man trying to cling to any fragment of his rapidly dissipating certainties about life.

The shortest verse in the pericope, 31:3 appears somewhat incomplete. Job makes a one-sided statement about what the wicked inherit, but neglects to mention the lot of the righteous. He utters a similar and more elongated expression in chapter 21. Though the fate of the righteous is mentioned elsewhere by the others present (17:9, 36:7), Job is unable to speak on the subject because his own experience of unjust suffering has deprived him.

The word אִיִּד appears 22 times in the Old Testament with most of the occurrences found in Job and Proverbs. Translated as "calamity" or "disaster" (RSV), אִיִּד almost always pertains to the wicked (21:17, 30), or outside of Job, to the Gentile nations (cf. Jer 49:8, 32). Notably, only in 31:3 and in Oba 1:12-13 are the words אִיִּד and נֶכֶד linked together. A consistent theme throughout wisdom literature books (Pro 6:15, Ecc 8:13, Psa 9:16), the fate supposedly allotted only to the wicked has become a conundrum to the man initially described as תָּם וְיָשָׁר (1:1).

Verse 4 expresses another common theme representative of the wisdom literature in the Semitic world, namely, God's omniscience regarding man's activity (cf. Psa 33:13-15, 119:68, Pro 5:21). Written chiastically, Job formerly resented the constant surveillance of שָׁרֵי (7:12, 19). Now, he hopes that God's vigilance will lead to his own vindication (as indicated by the opening הֲלֵא). Serving as a confirmation of verse 1 as well as the following verses, Job also knows that God is aware of his דַּרְדָּר.

The final verse of this section, 31:4, concludes Job's series of questions answered with questions. Having begun with the general speculation about the lot of man, Job has focused his own investigation upon himself. While he spoke similar words about God back in 14:16, his perspective since then has changed. Previously in chapter 14, his tone was more optimistic and his speech was more characteristic of faith talk. By chapter 31, his language has become more defensive and litigious in nature.

Verse 5 opens with a series of if-then statements that characterize the structure for most of the rest of the chapter. A closer look at the cola reveals that there are actually two formula variations which are significant enough to warrant discussion here. The first is, "If I have done X, may Y happen to me."<sup>22</sup> Found in verses 7-10, 21-22, and 38-40, the oath details both the alleged crime committed and the desired punishment the petitioner beckons upon himself. It is a powerful assertion of innocence that invokes imprecatory consequences should the speaker prove to be a liar.

The *NIB* also finds 10 examples of the second abbreviated form which consists of the phrase, "If I have done X."<sup>23</sup> Verses 5, 13, 16, 19, 24, 25, 26, 29, 31, and 33 all exhibit this form of a protasis with an unstated apodosis. Though this second style of oath does raise questions due to its incompleteness, the *NIB* offers no explanation.

Sheldon Blank, however, is of help in this area. He comments that the rationale behind the implied apodosis is fear.<sup>24</sup> According to Blank, the speaker left his statement unfinished because he dreaded that simply naming the calamity would bring about its reality.

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<sup>22</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, 551.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

<sup>24</sup> Sheldon H. Blank, "An Effective Literary Device in Job XXXI." *Journal for Jewish Studies* 2:2 (1951): 105-107.

A testimony to the power of the spoken word, the imprecatory oath in its complete form was certainly not one that anyone regarded lightly.

With nothing “suppressed,” the complete form of the oath appears only 3 times in all of scripture, specifically, Psalm 7, 87, and here in Job 31.<sup>25</sup> Differing somewhat from the *NIB* in his verse classifications (5, 7-8; 9-10; 13, 16-17, 19-22; and 38-40), Blank argues that the explicitly stated consequences for lying provide Job 31 with a unique and dramatic effect. That is, they boldly and unambiguously stress Job’s confidence in his own innocence and compel God to either acquit him or enact the oath’s curses. If God remains silent or takes no action, Job is vindicated by default.

Verses 5-8 consist of two conditional verses alternating with two verses of result. Yet, the topic of falsehood is essentially the same throughout the section. Botterweck and Ringgren define אָשׁוּב as something “insubstantial” or “worthless.”<sup>26</sup> With the exception of 31:5, all of the other instances in Job retain this meaning (7:3, 11:11, 15:31, and 35:13). Elsewhere in scripture, it has been applied to the improper use of God’s name (Exo 20:7), false testimony given in court (Exo 23:1, Deu 5:17), lies emanating from a person guilty of violent acts (Psa 144:8, 11), inauthentic acts of worship (Isa 1:13), misleading oracles uttered by uninspired prophets (Eze 12:24), and to idols (Jer 18:15).<sup>27</sup>

Although unaccompanied by the verb הִלְכָהּ anywhere else in scripture, the two together convey thoughts reminiscent of wisdom literature. For instance, “walking” is a common wisdom metaphor for one’s behavior (cf. Psa 1:1, Pro 2:13). By avoiding אָשׁוּב, Job

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<sup>25</sup> *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4, 107.

<sup>26</sup> G. J. Botterweck, and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 7 (Berlin: W. Kohlhammer, 1990), 1106.

<sup>27</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 411.

indicates that he has inclined his ear to the wisdom of Yahweh. In addition, he has lived by the same standard as those clean enough to enter the temple precincts (Psa 24:3-4).

The second colon of verse 5 echoes both the imagery and thought of the previous colon (cf. also 23:11). In fact, it's a very common metaphor among works of wisdom literature and the prophets (cf. Pro 1:16, Isa 59:7). In Job 31:5, it functions as a metonymy for the whole person. In fact, Job makes reference to the following individual body members throughout the pericope: eyes (31:1, 7); foot (31:5); heart (31:7); and hands (31:7). Such a summation of the various parts seems to be indicative of the totality of an individual's will and action (cf. also Pro 4:25-27).<sup>28</sup> By restraining his members from committing the visibly perceivable aspects of sin, Job is also suggesting that he has mastered the inner thoughts which give birth to such transgressions.

Verse 6 functions as the result of the previous verse. It begins with a jussive form calling on אֱלֹהִים to evaluate Job. Using the word יִשְׁקֶלְנִי, Job asks God to test his quality. In the past, Job wished for his “vexation” (RSV) to be weighed (6:2) in order to illustrate God's harshness. Now, Job hopes that God will weigh him in order to establish that he is no fraud.

The word כְּמֵאזֵנִי is reflected in a variety of instances throughout the Scriptures. De Vaux comments that while foodstuffs were measured by volume, precious materials and metals were weighed.<sup>29</sup> Predictably, “honest scales” became important to ensure equity and fairness in commerce. In fact, the first appearance of מֵאֲזֵנִי occurs in the Levitical law (Lev

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<sup>28</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, 553.

<sup>29</sup> Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 203.

19:36) where Yahweh specifically mandates justice. In addition to Job 31:6, this Pentateuchal passage is the only other place in scripture that ties מאזני and צדק together.

The adjective, צדק, becomes necessary for Job to emphasize his integrity. In contrast to the false scales described among wisdom literature and the prophets (Pro 11:1, Amo 8:5), Job demands that God judge him according to His own standards. The citation of צדק potentially connects to the Levitical law by drawing on its impartiality. The law is the spoken word of God which Job can point to as “external” to the current situation. In contrast to God's current "subjectivity" regarding Job, His written word stands as objective.

Therefore, Job challenges God to publicly evaluate him by His standard of truth. In distinction to man's self-appraisal, the scale symbolizes a reliable means to measure Job's integrity. While the scale is mentioned in only one other instance in reference to measuring a man (Psa 62:10), there are verses that convey the weighing of a man's spirit (Pro 16:2) and heart (Pro 24:12). In verse 6, Job calls for that balance of “final judgment”<sup>30</sup> that he believes will issue him a fair and impartial verdict.

In verse 7, Job again reverts to beginning his statement with the ו particle followed by a verb form. Here, the ו actually does triple duty by distributing itself among all three cola of the verse. The first verb in 31:7, תטה, is defined as “to stretch out” or “bend.”<sup>31</sup> Viewed in context with אשתי, English versions offer the translations of “to turn aside” (RSV) or “to turn from” (NIV, NASB). In this case, Job's words relate to 23:11 where he gave a

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<sup>30</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 176.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 639.

similar vow to express confidence in his innocence. Now, however, the curse which follows in verse 8 shades verse 7 with imprecatory consequences.

The Hebrew דֶרֶךְ which concludes the first cola is very important in Job. Employed a total of 36 times, it refers to God (21:14), Job (22:3), and the unrighteous (22:15). In several instances, the referent of דֶרֶךְ is not even human (24:13, 28:26). Defined as “road” or “way,”<sup>32</sup> Keil and Delitzsch contend that Job means the “one right way,”<sup>33</sup> or more specifically, the way of the righteous (cf. 17:9). The word is previously seen in 31:4 where Job expresses his awareness of God’s vigilance and omniscience. In verse 7, Job essentially invites the Almighty’s evaluation.

In the second colon, Job’s language hearkens back to verse one. Seen together within the same verse 37 times throughout the Old Testament and Apocrypha, לֵבָב and עֵין often influence one another (cf. Job 15:12, 19:27). In fact, wisdom literature nearly portrays a channel between the two (Psa 36:1, Pro 15:30). As a result, the relationship in Job 31:7 comes as no surprise. In the context of the verse, Job affirms that any corruptive suggestion that has entered his eyes has been squelched by his heart.

The last colon concludes the verse by highlighting the cleanliness of Job’s hands. Unlike the first two cola, the third colon contains words previously unmentioned thus far in the chapter. Nonetheless, such a concept in Job is certainly not unprecedented. In fact, Job is not afraid to claim such a characteristic for himself (16:17) despite the scoffing of his friends (22:30). Although sometimes, he does ponder its futility (9:30).

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>33</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 4, 177.

Yet, what is the **מֵאֵימָה** of which Job has kept his hands clean? Several English versions render it as “spot” (RSV, NASB). However, LXX, Syriac, and Targum all translate **מֵאֵימָה** as “anything.”<sup>34</sup> In support of the Masoretic text, Gesenius contends that the **א** of **מֵאֵימָה** was not intended to be pronounced, but appears solely as an orthographic reflection of etymology.<sup>35</sup> His argument is further reinforced by the only other Old Testament appearance of **מֵאֵימָה** in Daniel 1:4. There, the Qere indicates that the word should be read as **מֵאֵימָה**. Apparently, the alternate reading suggested by LXX, Syriac, and Targum is taken from the Hebrew **מֵאֵימָה** which means “anything.”<sup>36</sup> In Job, the “spot” interpretation appears more likely. As such, the English renditions reflect the nuance that sin would have left a “visible” mark on Job’s hands had they committed an offense.

Making a progression from steps (feet) to eyes and heart to hands, Job calls attention to the various parts of his body that he has kept free from sin. A common theme up to this point in the pericope, Job continues to emphasize the purity of his individual members throughout the chapter (cf. 31:9, 21, 27, 30). Building the case for his own righteousness “piece by piece,” the numerous parts can be assembled to establish the inculpability of the entire man.

In addition, there is a second progression of turning aside to being misled to becoming defiled. A precursor to verse 8, the verbs create a crescendo effect that portrays the “steps” of a path taken by an erring man. Remaining faithful to the **דְּרֹכַי** of God, Job has avoided even partially straying on to such a trail..

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<sup>34</sup> Pope, *Job*, The Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 15, 201.

<sup>35</sup> Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 80.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 548.

In verse 35, Job begins to bring his case to a close. Many scholars rightly group verses 35-37 together and argue that these verses formally conclude Job's defense. The *NIB* sees them as an "interruption" to Job's oath,<sup>37</sup> yet, it does not advocate transposing the material as Gordis and others do.<sup>38</sup> In reality, the anticlimactic nature of verses 38-40 should not be considered troublesome. There is certainly biblical precedence for such a structural move seen previously in Job (3:23-26, 14:18-22). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this type of linguistic incoherence is found in verse 7 of Amos 3:1-8. While such an element of poetry is foreign to many modern readers, its location in the text does not necessitate a shifting or an omission to accommodate the occidental ear.

The words *מִי־יִתֵּן* that begin verse 35 are used 17 times throughout the Old Testament with 9 of those instances located in Job. They usually express either a wish (Job 6:8) or a question (14:4) and frequently exhibit a very emotional tone. Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that Job himself is the speaker in 8 of those appearances. In comparison to the present context, Habel notes that *מִי־יִתֵּן* has often introduced earlier flights of hope (14:13, 19:23, 29:2).<sup>39</sup> In verse 35, *מִי־יִתֵּן* not only conveys a sense of anticipation, but also expresses an outspoken invitation. Serving as the last *מִי־יִתֵּן* spoken by Job, the phrase highlights the urgency of his request for a *שֹׁמֵעַ*.

Yet, who is this *שֹׁמֵעַ*? One attractive possibility is that the participle refers to the previously mentioned *מוֹכֵיחַ* of Job 9:33. Since Job has yet to receive resolution from God, he has sought to appeal his case to one who would serve as referee between God and himself,

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<sup>37</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, 555.

<sup>38</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 545; also Driver and Gray, *The Book of Job*, vol. 14 pt. 2, 272.

<sup>39</sup> Habel, *The Book of Job*, 438.

a שְׂמִיעַ. As evidence, Dick points to 2 Sam 15:3 where Absalom tells the Israelites who come to the city gate seeking מִשְׁפָּט that there is no שְׂמִיעַ for them.<sup>40</sup> In 2 Sam 15:4, the שְׂמִיעַ is also identified as a שֹׁפֵט. Job, then, hopes that such a שְׂמִיעַ would require his accuser to present his charges in writing in the form of a כִּכְרָר.

The following phrase, הֵן־תָּוִי, solicits a great deal of discussion among many scholars. The chief issue centers on determining the root of תָּוִי. In consideration, there are primarily two options. The first takes תָּוִי as a modified form of תָּו which BDB define as “mark.”<sup>41</sup> The only other occurrences of תָּו occur in Ezekiel 9:4 and 6. There, the “mark” functions to exempt its bearers from divinely mandated slaughter. Placed on the foreheads of various Israelites, the תָּו stands as a written sign (Eze 9:3) for the ones commissioned to carry out the executions. In Job, the תָּוִי could be indicative of a “written mark of attestation”<sup>42</sup> that functions as the final affirmation of Job’s oath.

The second option contends that תָּוִי is equal to the Hebrew letter ת accompanied by a first person suffix. Several commentators claim that the letter ת was a signature used by those who were illiterate to authenticate documents in ancient times.<sup>43</sup> In the old script, the letter ת resembled the English letter “X.”<sup>44</sup> Hartley further adds that since Job likely owned a seal to certify documents, his use of the letter ת likely signifies his intention to personally sign the oath himself.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> M. B. Dick, “Legal Metaphor in Job 31” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 41:1 (1979) 48.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1063.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1063.

<sup>43</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 424; also Driver and Gray, *The Book of Job*, vol. 14, pt. 2, 274.

<sup>44</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Notes*, 355.

<sup>45</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 424.

In either case, the *שָׁרִי* represents a confirmatory mark of Job's previous confession in this chapter. Having formerly been cross-examined and accused by the three friends, Job's words in chapter 31 are now directed towards *שָׁרִי*. The scene is reminiscent of a forensic setting. Job has finished testifying on his own behalf and is stepping down from the stand to await his verdict.

The next phrase, *שָׁרִי יַעֲנֵנִי*, particularly names the one to whom Job's oath and signature are directed. Seen a total of 48 times in the Old Testament, *שָׁרִי* is employed 31 times in the book of Job (cf. 37 of 49 instances of *אֱלֹהִים*). The root word, *שָׁרַר*, means "to deal violently with."<sup>46</sup> While the word seems to carry the connotations of might and power elsewhere in the scriptures (cf. *ὁ παντοκράτωρ* in Gen 28:3, Exo 6:3 of LXX), the denotative meaning seems especially fitting in Job.

The reformer Martin Luther had a different perspective. He contended that *שָׁרִי*, when derived from *שָׁרַר*, reflected a God of destruction. It was a name that "fit the demons more truthfully than it fit the God of life and light."<sup>47</sup> Instead, he argued that *שָׁרִי* originated from the word *שָׂד* which means "breast." Just as a mother nourishes and sustains her child from her own body, so will God Himself nourish and sustain His children.

In evaluation of the two interpretations, the first possesses much greater support. Though the word does portray an image of fierceness and fear, God can certainly not be denied those qualities. Furthermore, the LXX rendition of *παντοκράτωρ* would seem to strengthen the legitimacy of the BDB definition. Job, then, calls upon the one who has "dealt

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 994.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 83.

violently” with him to answer. The word is an appropriate description of God from Job’s perspective. Perhaps that is why he uses the name אֱלֹהֵי rather than אֱלֹהִים.

The final colon of verse 35 is especially problematic in matters of exegesis and interpretation. Translations such as “that my Prosecutor had written a book!” (NKJ) and “and *that* mine adversary had written a book” (KJV) are somewhat unclear. Composed of fairly simple Hebrew, it is the syntax of the third colon of verse 35 that is complex.

In analysis, the verse begins with a ו plus the noun סֵפֶר. The ו should not be overlooked as its presence in this context can lead to a variety of interpretations. Viewed concessively, the translation might be understood two different ways. In the first, the ו functions to introduce colon c of verse 35: “Let the Almighty one answer me *even though* my adversary has written a scroll.” In the second, the ו might be translated to introduce colon a of verse 36: “*Even though* my adversary has written a scroll, surely upon my shoulder I will bear it.” Because of the poetic nature of chapter 31, the imperfect אֲשַׁנֵּן can also reflect a broad range of meanings.<sup>48</sup>

Another possibility that is syntactically feasible is to view the ו as the introduction to the apodosis of an earlier verse (s). The words, “*Then* my adversary would have written a scroll” would complete the prodases begun in verses 33-34. Joüon refers to this phenomenon as “juxtaposition.”<sup>49</sup> According to this translation, the first two cola of verse 35 serve as an

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Waltke and O’Connor for a detailed presentation on this issue, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 496ff.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 2 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 627; also Dr. Paul Schrieber, Personal Discussion. St. Louis, MO. 1/27/00.

interjection. With verses 35-37 emerging as such themselves, an exclamation here should not seem a surprise.

A third possibility for interpreting verse 35 does not so much center on the ו as on the מִי־יִתֵּן. Specifically, the מִי־יִתֵּן might function in a dual role by carrying over to the beginning of the third colon. Described as an “ellipsis,” the verse could be read, “O that I had a hearing one...And *O that I* had the scroll my adversary has written.” Functioning simply as a copulative, the ו merely joins the two clauses of 35b and 35c together.

Lastly, one may take the ו as an adversitive with a conditional nuance.<sup>50</sup> “*But had* my prosecutor written a scroll, surely upon my shoulder I would bear it.” In contrast to two of the previous translations, this rendition suggests that no scroll has been written. After further review, there is no prior citation of a סֵפֶר in chapter 31. Yet, the subsequent appearances of סֵפֶר are particularly suggestive that God has written a document against Job. Where, then, is the precedent for such a scroll?

While the word סֵפֶר is frequently conceived of as a “book” or “scroll,” it can also be defined as a “document,” or more specifically in the case of verse 35, an “indictment.”<sup>51</sup> Though some commentators believe that the scroll might refer to a “writ of innocence” for Job,<sup>52</sup> the BDB definition accompanied by אִישׁ רִיבִי favors the interpretation of a testimony written against him.

The author of the scroll is also somewhat of an enigma. Possible translations include: “man of my controversy,” “man of my adversary,” and “accuser.” The root word, רִיב, occurs

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<sup>50</sup> Dr. Timothy Saleska, Telephone Discussion. St. Louis, MO. 1/26/00.

<sup>51</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 706.

<sup>52</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 424-425.

a total of 12 times in Job and is usually translated as “complaint” when it appears as a noun and “to contend” when used in the verb form. The question, however, is not centered on defining the verb, but on identifying the referent. While it is possible to see the friends functioning collectively as Job’s accuser or adversary, another person is far more likely to fit that role. Researching the previous instances of כָּתַב now becomes important.

Found extensively throughout the Scriptures, כָּתַב appears only 3 times in Job. Yet, one of those instances would seem to confirm the existence of the scroll cited in 31:35. In verse 13:26, Job says of שָׂרִי, “For you *write down* bitter things against me” (NIV). More than keeping track of his offenses, Job’s words indicate a belief that שָׂרִי is inscribing some sort of negative report. While סִפָּר does not occur here, the word מְרִירָה is certainly suggestive of an incriminatory document.

Returning to the evaluation of translational options for verse 35c, the determination of referents has facilitated the development of a conclusion. Since Job expresses a prior belief in the existence of a “scroll,” the second and fourth options (cf. pgs. 23-24 of this report) which question or deny its existence can be eliminated. Furthermore, the third option is favored over the first because the former more definitively reflects God, and not the friends, as Job’s accuser.

In verse 36, Job boasts that he would take the aforementioned indictment and wear it upon his shoulder or head. He is so confident in his own innocence that he would not wear the סִפָּר humbly as if it had validity, but rather proudly, as though the indictment were untrue. Having been humiliated publicly, Job plans on openly parading about in order to make a

spectacle of himself and his סִפֹּר. At this point, Job does not seem to be concerned with the restoration of his previous life, but only with the reinstatement of his blamelessness.

The third person singular suffix seen in אֲשָׁאֲנִי would seem to refer to סִפֹּר and not to אִישׁ רִיבִי. The סִפֹּר is the nearest antecedent and best fits the context of verse 36. Though there are no other instances in scripture of wearing a סִפֹּר, an item worn about the shoulders or head was considered to be significant. For instance, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, was given a tunic to place on his head and a key on his shoulder as a sign of authority (Isa 22:22). In Proverbs, the crown is shown to be a symbol of blessing and honor (Pro 4:9, 12:4). The word עֲטָרוֹת is likely in the plural in Job 31:36 to show that it was a multi-layered headpiece.<sup>53</sup>

In verse 37, the words, “the number of my steps” form a poetic inclusio with verse 4 and signify the presence of a structural envelope in the chapter. Initially wondering if God was counting his steps, the litany of transgressions Job denies between verses 4 and 37 reflect his initiative to count his own steps for God. When accompanied by the verses which surround the poetic envelope (1 and 38-40), the 14 transgressions Job enumerates doubly emphasize the completeness of his blameless ways.

After concluding his oath, Job engages in an imaginative and proleptic celebration in what amounts to a victory dance. The word play between אֲגִידָנִי and נָגִיד highlights the feelings of confidence and security with which Job will approach אִישׁ רִיבִי. The description likens him to an unjustly imprisoned man who has recently been freed. In response, Job will

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<sup>53</sup> Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary, vol. 20, 309.

visit the judge who has wrongly convicted him. Wearing the indictment so prominently, he will stand before God as the ultimate gesture of his own vindication.

### **THEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Job 31 represents the final plea of a man who has struggled to understand the wisdom of God. Initially, Job believed that human behavior causatively influenced divine response. His loss of prosperity left him without certainty. In his demand for an answer or resolution, Job has come to learn of the true wisdom of God. He is a God whose **עֲצָה** cannot be questioned and whose ways do not have to be explained or justified.

To Job's credit, he never loses faith nor does he forsake God. Seeking God's presence even through immense and unexplained anguish (31:35), Job has indeed negated the initial claim of **יָשָׁה** in chapter one. Yahweh, on the other hand, while discrediting human insight, exonerates Job and even provides a way of restoration for his friends. Thus, the book of Job ends with all of the relationships restored.

In relation to the Old Testament, chapter 31 of Job calls the theology of divine retribution into question. While the message that the wicked are cursed and the righteous are blessed is present in Job, the cause/effect relationship of such a theology is negated. Suffering is not an absolute indication that one has sinned, and good works do not earn one prosperity. Rather, God's blessing flows from the grace and benevolence of His nature. Whether it is inheriting the land of Canaan, fathering numerous descendants, or receiving divine favor, all are gifts from God.

Secondly, the book of Job explores the issue of human suffering, specifically, the affliction of God's servants. Responding with a history of his own service record, Job's defense in chapter 31 is very similar to that of Jeremiah's (cf. Jer 15:15-21). In comparison,

both argue against their divinely ordained suffering with criticism and a resume of human righteousness. Yet, like the Psalmist who also experienced God's alien work, both Job and Jeremiah hold on to God against God.

In the New Testament, the parallel to Job is obvious. The innocent and blameless Jesus Christ endured a time divinely imposed agony. Lonely, depressed, and alienated from both God and man, Christ understood the depths of isolation experienced by Job. Likewise, at the height of His torment, Jesus also questioned why God had forsaken Him (Mat 27:46). Yet, because Jesus Christ did experience the trials and tribulations associated with bearing the world's sin, all of humanity now truly has one who is a מוֹכִיחַ.

As far as the text's religious significance, the believer is able to see the presence of God even in the midst of adversity. Though God may appear distant or removed from the life of the afflicted one, the story of Job reminds people of faith that He is always near—even in events as horrific as the Holocaust. Furthermore, the Church believes that the anguish and death of Jesus Christ put an end to the alienation between God and man. On account of Christ's atoning work, men and women can now truly approach God with the confidence and security of a נְגִיד.

The story of Job provides a special sense of comfort for the men and women who aspire to serve God in His Church. While ministering to those in distress, pastors and laypeople can encourage them with the message that the Lord also endured a time of suffering to save humanity. Drawing upon His strength, those in pain can develop a sense of confidence that God has a purpose even though it may remain unrevealed. Moreover, God's next appearance gives the Church an eternal sense of hope. On account of His promise to return, all believers can celebrate in an anticipatory victory dance of their own.

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