

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 17

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Now My Eyes Have Seen You

IMAGES OF CREATION AND EVIL
IN THE BOOK OF JOB



Robert S. Fyall

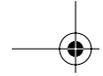


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Contents

Series preface	9
Author's preface	11
Abbreviations	13
1 Speaking what is right	17
The scope of this study	17
The approach taken	18
Is it a unitary work?	18
Varied readings of Job	21
The literary genre of Job	23
The poet's use of imagery	24
Myth and theology	26
The shape of this study	28
2 An advocate in heaven?	31
The prose tale	34
Job 9:32–35	39
Job 16:18–22	41
Job 19:20–27	44
The third speech-cycle (chs. 22 – 31)	52
The Elihu speeches (chs. 32 – 37)	53
God and Job (38:1 – 42:6)	53
The epilogue (42:7–16)	54
General comments	54
3 The tragic Creator	57
'He also made the stars'	58
The tree of life	62
'Where can wisdom be found?'	65
'The world is charged with the grandeur of God' (chs. 38 – 39)	73

4 The raging sea	83
Job 3:8	84
Job 7:12	85
Job 9	86
Job 26	89
Job 28	90
Job 38	92
The sea stories in the gospels	98
5 The shadowlands	101
The significance of Job 3	102
The womb of the earth	103
The vast reaches of the underworld	105
The powers of darkness	112
6 Yahweh, Mot and Behemoth	117
God as tormentor	117
How the images relate to each other	125
The figure of Behemoth	126
7 The ancient prince of hell	139
The scope of the study	139
A note on the prose tale	141
The significance of chapter 3	141
The significance of the rest of the poetic dialogue	145
The Elihu speech	153
8 Drawing out Leviathan	157
The challenge (40:25–32; Eng. 41:1–8)	158
Overwhelming fear (41:1–4; Eng. 41:9–12)	159
Description of the monster (41:5–21; Eng. 41:13–29)	162
His habitat (41:22–26; Eng. 41:31–34)	167
The other Leviathan passages	168
General comments	172
9 The vision glorious	175
Structure	175
Theological issues	177
Job and biblical theology	184

Appendix: Job and Canaanite myth	191
The significance of Ugarit for Old Testament studies	191
The relevance of the Baal sagas	192
Theological significance	194
Bibliography	195
Index of modern authors	202
Index of Scripture references	204
Index of ancient sources	208

To Thelma,
with love and gratitude

Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: 1. the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); 2. the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and 3. the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of the scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

For many readers, Job has been a closed book, or, at most, a book with which they have only a superficial acquaintance. They know it is about suffering, and not just any suffering but unjust suffering. They may even recall that such suffering is Job's lot, that God has permitted Satan to have a relatively free hand with the unfortunate man, and that Job begins by taking it very well, but over the course of several cycles of debates between Job and his 'miserable comforters' he becomes more and more convinced of his own righteousness and of the unfairness of what he is experiencing. Eventually, in several highly symbol-laden chapters, God scolds Job but does not give him a direct answer to his most burning questions. Then the book closes with a happy ending. This, more or less, is what casual readers know of the book of Job.

NOW MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOU

What are we to make of this? In fact, we do not begin to gain a real grasp of the message of the book of Job and of its contribution to the canon, apart from a more detailed grasp of its imagery and drama. Here Dr Fyall is a sure-footed guide: not only does he lecture in Old Testament, but he preaches regularly in a church that draws several hundred university students – something that does not usually happen unless the preacher has something to say from the Bible, and says it well. In this book many more can listen in with pleasure and profit.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Author's preface

How long does it take to write a book? This work is a substantial rewriting of my doctoral thesis presented to the University of Edinburgh in 1991. Its roots, however, go further back to my undergraduate studies and beyond that to my late teens when I read the book of Job (in the AV) at a time when I was also devouring other works such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the plays of Shakespeare and Homer's *Iliad*. In the study of Job my great loves of theology, of Bible exposition and literature came together especially powerfully and significantly.

Job studies have not stood still in the ten years since the thesis was presented, and this book differs in many ways from the original study. However, the basic argument at the heart of it is still the same: that the key to Job is its depiction of God dealing with and overcoming evil, represented by Behemoth and Leviathan. Over the last decade I have taught the book at St John's College, Durham and I am grateful to the many students who have sharpened my insights and raised new ideas and suggested new angles on the text. Many of them have urged me to see this into print, and encouraged me to return to this project three years ago when the serious writing began. I am also grateful to the 1992 executive of Durham Christian Union who asked me to give a series of talks on Job. These talks, somewhat expanded, were published by Christian Focus Publications in 1995 under the title *How does God treat his friends?* Marianne Young, former Course Administrator at St John's College, has transferred the whole thing on to computer disk and has my most grateful thanks.

To my former teacher and supervisor of the thesis, Professor John Gibson, who was also my mentor in matters Ugaritic, I give my grateful thanks. Also, thanks are due to Professor Emeritus Robert Davidson, the external examiner of the thesis and Dr Peter Hayman, the internal examiner. Both have my gratitude for their courtesy and shrewd comments.

It is a great joy to have this book published as part of the New

NOW MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOU

Studies in Biblical Theology. No-one could have been more helpful, encouraging and supportive than Professor D. A. Carson. His own immense knowledge and love of Scripture, and his concern for accuracy as well as the broad sweep of the argument, have constantly urged me on with this project. I also thank Inter-Varsity Press, and particularly Dr Philip Duce, for their courteous help. My hope and prayer is that this book will send people back with renewed interest to the book of Job and indeed to the Bible as a whole.

My family, as always, have provided the context of loving support in which the book was written. My children, Carmen and Drummond, now in their late teens, still show a somewhat bemused interest in 'Dad's books', and ensure that scholarship and living are held together. My wife Thelma has supported, encouraged and prayed this project to completion and I dedicate this book to her with love and gratitude.

Robert S. Fyall

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AN Bib</i>	<i>Analecta Biblica</i>
<i>AnOr</i>	<i>Analecta Orientalia</i>
<i>AOAT</i>	<i>Alter Orient und Alter Testament</i> (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Kevelaar)
AOS	American Oriental Society
AV	Authorized (King James') Version
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford, 1906)
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (eds.) (Stuttgart, 1968–1977)
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibOr</i>	<i>Biblica et Orientalia</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> (Berlin)
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> (Washington)
<i>Conc</i>	<i>Concilium</i>
<i>CML</i>	<i>Canaanite Myths and Legends</i> , J. C. L. Gibson (ed.), (2nd edn. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978; previous edn. G. R. Driver (ed.), 1956)
<i>CTA</i>	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cuneiforms alphabetiques</i> , A. Herdner (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963)
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
Eng.	English (where numbering different from Hebrew)
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , with E. Kautzch and A. E. Cowley (2nd edn., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)

NOW MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOU

<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Reviews</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOT Sup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Keilaphabetische Texte aus Ugarit</i> , M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, J. Sanmartin (<i>AOAT</i> 24, Neukirchen- Vluyn: Kevelaar, 1976)
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NEB	New English Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version (1983, 1978, 1984)
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studies</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SBLMS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</i>
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SOTS	Society of Old Testament Studies Supplement Series
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
Theol	<i>Theology</i>
<i>TOTC</i>	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ugaritica V</i>	<i>Les Nouveaux des Texte mythologigues et liturgigues de Ras Shamra/Ugaritica 5</i> , C. Virolleaud (Paris, 1968), 545–606
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTs</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplements</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Chapter One

Speaking what is right

A book of sermons by a distinguished biblical scholar and preacher bears the title *Trembling at the Threshold of a Biblical Text*.¹ This is a salutary caution to anyone who tries to expound the ‘living oracles of God’. Few texts are more daunting and yet more fascinating than the book of Job; few have been the subject of such diverse interpretation, and the flood of commentaries and studies continues unabated. Bearing in mind the condemnation of the friends as ‘not speaking what was right’, it is important to approach this great book with humility, realizing that we do not know the answer to many of the problems. Indeed, the mystery of God’s ways and the appalling evil and suffering in the world are at the heart of the book’s massive contribution to the canon.

In this introductory chapter I shall outline the scope of this study; explain my approach; set out the case for the unity of Job; discuss some of the varied readings of the book and reflect on its genre and language.

The scope of this study

It is my aim to give a holistic reading of Job particularly in terms of its depiction of creation and evil. Naturally all the commentaries mention these, but there is a need for a synthesis and fresh treatment of the material and an attempt to assess their importance in the context of the study of the book as a whole. Commentaries diverge sharply in their treatment of these issues and these divergences colour their overall picture of the theology of Job.² I want to make three observations at this point that I hope will be useful.

The first relates to the importance of the divine speeches (chs.

¹ Crenshaw 1994.

² Generally speaking, older commentators such as Driver-Gray (1977) and Dhorme (1967) (supported by the later commentaries of Andersen and Gordis) argue for a naturalistic interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan. Dahood and his followers, notably Pope and Michel, are convinced of a supernatural interpretation but barely glance at the theological implications of their views.

38 – 41). Here, surely, is the heart of the theology of Job, and it is my conviction that these chapters must control the interpretation of this book. Thus, two chapters (3 and 4) bear particularly on the first divine speech and four chapters (5 – 8) deal with the second divine speech.

Secondly, issues of creation and evil are of enormous importance for Old Testament theology as a whole. Thus, constant comparisons are drawn with a wide range of biblical material.

Thirdly, this study takes seriously the integrity of the whole of Job. Later in this chapter the case for the unity of Job is argued. Particularly important is the connection of the prose and the poetry and thus Job 1 and 2 are frequently referred to and 42:7–17 is analysed in detail.

The approach taken

This is not a full commentary on Job, nevertheless many passages are given very close attention. The argument of this study, that Behemoth is the figure of Death and that Leviathan is a guise of Satan, grows from a translation and exegesis of the relevant passages; likewise the central theme of the divine council includes a translation and commentary on Job 19:22–27. Many other passages, notably chapters 3, 9, 26, 28 and 38 – 39 are given close attention. In particular, I attempt to make sense of the Masoretic text of Job as it stands and to avoid speculative emendations. Close exegesis is the foundation of the study.

However, it is important not simply to explain individual words and phrases, but to be aware of nuance and literary genre and to give full weight to the magnificence of the poetry.³ Thus, much of this study will focus on the imagery of the book.

I will also give a fair amount of attention to the extensive use of Canaanite and other mythical allusions. The use of these is discussed later in this chapter as well as in an appendix on ‘Job and Canaanite myth’.

Is it a unitary work?

The author of Job is totally unknown and no sources have been found. He is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:20 along with Noah and Daniel,

³ Clines (1989: xii) finely comments: ‘The craftsmanship in the finest details, the rain of metaphor, the never-failing imagination of the poet, is surpassed only by the variety and delicacy of the theological ideas.’

which means that this story was known by the early sixth century BC. Many parallels have been adduced with other Ancient Near Eastern texts. These include stories such as the Egyptian 'Protests of the Eloquent Peasant'; laments such as the Sumerian 'A Man and his God'; and disputations such as 'The Babylonian Theodicy'. None of these, however, is particularly close to Job except for rather general similarities of subjects and format.

It is commonly argued that the book is the result of a long process of editorial activity by many people. This is not in itself a view which denies divine inspiration, but it does not seem to make particularly good sense in relation to the canonical book. If the book is the result of a centuries-long redactional process, then we have to try to recover each stage and the slant given to it by different authors; but if the book is the product of one controlling mind, then our task is to try to discover the overall meaning. More especially the question of the relationship of the prologue (chs. 1 – 2) and the epilogue (42:10–17) to the poetic dialogue must be explored.

There are a number of good reasons for seeing these as the product of one mind. The first is *structural*. Neither the prose nor the poetry can stand on its own. The prologue and epilogue do not constitute a story but only its opening and closing pages. Nor does the poem in all its magnificence stand plausibly on its own. Such volcanic emotions and implied traumas must have some adequate cause.⁴

There are a number of vital structural connections. The first is the establishment of the two levels on which this story is to operate. There is the sequence of events on earth and there is the reality of the orchestration of these events in the heavenly court. This establishes considerable dramatic irony in that the reader knows, but Job and his friends do not know, what has been happening in the divine council. We shall see that Job, from time to time, glimpses this reality. This ignorance, it will be argued, is no small part of the reason why the friends fail to 'speak what is right about God'. They have a flat, mechanical interpretation of the earthly events: Job is suffering badly, thus Job must be a particularly bad sinner.

A second structural connection is evident in 42:7–17. Verse 11 speaks of 'all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him' which clearly refers to the events of chapters 1 and 2. Yet the failure of the friends to speak what is right must refer to the poetic dialogue as they

⁴ Those who wish to dissect the book are, of course, aware of this issue. Fohrer (1968: 325) identified five stages from a pre-Israelite legend to a final post-exilic redaction which blended prologue and dialogue.

say nothing in the prologue. Moreover, chapters 1 and 2 and 42:7–17 do not constitute a full story. Something like the present chapters 3 – 42:6 are necessary to complete the picture and to create the magnificent book as we have it.

A second connection of the prose and poetry is *thematic*. Some commentators argue that the Job of the prologue is a rural figure with flocks and herds grazing over wide spaces (1:14–17), while the Job of the speeches is a city dweller (29:7–11; 31:8–11). But this is to import a rigid distinction between city and country which is anachronistic and only truly emerges historically after the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, one of the features of Job is the creative way in which the author ransacks the whole of human activity for background and illustration.

Moreover, far from there being a contradiction between the patient Job of the prologue and the angry and strident Job of the speeches, both are necessary for a full understanding of Job's character. Without the prologue, the reader would have no reason to dispute the friends' increasingly virulent denunciation of Job. Without the speeches, the reader would be tempted to agree with Satan: 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' (1:9).

Thirdly, there is a strong *theological* link between the prose and the poetry. This bears most directly on the subject of this present study. We have already noticed the structural importance of the divine council. Arguably, the divine council (as ch. 2 will demonstrate) is theologically the controlling theme of the book. However, it is the role of Satan which binds the next chapters to the prologue. It will be argued in detail that Satan is unmasked in chapter 41 as Leviathan. A major part of this argument will be that such an identification is prepared for by numerous hints throughout the intervening chapters beginning in chapter 3. In other words, Satan is not simply a minor figure who has a walk-on part in chapters 1 and 2 and then disappears from the action. Rather the battle with evil is a major motif in the book as a whole. Once again the prologue is essential to establish two major truths. The first is that Yahweh is totally supreme; he alone has the power of life and death (2:6: 'you must spare his life'). The second is that Satan has enormous power and uses it to afflict Job grievously. This is the basis for the immensely powerful exploration of God's ways and the mysteries of creation and providence which are at the heart of Job.

Varied readings of Job

Unsurprisingly, Job has attracted a plethora of different readings and this continues. Here only a few comments can be made as an introduction to the main body of the study.⁵ Early studies tended to emphasize the Job of the prose tale and dwell on the long-suffering Job rather than the passionate and angry Job of the speeches. Some scholars, including Dell (1991: 6), trace this emphasis on the patience of Job to James 5:11, but rather ignore 5:11c – ‘and have seen what the Lord finally brought about’. Certainly the image of Job as the ideal and patient sufferer exercised a powerful grip on the imagination of all who wrote on the book.

By the twentieth century interest shifted to the poetic dialogue, and Job the passionate and unorthodox rebel became the focus of attention. Often this was linked with a tendency to dissect the book and see the prose and poetry as coming from different hands at different times. G. von Rad discussed Job and other wisdom literature and saw it, along with Ecclesiastes, as ‘wisdom in revolt’.⁶ This kind of interest is also reflected in H. G. Wells’ novel, *The Undying Fire*, in which the owner of a country estate is visited by friends who come to console him over the death of his son in the First World War. Wells’ framework is the dialogue of Job and his friends. This literary interest in the book of Job is evident earlier in Goethe’s use of it in his prologue to *Faust* and in Blake’s ‘Drawings for the Book of Job’.

More recently, many comparisons have been drawn with Ancient Near Eastern myths, especially the chaos battle-theme. I will be discussing much of this in the following pages and assessing the value of such analogies. The commentary which makes most use of these analogies is that of Pope (1973), followed by the still incomplete philological commentary of Michel (1987). Both of these draw extensively on the work of Mitchell Dahood.

With the growth of interest in ‘reader-response’ criticism and deconstruction, the text of Job has been examined again in many studies. We may note the work of Athalya Brenner, now well known for her feminist readings of Old Testament texts. She argues that the book of Job is a sustained exercise in irony which in fact deconstructs wisdom literature’s basic premise that virtue is rewarded.⁷

⁵ A useful overview of the main lines of interpretation can be found in Dell (1991: 6–44). For an updated version of this work, see Dell 2001: esp. 361–364.

⁶ von Rad 1972.

⁷ Brenner 1989: 37–52. See the comments by Carson 1990: 156–157.

At first sight, Job appears to be a promising text for a 'reader-response' critic. It has no clear historical referents; it has no obvious relationship to Israel's legal and sacrificial system, and its depth and complexity are reflected in the widely varying interpretations already referred to. This non-realist view is the premise of much of the recent work of D. J. A. Clines on the book, especially in his paper 'Why is there a book of Job, and what does it do to you if you read it?'⁸ Clines argues that the book is effectively a dream-like fantasy of what would happen to the author were he to lose his vast wealth. However, the author also imagines the overcoming of his death-wish and writes about the restoration of what he had both feared and wished to lose. He further states that the book exhibits inner conflict: affirming that piety does not lead to prosperity and then showing how the pious Job becomes more wealthy than ever. He then goes on to maintain that the book persuades readers that Job had the right to be rewarded, that his wealth was unproblematic, that there is a real objective cause to his suffering and that Job, far from being 'everyman', is a totally untypical human being. Clines wants to hold on to the book as great and powerful literature but to avoid readings which will be conditioned by dogma and will thus limit it.

Now if Clines is correct in his reading, many of the studies of Job (including this one) can safely be set aside. Deconstructionist readings, while they may throw some interesting sidelights on texts, are incompatible with hearing the voice of God in Scripture. Three considerations lead to a rejection of Clines' view of Job.

The first is a literary consideration. Deconstructionist readings claim that they are more sophisticated as readings because they distinguish between what a text apparently says and what it actually says. It is true that Job is a book of immense depth and power, with multiple layers of meaning. However, what Clines perceives as elements which undermine the text are imported by him into the text rather than arising from a reading of the text itself. Thus, the idea that great wealth somehow insulates Job from his calamities ignores the fact that loss of wealth is not raised as an issue in the dialogue. Also, the argument that the epilogue undermines the prologue ignores the fact that renewed prosperity is a gift of grace, not a reward for good conduct, and the reality that Job still needs to live the life of faith. (See further discussion in ch. 9).

The second consideration is theological. God is not carrying out

⁸ In Beuken 1994: 1–20.

an experiment to see if Job's piety survives the loss of his prosperity. Clines relates this to God's lack of knowledge of what will happen and his inner need to know the truth about humankind. But our author is demonstrating exactly the opposite. He insists that suffering and calamity are under God's sovereignty. This is not a simplistic proposition and the suffering is real. The book abounds with hard questions and much mystery remains. Yet there is never a question that Job will turn away from God. His protests are not those of the atheist but of the baffled believer.

The third is canonical. As will be argued more fully in the final chapter, the book of Job is not freestanding and many of its themes are taken up elsewhere in the biblical canon as well as other complementary ideas introduced. In particular, the cosmic struggle between God and Satan is a major part of the whole biblical narrative, so we cannot simply take it as a narrative device, but must see the story of Job as an important experiment of the whole biblical revelation.

Thus we must reject deconstructionist readings and keep on wrestling to find a fuller understanding of this great book.

The literary genre of Job

No consensus has been reached on the overall genre of the book, and the fact that it contains both narrative and poetic dialogue should make us cautious in deciding too quickly how to classify the work. Dell (1991) has a useful chapter identifying various pitfalls such as assuming that the genre as a whole can be determined by finding a predominant minor genre, of too hastily and vaguely classifying it as 'wisdom' literature and of placing overmuch weight on recurring words and themes. She opts for parody as an overall genre and demonstrates many interesting links particularly with the Psalter. There is some truth in this approach, but it tends ultimately to isolate Job from much of the canon and to set it up in opposition to other biblical passages.

It is important to explore the idea of genre a little further as we establish some basic approaches to the book. Four observations might help.

First, it is to a large extent *sui generis*. This is not a counsel of despair, rather an acknowledgment that we cannot force the book into a straightjacket. The nature of the book is such that no one form can cover the variety of situations, emotions, questions, protests and characters that it introduces.

Secondly, the key, nevertheless, is in the skilful blending of the prose narrative and the poetic dialogue. This blending reflects the canon itself in miniature, with the narrative of God and his dealings with the universe and humankind and the commentary on that in prophetic, wisdom, epistolary and other texts. The story in Job is much more than a 'framework'; it is the essential seed plot from which the theology grows.

Thirdly, the prose has often been compared to the patriarchal narratives and to the book of Ruth. This is not unhelpful in itself, but does not take into account the interlocking of prose and poetry. While it may not be totally accurate to describe the book as drama, nevertheless the speeches are earthed in the narrative. This is not a debate or seminar on the problem of evil, it is an intensely rendered experience happening in the life of a named individual.

And fourthly, the poetry itself is rich and diverse. Dell is right in using parody as one of the prevailing forms (e.g. Ps. 8 parodied in 7:17–20; the traditional language of hymns of praise used in such evocations of God's power in creation in chapters 9 and 26). The lament genre is powerfully represented in speeches such as those found in chapters 13 – 15 and 19.

The present study attempts to take seriously the literary and artistic integrity of Job as well as its theological profundity. It is an examination of creation and evil as they are presented in the book and it particularly explores imagery, for there we find one of the most significant clues to the meaning of Job. It is to the relationship of imagery, myth and theology that we now turn.

The poet's use of imagery

In recent decades increasing attention has been given to the importance of metaphor in theology and it will be necessary to outline what I consider to be the gains and pitfalls of such an approach. We begin by noting that imagery and its effective employment by great poets is intended to engage the imagination as well as the minds of audience and readers. Robert Alter argues:

It is probably more than a coincidence that the very pinnacle of ancient Hebrew poetry was reached in Job, the biblical text that is most daring and innovative in its imagination of God, man and creation; for here as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the literary medium is not merely a means of 'conveying' doctrinal

positions but an adventurous occasion for deepening doctrine through the play of literary resources, or perhaps even, at least at times, leaping beyond doctrine.⁹

I have some reservations with this statement, but it makes the important point that the imagery is of the essence of what is being said and is not merely colourful decoration. There has been a growing interest in the literary study of the Bible in recent years, much of it stimulated by the important work of Alter himself. Thus there is little excuse for ignoring the power and eloquence of this book. Since much of this study relates to the poetry of Job, we must examine carefully its powerful imagery and respond to that with our senses as well as our minds.

However, we must also avoid what I believe to be a misuse of the concept of metaphor. One of the significant books on metaphor and theology in recent years is by Sallie McFague.¹⁰ Much of what she says is interesting and pointed, and she quite rightly asserts that religious language is profoundly metaphorical. She then, in my view, makes two wrong moves.

The first is to assert that the image of God as Father has become an idol. Christian tradition has narrowed and straightjacketed our images of God and there is a need to widen and democratize them. Doubtless the idea of God as Father has often been misused to oppress and exclude, but that is the fault of the user not the concept. To assert that one metaphor is incomplete in itself is quite right, it is illegitimate to set metaphors against each other and use the ones we like to discredit others.

The second illegitimate move is to set up a false dichotomy between a radical approach to Scripture which recognizes metaphor and an approach which absolutizes Scripture and fails to recognize metaphor. There may be such naïve approaches to Scripture, but it is difficult to find responsible conservative exegesis that approaches Scripture in such a flat and unnuanced way. Taking Scripture seriously means taking form as well as content into account when listening to a text.

This need for a balance of form and content has a direct bearing on the present study of Job. The basic premise of the interpretation offered here is that the divine speeches are the key to understanding

⁹ Alter 1987: 15.

¹⁰ McFague 1983.

the book as a whole. These speeches (chs. 38 – 41) are the peak of the poetry of the book. We must therefore read them as poetry, unpacking the imagery, trying to discern the flow of thought and resisting the temptation to come out with a series of propositions: ‘What the book of Job really says is . . .’ We must respond with all our hearts and our imaginations.

Moreover, this balance bears on another major issue in the interpretation of Job. It is frequently argued that God fails to address the issues of the book. In one sense that is true. We are given no easy answers to the mystery of suffering, nor are we told why the calamities came in the first place. Yet at a more profound level Yahweh does respond to the cries of Job. Many images and metaphors that have been used earlier, not least in Job’s first agonized cries in chapter 3, are taken up in chapters 38 – 41. Failure to see this, in my view, has often led to inadequate readings of the divine speeches.

Myth and theology

Much of the imagery, especially relating to death and evil, appears to come from the milieu of Canaanite and other mythology. The links with Canaanite myth are discussed in an appendix (pp. 191–194), but something must be said here.

C. S. Lewis made some shrewd comments on the nature of myth and these are relevant to our study. His arguments are subtle and scattered throughout many of his writings;¹¹ but in essence he argues that pagan myths are ‘good dreams’ sent by God in preparation for the gospel. He further maintains that when we awake from the dream into the daylight of the ‘Great Fact’ we need to receive this with the same imaginative embrace that we accord to the dream myth.

My argument is that the author of Job and other Old Testament writers respond imaginatively to these ancient stories and use elements from them. They employ these partial insights and integrate them with the revelation given about the true nature of God and his relationship with his creation. These images and the myths to which they refer are a fundamental component of the book’s theology. We cannot simply demythologize otherwise we will merely end up with a series of duller and less pointed images.

A further word needs to be said about the relationship between

¹¹ See e.g. ‘Myth become Fact’ in Lewis 1979. Lewis also wrote myth, notably in the Narnia stories, as did his friends J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Williams.

imagery, myth and theology, for the above must not be taken to mean that these terms are being used interchangeably. Imagery, particularly in its most common manifestations of metaphor and simile, sees each object or person as having a significance beyond itself as an image of something or someone else. The poet rejuvenates language by creating new images or by using hackneyed images in new contexts. Poetry, in its compression and allusiveness, is thus a powerful way of embodying the richness and complexity of the world. Imagery and myth are not identical (e.g., images of trees, clouds and lakes in Job are not mythological). However, as demonstrated in the analysis of chapter 38, natural images often have mythological nuances. Similarly, to say that Leviathan has characteristics of the crocodile and the whale is not to say that it is such a creature, but rather to suggest that evil is rooted in the natural world.

The next step is to try to arrive at a working definition of myth. One point must be made immediately. Even if it could be demonstrated that the allusions to Canaanite myth were simply poetic rhetoric (whatever that means), we would still be left with questions about how and why they are used. The purpose of metaphor is to clarify and give a richer understanding. Moreover, since imagery works at a very deep level, the characteristic imagery of an author is a guide to his worldview and the characteristic cast of his mind.

By 'myth' I do not mean a story of 'make-believe', rather an attempt to embody in narrative the great truth of good and evil, of origin and consummation, of truth and error. When we use terms such as 'light' and 'darkness' about spiritual as well as physical realities, we are underlining the link between the natural and supernatural worlds. Myth takes this a step further and embodies these concepts in divine figures who battle for mastery. Baal and Yam, Osiris and Seth, Marduk and Tiamat are examples.

Thus the author of Job uses these stories as a potent vehicle for conveying the reality of the great cosmic battle between Yahweh and his adversary, the battle adumbrated in Genesis 3:15. That reality is expressed also in prose in chapters 1 and 2 with the picture of the heavenly court.

This means that some understanding of how Canaanite myth is used in Job is necessary for an appreciation of much of the imagery. The principles governing the use of these texts as well as some illustrative examples are laid out in the appendix on Job and Canaanite myth. However, I would like to make three observations about the author's use of the material.

The first observation is to do with the nature of revelation and inspiration. If the biblical use of Canaanite and other motifs were simply evidence of a common mythology, then it would be difficult to maintain a doctrine of special revelation. What we do have, here and elsewhere in the Bible, is creative use of such motifs to present a distinctive message. The inspired word comes in a variety of genres, through different personalities, and bears the stamp of the creativity of the different human authors.

Secondly, the author of Job is interacting with the worldview of Israel's neighbours. He is establishing the incomparability of Yahweh as against the gods of the nations. By using and engaging with their stories, he is showing an understanding of their worldview.

Thirdly, it is important to realize what the allusions to Canaanite myth do and do not do. The Canaanite evidence, as will be demonstrated, gives very strong support to a supernatural interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan. What it does not and cannot do is to prove that interpretation to be the right one. Indeed the argument of this book does not depend on Canaanite parallels; these are, however, important supporting evidence.

The shape of this study

So far I have argued that the book of Job is a literary and theological unity and that a study of its imagery is necessary in any responsible interpretation of the book as a whole. The title *Now my eyes have seen you*, taken from Job 42:5, encapsulates neatly the basic thrust of this study. What is it that Job has seen, and how is this anticipated in the unfolding drama?

Chapter 2 discusses the basic legal metaphor which underlies and gives coherence to the book of Job. Beginning with an outline of the flow of Job, it traces this theme throughout the book and in particular discusses the 'Redeemer' passage in 19:21–27. The heavenly court is an expression of the doctrine of providence and thus chapter 3 discusses creation theology in Job and defends the unity and integrity of chapters 26–31 more especially as a setting for the wisdom poem in chapter 28.

The sub-title of the study is *Images of creation and evil in the book of Job*, and chapter 4 examines the raging sea, the most basic Old Testament image of the forces of evil. That study lays a foundation for chapters 5–8 where the implications of all these other images are focused in Behemoth and Leviathan.

SPEAKING WHAT IS RIGHT

In chapters 5 and 6 I will examine Behemoth and explain how this figure has been anticipated right from chapter 3. Then in chapters 7 and 8 I undertake a similar exercise for Leviathan. An important feature of these chapters is a translation and exegesis of the relevant passages.

Chapter 9 concentrates on Job 42 and argues that the interpretation advanced for the rest of the book makes this chapter no anti-climax but a powerful climax of the theology of Job and the unity of its prose and poetry. Some comments are also made on the canonical place of the book.

The book of Job is far more than any possible interpretation of it and it continues to defy easy classification. Yet it is important that we make the effort to listen to it, to be moved by it and see its progress from shrieking protest to repentance and vision.