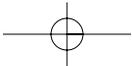
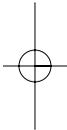
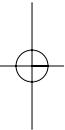


# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 14

TOTC

JOB



# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 14

GENERAL EDITOR: DONALD J. WISEMAN

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## JOB

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

FRANCIS I. ANDERSEN



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InterVarsity Press, USA  
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Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426, USA  
Website: [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)  
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Inter-Varsity Press, England  
Norton Street  
Nottingham NG7 3HR, England  
Website: [www.ivpbooks.com](http://www.ivpbooks.com)  
Email: [ivp@ivpbooks.com](mailto:ivp@ivpbooks.com)

©Inter-Varsity Press, 1976

First published 1976

Reprinted in this format 2008

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Inter-Varsity Press, England, is closely linked with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, a student movement connecting Christian Unions in universities and colleges throughout Great Britain, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Website: [www.uccf.org.uk](http://www.uccf.org.uk).

USA ISBN 978-0-8308-4214-8

UK ISBN 978-1-84474-291-2

Set in Garamond 11/13pt

Typeset in Great Britain by Avocet Typeset, Chilton, Aylesbury, Bucks

Printed in the United States of America ∞



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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Andersen, Francis I., 1925-

*Job: an introduction and commentary*/Francis I. Andersen.

p. cm.—(Tyndale Old Testament commentaries; v. 14)

Originally published: London: Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, c1976.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8308-4214-8 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Bible. O.T. Job—Commentaries. I. Title.

BS1415.53.A534 2009

223'.107—dc22

2008046924

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#### British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

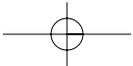
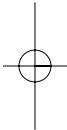
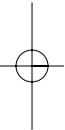
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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## GENERAL PREFACE

The aim of this series of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, as it was in the companion volumes on the New Testament, is to provide the student of the Bible with a handy, up-to-date commentary on each book, with the primary emphasis on exegesis. Major critical questions are discussed in the introductions and additional notes, while undue technicalities have been avoided.

In this series individual authors are, of course, free to make their own distinct contributions and express their own point of view on all controversial issues. Within the necessary limits of space they frequently draw attention to interpretations which they themselves do not hold but which represent the stated conclusions of sincere fellow Christians. The book of Job, with its profound discussion of the mystery of personal suffering, is here commented upon by a scholar who knows something of the problem. Professor Andersen writes also from his experience as a teacher of Hebrew and cognate Semitic languages and literatures in which his reading is wide and up-to-date. He faces the many problems of the difficult text of this ancient book clearly and fairly and at the same time brings fresh insights and interpretation to a commentary which reflects not a little of his personality, life and work and so should help all modern Jobs and their would-be comforters.

In the Old Testament in particular no single English translation is adequate to reflect the original text. The authors of these commentaries freely quote various versions, therefore, or give their own translation, in the endeavour to make the more difficult passages or words meaningful today. Where necessary, words from the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Text underlying their studies are transliterated. This

will help the reader who may be unfamiliar with the Semitic languages to identify the word under discussion and thus to follow the argument. It is assumed throughout that the reader will have ready access to one, or more, reliable renderings of the Bible in English.

Interest in the meaning and message of the Old Testament continues undiminished and it is hoped that this series will thus further the systematic study of the revelation of God and his will and ways as seen in these records. It is the prayer of the editor and publisher, as of the authors, that these books will help many to understand, and to respond to, the Word of God today.

D. J. Wiseman

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It is presumptuous to comment on the book of Job. It is so full of the awesome reality of the living God. Like Job, one can only put one's hand over one's mouth (40:4). But God has revealed himself, preserving at the same time the inaccessible mystery of his own being. So we must attempt this impossible thing which he makes possible (Mark 10:27). However forbidding, he fascinates us irresistibly until, by 'kindness and severity' (Rom. 11:22), he brings us in his own way to Job's final satisfaction and joy. The story of Job is an invitation and a guide to discoveries like his. It is especially the book for any who find themselves in 'Job's sick day'<sup>1</sup> as a result of some shattering experience.

This commentary has taken shape in turbulent times. It was begun in Jerusalem, against a background of wars whose horrors have awakened the cries of Job again. It was continued in Africa and New Guinea, where the struggle for subsistence has its own misery. Finally Berkeley, California, provided a convulsive background of moral protest against war, poverty and racism.

The book of Job is about the unchanging human realities – war, destitution, sickness, humiliation, bereavement, depression. Also the unchanging goodness of God, who transforms our human agony into justice, kindness, love and joy. It is about 'the terror of the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:11) and his great tenderness (Jas 5:11). It is the

---

1. John Donne, *From the Litany*.

story of one man who held on to his life in God with a faith that survived the torments of utter loss and expanded into new realms of wonder and delight.

The author is indebted to more persons that he can name. A generous research grant from the Australian Institute of Archaeology made it possible to complete the final revision. With a full heart I thank God for the unfaltering love of my wife Lois. The completion of this book is also a tribute to the Dean of Auckland, the Very Reverend John O. Rymer, and his wife, Joyce, who brought the love of God to us in a dark hour. Everything is a gift, suffering the holiest of all; and the healing of all hurts is found in the Body of One who was broken, the only *pharmakon athanasias*.

Francis I. Andersen  
Saint Andrew's Day, 1974

## CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

11QtgJob	The Qumran Targum of Job (see p. 58, n. 70).
AASOR	<i>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research.</i>
AB	<i>The Anchor Bible.</i>
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages.</i>
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> edited by James B. Pritchard, 1954.
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i> <sup>2</sup> edited by James B. Pritchard, 1955 (31969).
AS	<i>Anatolian Studies.</i>
ATANT	<i>Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments.</i>
ATD	<i>Das Alte Testament Deutsch.</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research.</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library.</i>
BWL	<i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i> by Wilfred G. Lambert, 1960.
BZAW	<i>Beibefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.</i>
CAD	<i>Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.</i>
CB	<i>Cambridge Bible</i> (for schools).
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly.</i>
COCR	<i>Corpus Reformatorum: Calvini Opera.</i>
DOTT	<i>Documents from Old Testament Times</i> edited by D. Winton Thomas, 1958.

<i>EI</i>	<i>Eretz Israel.</i>
<i>HAT</i>	<i>Handbuch zum Alten Testament.</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review.</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual.</i>
<i>IB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Bible.</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary.</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society.</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature.</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies.</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies.</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review.</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies.</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies.</i>
<i>KAT</i>	<i>Kommentar zum Alten Testament.</i>
<i>K-B</i>	<i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i> by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, 1953.
<i>NBCR</i>	<i>The New Bible Commentary Revised</i> , 1970.
<i>NCB</i>	<i>New Century Bible.</i>
<i>OTMS</i>	<i>The Old Testament and Modern Study</i> edited by H. H. Rowley, 1951.
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Outtestamentische Studien.</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique.</i>
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology.</i>
<i>SBT<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i> , second series.
<i>SVT</i>	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> .
<i>TOTC</i>	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries.
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Altunterskünde Syrien-Palästinas.</i>
<i>WMZANT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Monografien zum Alten und Neuen Testament.</i>
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie.</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft.</i>

**Texts and versions**

AV	Authorized Version (King James).
JB	Jerusalem Bible.
LXX	The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).
Moffatt	A New Translation of the Bible by James Moffatt.
MT	Massoretic Text.
NAB	New American Bible.
NEB	New English Bible.
RSV	Revised Standard Version.
RV	Revised Version.
TEV	Today's English Version.
Vulg.	The Vulgate (Jerome's Latin version of the Bible).

**Commentaries**

(referred to by author's name and page number)

Bickell	<i>Das Buch Hiob</i> by G. Bickell, 1894.
Budde	<i>Beiträge zur Kritik des Buches Hiob</i> by K. Budde, 1876.
Davidson	<i>The Book of Job</i> by A. B. Davidson ( <i>CB</i> ), 1884.
Delitzsch	<i>Job</i> by F. Delitzsch ( <i>Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</i> ), 1866.
Dhorme	<i>A Commentary on the Book of Job</i> by E. Dhorme, translated by H. Knight, 1967.
Driver–Gray	<i>A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job</i> by S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray ( <i>ICC</i> <sup>2</sup> ), 1950.
Duhm	<i>Das Buch Hiob</i> by Bernhard Duhm ( <i>Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament</i> , XVI), 1897
Fohrer	<i>Das Buch Hiob</i> by G. Fohrer ( <i>KAT</i> , XVI),
Gordis	<i>The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job</i> by Robert Gordis, 1965.
Guillaume	<i>Studies in the Book of Job</i> with a new Translation by A. Guillaume, edited by John Macdonald (Supplement II to the Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society), 1968.
Hölscher	<i>Das Buch Hiob</i> by G. Hölscher ( <i>HAT</i> ), 1952.
Jones	<i>The Triumph of Job</i> by E. Jones, 1966.

- Pope *Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes*<sup>3</sup> by Marvin H. Pope (*AB*), 1973.
- Rowley *The Book of Job* by H. H. Rowley (*NCB*, 1970.
- Tur Sinai *The Book of Job: A New Commentary*<sup>2</sup> by N. H. Tur Sinai, 1957.
- Weiser *Das Buch Hiob* by A. Weiser (*ATD*<sup>2</sup>), 1956.

## INTRODUCTION

### **1. The story of Job**

The book of Job tells the story of a good man overwhelmed by troubles. He is stripped of his wealth, his family, his health. He does not know why God has done this to him. Only the reader knows that God is trying to prove to the Devil that Job's faith is genuine. Three friends come to console him in his misery, and the four engage in a long discussion. The friends try to explain what has happened by connecting Job's sufferings with his sins. Job rejects their theory. Instead of accepting their advice to repent and so make peace with God, Job insists on his own innocence and questions the justice of God's treatment.

At this point a new character, Elihu, appears and makes four speeches which he thinks will solve the problem, but this does not seem to make any difference. Eventually the Lord himself addresses Job. These speeches change Job's attitude, for he responds with contrite submission. In the end God declares Job to be in the right and restores his prosperity and happiness.

Upon this simple plot an unknown writer of superlative genius has erected a monumental work. The most persistent questions of the relationship of men to God have been given powerful theological treatment in verse whose majesty and emotion are unsurpassed in any literature, ancient or modern.

## 2. The study of the book of Job

The Old Testament book about Job is one of the supreme offerings of the human mind to the living God and one of the best gifts of God to men. The task of understanding it is as rewarding as it is strenuous. For his help, the modern student has a rich legacy from the labours of the past. It is a tribute to the greatness of the book that the work of interpreting it is never finished. After each fresh exploration the challenge to scale the heights remains. One is constantly amazed at its audacious theology and at the magnitude of its intellectual achievement. Job is a prodigious book in the vast range of its ideas, in its broad coverage of human experience, in the intensity of its passions, in the immensity of its concept of God, and not least in its superb literary craftsmanship. It reaches widely over the complexities of existence, seeking a place for animals as well as men in God's world. It plumbs the depths of human despair, the anger of moral outrage, and the anguish of desertion by God. From one man's agony it reaches out to the mystery of God, beyond all words and explanations. It is only God himself who brings Job joy in the end. And, when all is done, the mystery remains. God stands revealed in his hiddenness, an object of terror, adoration and love. And Job stands before him 'like a man' (38:3; 40:7), trusting and satisfied.

The study of these great questions as they are raised by the book of Job has produced a huge literature, only a fraction of which can be indicated in this commentary. Ultimately such work must go back to the Massoretic Text (MT). Translators agree that the Hebrew text of Job presents more problems than most other parts of the Old Testament. The commentary will make use of many versions, including such ancient translations as the Septuagint (LXX). Comparison of one with another shows that we are still in the dark as to the exact meaning of the Hebrew text in many places. There is not room in

this commentary for detailed examination of all the textual and philological questions encountered in the book, and even the technical literature is still a long way from reaching final answers. We shall have to be content with such uncertainty for the time being; but the incomplete state of our research should not be permitted to diminish our respect for the integrity of the Hebrew text. On the contrary, the difficulties we encounter are themselves a tribute to the fidelity of the Jewish scribes, who reverently preferred to copy an obscure text exactly rather than attempt to clarify it by an emendation. In this they were more modest, and more scientific, than many modern critics. In the hey-day of the criticism that reached its peak at the turn of the century, scholars were quick to infer that a passage which they could not understand must be corrupt. They then proceeded to 'correct' it. Some problems have been solved in this way, for even the Massoretic Text is not without its blemishes; but more often than not rewriting the text does not solve the problem. It merely destroys the evidence.

Recent research has made text critics more cautious. Numerous discoveries, especially those derived from archaeology, now enable us to make sense of the text as it stands. Many of the ingenious reconstructions of a previous generation of scholarship must now be abandoned as uncalled for. Yet, in spite of great progress, many passages in Job remain problematical. They must be attacked with all the apparatus of contemporary learning: the latest advances in the analysis of the spelling of words in ancient Hebrew, of the meanings of rare words (which are abundant in Job), of grammatical constructions, of the forms of Hebrew poetry, of the kinds of literature incorporated into the design of this book. Job is a little encyclopedia of life in the ancient Near East; so its cultural milieu and sociological background help to explain many passages.

No one book can now hope to embrace such a many-sided task, let alone review the vast labours of the past; and intricate technicalities would be out of place in this series.<sup>1</sup> Several of the larger

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1. Copious bibliography up to 1953 is given by C. Kuhl, 'Neuere Literaturkritik des Buches Hiob', *Theologische Rundschau*, XXI, 1953, pp. 163–205, 257–317, and 'Vom Hiobbuche und seinen Problemen',

works happily complement each other. For textual matters Édouard Dhorme's monumental commentary<sup>2</sup> is indispensable. The commentary begun by S. R. Driver<sup>3</sup> gathers up the main results of the older higher criticism. But the death of Professor Driver before it was finished left Dr Gray at a disadvantage in unifying the material. In any case, much of their philological work has now been superseded by subsequent linguistic discoveries. Of the continuing stream of commentaries and special studies on Job only a few will be mentioned here. The lifelong studies of Naphtali H. Tur Sinai (H. Torczyner) have bequeathed a wealth of provocative philological observations.<sup>4</sup> The recovery of a body of old Canaanite literature in the language of the city of Ugarit has opened up a whole new phase of research, whose benefits can be seen in Marvin Pope's contribution to *The Anchor Bible*,<sup>5</sup> and in the continuing work of Mitchell Dahood.<sup>6</sup> Robert Gordis has written a fine appreciation of the book as a literary whole in the best traditions of theistic humanism.<sup>7</sup> The commentaries of G. Hölscher (*HAT*, 1952), Artur Weiser (*ATD*<sup>2</sup>, 1956) and H. H. Rowley (*NCB*, 1970) may also be mentioned.

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ibid., XXII, 1954, pp. 261–316. This may be augmented by the references in commentaries published since then. See the list in *Chief Abbreviations* (pp. 13–14, above), and particularly Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob (KAT)*, pp. 59–68.

2. *Le Livre de Job* (1926); English translation by H. Knight, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (1967).
3. S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job Together with a New Translation (ICC*<sup>2</sup>, 1950).
4. His great three-volume analysis, *Hallāšōn wēbassēper* (1950, 1954, 1955) and *Sēper 'Iyyōb* (1954), was followed by a summary of revised results in English: *The Book of Job: A New Commentary*<sup>2</sup> (1957), which highlights the Aramaic features of the language. See the review by W. F. Albright in *BASOR*, CXLIV, 1956, p. 39.
5. Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*<sup>2</sup> (*AB*, 1973).
6. See Anton C. M. Blommerde, *Northwest Semitic Grammar and Job (Biblica et Orientalia*, No. 22, 1969).
7. *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (1965).

The reflections of earlier thinkers on this great book still have much to offer, especially when it comes to theological understanding. A number of teachers and preachers of the early church made use of Job, but little of their work survives, except in the *catenae* of later students. The commentary of Gregory the Great<sup>8</sup> dominated later centuries. The works of Albert Magnus and Thomas Aquinas gave expression to a more scientific approach. But for a thousand years the church had generally preferred the methods of allegorical, typological, moral and spiritual interpretation to the literal meaning of Scripture. The Reformation rehabilitated grammatico-historical exegesis and produced the greatest exposition of Job ever given, in the one hundred and fifty-nine sermons of John Calvin on this book.<sup>9</sup>

The immensity of the theme and the numerous technical problems presented by the book of Job should not be allowed to intimidate the general reader. The impact of this story is not impeded by our continuing puzzlement over various textual and linguistic mysteries. It is on the level of human experience that the artistic and theological greatness of this writing can be powerfully felt. The disgust expressed in Job's remark that '*ryr hlmut* is tasteless' (6:6) can be appreciated, even though we still do not know what that substance is. The rigorous study of the text by every available scientific means is an essential preliminary to sound exegesis. But Rabbi Gordis has wisely advanced beyond this groundwork to insist that it is the literary effect of the whole book, at once aesthetic and intellectual, that is the medium of its theology. Reading it in this way then becomes the occasion, or at least the opportunity, for any person to recapitulate Job's dramatic encounter with the living God.

As a Christian, the present writer recognizes in Job ideas which point beyond the Old Testament, especially in Job's reiterated longing for a mediator and his desperate hope for personal resurrection.

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8. *Expositio in librum Job, sive Moralium libri XXXV*, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, LXXV, cols. 500ff.

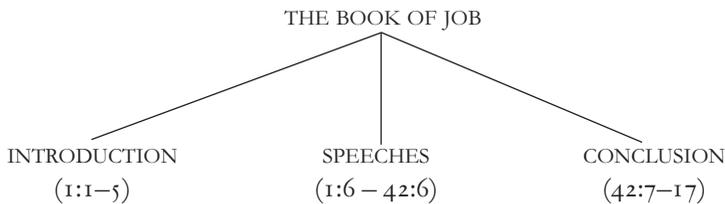
9. *Calvini Opera. Corpus Reformatorum*, Vols. XXXIII–XXXV. A selection of twenty of these sermons, translated by Leroy Nixon, is available in English: *Sermons from Job* (1952).

This hope finds its fulfilment in Jesus, the Messiah. Already in this older part of his self-revelation, the God who pardons and saves can be seen behind the Creator and Judge, and Job is ready to meet his Redeemer.

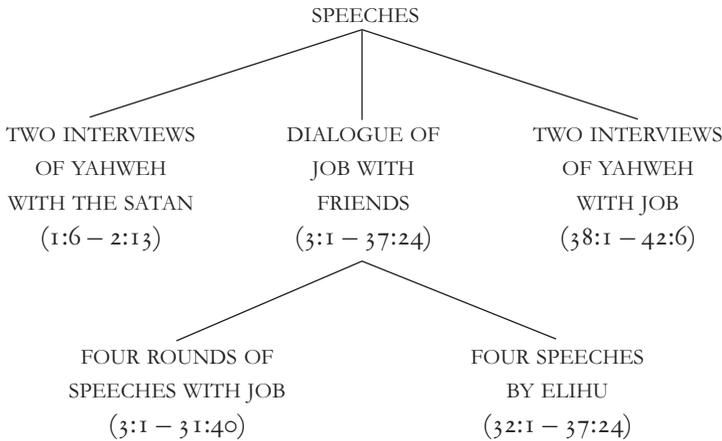
### 3. The design of the book of Job

The plan is readily grasped. By a simple arrangement of corresponding materials in balancing positions, a scheme is built up in which the episodes of the story are easy to follow. The massive speeches that make up the bulk of the book have been incorporated into the narrative framework with a symmetry that effects artistic harmony. At the same time there is a development in the tempo that leads from climax to climax, until the final resolution. The speeches are assembled in cycles through which tension is built up from stage to stage. Thus the second interview with the Satan is more drastic than the first, and Yahweh's second address to Job is more tremendous than the first. The exchanges between Job and his friends become more and more heated as round follows round. But the drama does not move steadily upwards to its peak and then down through the dénouement to the end. Job's crowning speech is set off by using a beautiful poem on Wisdom (chapter 28) as an interlude after the three main cycles are finished. The tranquillity of this meditation contrasts with the turbulence before and after it, and provides needed relief for the reader. By a similar device the two most stupendous moments in the book – Job's final intrepid challenge (chapters 29 – 31) and Yahweh's overwhelming reply (chapters 38 – 41) – are kept apart by the speeches of Elihu (chapters 32 – 37), whose very slowness of movement creates an interval of suspense against which the words of the Lord become all the more majestic.

The plan can be shown as follows.



The Introduction shows Job in his original happiness; the Conclusion paints a similar picture of his final contentment. All of the action in between takes the form of words rather than deeds. The speeches have the same kind of architectonic balance.

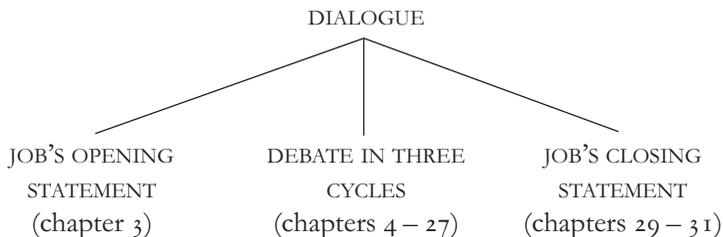


The similarity in form between the opening scene, in which God talks twice to the Satan, and the closing scene, in which God talks twice to Job, is important as a mark of the artistic integrity of the treatment. It suggests deliberate planning and unity of authorship. But many scholars assign these episodes to the 'Prologue' (identified as 1:1 - 2:13) and 'Dialogue' (3:1 - 42:6) respectively, and ascribe them to different authors. We admit that the inner structure of these two double interviews is different. The final confrontation between Yahweh and Job is quite simply recounted. It consists of two cycles in each of which the Lord makes a long speech and Job makes a brief reply. But this part of the story is told in the same epic style as 1:6 - 2:13, by using the same stereotyped formula to introduce the speakers in each round. Thus both speeches of Yahweh are made 'out of the whirlwind', just as each interview with the Satan takes place in the divine assembly with almost identical introductions to each occasion. The section 1:6 - 2:13 does, of course, include more than the two interviews with the Satan. Each of these is followed by the Satan's action and Job's response. The similarity of the development has the balance of a classical musical composition.

<i>Round 1</i>	<i>Round 2</i>
Interview with the Satan (1:6–12)	Interview with the Satan (2:1–7a)
The disasters (1:13–19)	The affliction (2:7b, 8)
Job's reaction (1:20–22)	Job's reaction (2:9–13)

What we have called Job's reaction to his illness is more complex than his simple response to the first disasters. For now his wife and his friends come into the story, and this material is transitional to the main dialogue which follows. But, by way of compensation, the tale of disasters in the first round is more elaborate than the simple stroke of 2:7b. Furthermore, the reports of the destruction of Job's household are brought by four messengers, an artificial pattern which reveals a propensity of the author for the number four which is found throughout the book. Thus Elihu makes four distinct speeches, even though they come all together. And the dialogue with the three friends actually involves four cycles of speeches, even though Job is the sole speaker in the last of them.

We have already observed that the poem on Wisdom (chapter 28) and the speeches of Elihu (chapters 32 – 37) serve special purposes as interludes between other, more important, speeches by Job and Yahweh. Leaving these aside, we see that the remaining speeches made by Job and his three friends are also arranged in a symmetrical pattern like the one we have already met in the book as a whole and in the speeches as a whole.



There is a real correspondence between Job's opening curse (chapter 3) and his closing auto-imprecation (chapter 31). But it is

not clear how the several speeches are to be grouped in the three cycles. By separating off chapter 3 as an opening statement, we leave Eliphaz to commence the debate in chapter 4. Job replies to this, and so it goes on. This implies that the dynamics of the dialogue is a succession of attacks by Job upon the statements of his friends, rather than criticisms of Job's words by each of his friends in turn.<sup>10</sup> But it would over-simplify the matter and create serious problems for interpretation to look on each successive speech as a logical reply to the one immediately preceding it. The dialectic is not as closely woven as that.

While Job speaks in alternation with each of the friends in turn, the three cycles are not identical.

		<i>Cycle 1</i>	<i>Cycle 2</i>	<i>Cycle 3</i>
Eliphaz	chapters	4 – 5	15	22
Job		6 – 7	16 – 17	23 – 24
Bildad		8	18	25
Job		9 – 10	19	26
Zophar		11	20	?
Job		12 – 14	21	27

It will be noticed at once that Zophar does not make a speech in the third cycle. Many attempts have been made to explain this, and we shall look more closely at some of them in section 7 below.

There are other ways of looking at the total structure of the book. One system which has been widely used by scholars distinguishes an opening Prologue (1:1 – 2:13), and a closing Epilogue (42:7–17), both in prose, from the intervening Dialogue, in poetry. The dialogue falls into three parts as the speakers change. First Job talks with his three friends (chapters 3 – 31); then Elihu makes four speeches, without discussion (chapters 32 – 37); finally Yahweh addresses Job twice (chapters 38 – 42:6).

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10. The latter approach is taken by W. E. Hulme in *Dialogue in Despair* (1968).

#### 4. The literary background of the book of Job

A book like Job was not written in a vacuum. Only God creates out of nothing. His creatures use the materials he gives them, and the work of the mind is done with what flows into a man's life from his own experience and from the culture of his people. If he is well-educated, he feeds on other people's ideas. The author of Job was not only sensitive and intelligent; he was experienced and cultivated. We can only guess at the community that nourished his thought. We do not know how much he learnt from reading, from discussion of the kind he portrays in his own book, or from travel. We do not know if he could read other languages besides Hebrew, and so draw directly on the literature of neighbouring countries.

Whatever the stimulus, his art is unique. But not isolated. In the first place, it stands in the tradition of his own people. It is Israelite in spirit and distinctively Israelite in theology. At the same time it is universal in its humanism, and is a sample of the kind of literature from the ancient world which was most cosmopolitan in character – the literature broadly called 'Wisdom'.

This term covers a wide variety of literary forms, from simple sayings of the common folk to the learned discourse of philosophical minds. All Israel's neighbours had their own store of Wisdom literature, which has survived in varying amounts. While there are local peculiarities, there is much of it which expresses the common experiences of men, beyond all differences of race, nation or culture. The Old Testament contains a considerable quantity of Wisdom literature, not only in entire works such as Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but also in smaller adages, riddles, poems, scientific lists and meditations on cosmological or ethical questions scattered through other biblical writings. The New Testament also has its share of Wisdom materials.<sup>11</sup>

Many similarities have been observed between Job and other writings from the ancient world, particularly the Wisdom literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt. These other works supply valuable

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11. G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Eng. tr. 1972) is the most valuable general recent study.

background and help to interpret many parts of Job. They also raise the question of how much of such literature the author of Job actually knew, and perhaps used as a source of his ideas or even of quotations.

In studying this problem, two extremes should be avoided. Nothing is gained by contending so energetically for the uniqueness of Israel's life, especially its religion, as the product of special revelation, that the people of God are cut off from the rest of the world. Some scholars have not been prepared to recognize much affinity between the Old Testament and 'pagan' writings, and insist on interpreting the Bible solely in terms of itself. At the other extreme, the culture of the ancient Near East is sometimes viewed as if it were uniform from the Persian Gulf to the upper reaches of the Nile. 'Comparative' studies of myths and rituals have highlighted similarities between the gods and institutions of the peoples of the region; and the impression is sometimes given that the Israelites invented nothing of their own, but borrowed everything, just as they borrowed the alphabet, from one or other of their neighbours. The book of Job is then seen as a cosmopolitan work, a miscellany of 'wisdom' garnered by some bookish Israelite from the libraries of other peoples.

There is some truth in each of these positions; but neither is true if stated alone. Job shows a certain resemblance to other works here and there. How far that resemblance goes can be found out only by detailed comparison of Job with each such companion piece. This research will also show the extent to which Job is *sui generis*.

So far as *plot* is concerned, it is curious that the only story which, as a story, is said to be like Job, is one for which any historical connection is quite improbable. The Indian legend of Hariś-čandra<sup>12</sup> has been compared with Job.<sup>13</sup> The hero is introduced as an ideal king in whose realm prosperity, justice and contentment prevail. The claim

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12. *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*, translated by F. Eden Pargiter (*Bibliotheca Indica*, Vol. 125, 1904), pp. 32–61. (Reprinted by Indological Book House, Delhi-6, 1969.)
  13. P. Volz, *Hiob und Weisheit* (1921), pp. 8f.; P. Bertie, *Le poème de Job* (1929), p. 54; Adolphe Lods, *Histoire de la littérature hébraïque et juive* (1950), pp. 691f.; E. G. Kraeling, *The Book of the Ways of God* (1939), pp. 187ff.

of some Western scholars that the gods decide to test his virtue by suffering is not borne out by reading the story. While coming to the aid of a woman in distress, the king is brought to an avowal of his piety by professing his duty to give alms, especially to brahmins, to protect the fearful and to make war with enemies. Having extracted this admission, the brahmin puts Hariś-ćandra's ethics to the test by requesting all his possessions – his entire kingdom, in fact – excepting his wife, his son, his body and, of course, his inalienable rectitude. All these the righteous king gives up without a murmur, and leaves his domain as a penniless beggar.

But he had omitted the fee for the Raja-súya sacrifice, and no longer had means to pay it. He does not deny his obligation to keep the promise, and is granted time to do it. Visvāmitra is unrelenting in his demand, which Hariś-ćandra's continued destitution renders impossible. Finally, at the last minute, he sells his wife and child for the fee, and ekes out his own subsistence in utter degradation as worker in a burial-ground. The son dies, and when his mother brings his body to the cemetery, the parents resolve to immolate themselves on his funerary pyre. Then Indra intervenes; the boy is restored to life and Hariś-ćandra's unflinching virtue is rewarded as the reunited family ascends to heaven.

There is very little resemblance to Job in this story. Hariś-ćandra's misery is the result of voluntary renunciation. He is submissive and uncomplaining. The background of ethics and theology is totally different from that in the Bible. R. K. Harrison thinks that it is possible that such a story is a late corruption of much earlier Mesopotamian material.<sup>14</sup> But, if so, it has travelled so far and so long that any connection with the Near East cannot be demonstrated. The few similarities are merely coincidences that are only to be expected in such common experiences of life.<sup>15</sup>

In this context we should say decisively that Job has nothing in common with the vulgar stories of wagers between celestial beings over the corruptibility of some conspicuously good human. The

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14. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1970), p. 1027.

15. Hölischer (p. 3) suspects that the Indian story has been contaminated somewhat from the biblical one.

agreements between Yahweh and the Satan are not bets (see commentary on Job 1:11).

Nearer the Israelite homeland a comparison can be made with the Ugaritic story of Keret,<sup>16</sup> a good king who is bereaved of all his family (seven sons!) and whose fortunes turn after ritual prayers. But the story goes on to end quite differently from Job, and the questions raised in the Bible are nowhere discussed.

The suggestion that an Akkadian work entitled *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi* could be called 'The Babylonian Job' was first made in 1906.<sup>17</sup> Evidence for the text has gradually accumulated.<sup>18</sup> The work is actually a hymn of thanksgiving to Marduk for recovery from an illness. Form-criticism of prayers of lamentation and songs of gratitude has shown a close affinity between such compositions, in spite of their totally opposite moods of grief and jubilation. For in each the sufferer recounts his plight, in the first to arouse the pity of the gods, in the second in thankful reminiscence. Each tells the story of the poet's sufferings, although from a different point in time.<sup>19</sup> The so-called 'Babylonian Job' belongs to this genre, and here the

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16. A full bibliography of Keret studies is given by George Saliba in his (unpublished) Master's dissertation submitted to the University of California (Berkeley) in 1969. Among many available English translations of *Keret* see *ANET*, pp. 142–149 or *DOTT*, pp. 118–124.
  17. M. Jastrow, Jr, 'A Babylonian Parallel to the Story of Job', *JBL*, XXV, 1906, pp. 135–191.
  18. The first fragments published are documented in *ANET*, p. 434. The first extensive text was published by S. H. Langdon, *Babylonian Wisdom* (1923), Plates I–V; translation pp. 35–66 see also *Babyloniaca*, VII, 1923, pp. 131ff. The text of the Istanbul copy was published by R. J. Williams, 'Notes on some Akkadian Wisdom Texts', *JCS*, VI, 1952, pp. 4–7. Sultantepe has provided more evidence: W. G. Lambert and O. R. Gurney, 'The Sultantepe Tablets: III. The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer', *AS*, IV, 1954, pp. 65–99. English translations in *ANET*, pp. 434–437 and *BWL*, pp. 21–62. Updated translation in *ANET*,<sup>3</sup> pp. 596–600.
  19. On the use of similar imagery in both types see H. H. Rowley, *OTMS*, p. 174. S. Mowinckel points out the affinity between psalms of this kind

resemblance to the biblical work ends. The worshipper reviews his ordeal of a horrible and unaccountable disease, and, while there are passages in Job in which Job describes his symptoms with equally gruesome details, a piece such as the Babylonian composition properly belongs after Job's deliverance, where no such song of thanksgiving is provided. Thus, while a story lies behind the Mesopotamian poem, it is only a monologue and lacks the elaborate dramatic form of Job. Furthermore, Babylonian polytheism could never approach the questions raised by Job. Gratitude to the gods for the return of good health is a universal theme, and it is remarkable that the book of Job says nothing about the cure of Job's dreadful ailment, unless this is covered by the statement in 42:10 that 'the Lord restored the fortunes of Job'.

An even older work from Mesopotamia is a Sumerian poem which attains more narrative development. Samuel Noah Kramer has called it 'the first "Job"'.<sup>20</sup> It is, however, not a story or a dialogue, but an edifying tract intended to encourage a person in affliction to keep on glorifying his personal god (a minor deity), and by bitter wailing, whose volume should be increased by the assistance of his friends and the hiring of professionals, to move the god to pity.<sup>21</sup> The point is made by citing a specific case, and here there is some resemblance to Job's experience, including the happy ending. There are also similar expressions of misery, but these are quite conventional. While the Sumerian poem shares with Job a tragic sense of the burden of sin, the justice of the gods is never questioned. It is not even assumed. All a man can do is weep. The simplistic advice of the Sumerian sage is just like the discreditable theology of Job's friends. While there can be no question of direct influence from a work more than a thousand years older than Job, the Sumerian poem shows how

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and 'Wisdom' literature: *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas (1962), Vol. II pp. 31–52.

20. S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*<sup>2</sup> (1961), pp. 167–171.

21. S. N. Kramer, 'Man and his God: A Sumerian Variation on the "Job" Motif', *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, edited by M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, *SVT*, III, 1960, pp. 172–182. English translation in *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 589–591.

ancient is the theory that guilty man's only hope is to move God to compassion.

So far as the *form* of Job is concerned, its prominent dialogue invites comparison with the extensive 'contest' literature of the ancient Near East. This gives a clue as to how the debate works. It does not proceed, by closely woven dialectic, to confute an opponent by irresistible logic; it is intended rather to impress an audience by brilliant rhetoric. A well-known example is the insertion into 1 Esdras of the elocution contest between three courtiers of King Darius (1 Esdras 3–4). Another is the submission to Absalom of the contradictory advice of Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Samuel 17). These situations make clearer the role of Elihu, and later of Yahweh, as adjudicator in the debate between Job and his three friends.

A popular variant of such disputation comes down in numerous fables which deal with such riddles as which is sweeter, sugar or salt, or which argue about which tree is most serviceable to man.<sup>22</sup> The debate between the tamarisk and the date palm<sup>23</sup> is an ancient example to which Jotham's fable (Judges 9) offers a resemblance.

The ancients also debated more serious subjects, including the problem of divine justice in a world of suffering. A work of this kind from Mesopotamia has been called 'The Babylonian Theodicy',<sup>24</sup> or the Babylonian Ecclesiastes. The poem is probably earlier than 1000 BC. Like Job it is highly artificial in structure. It consists of twenty-seven stanzas, each of eleven lines. In each stanza all the lines begin with the same cuneiform sign, and the twenty-seven signs constitute an acrostic which contains the name of a priest who could have been the author. Although no speakers are identified, it is clear from the content, as well as from the changes of the acrostic, that the complaints of a sufferer are answered in the alternating stanzas, whether by one or several friends. Not only is his problem like Job's, but many

22. S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*<sup>2</sup> (1961), chapter 18, *Logomachy*.

23. English translation in *BWL*, pp. 151–164 and *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 592–593.

24. English translations in *DOIT*, pp. 97–103 (selections); *BWL*, pp. 63–91 *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, pp. 601–604 (superseding the translation by R. H. Pfeiffer in *ANET*<sup>2</sup>, pp. 438–440, where it is called 'A Dialogue about Human Misery').

passing phrases remind one of expressions in Job. Yet W. G. Lambert is emphatic that there is no direct connection between the two works.<sup>25</sup> Since there is no story, the debate is more abstract than Job, and also more inconsequential, since it lacks the foundation of Israelite moral monotheism. Yet the two works stand in the same tradition, and Albright, from the analogous case of Ahiqar, thought that the author of Job might have been acquainted with some such Babylonian wisdom materials through Aramaic translations.<sup>26</sup>

The dialogue form was also used in Egypt for quasi-philosophical discussions. A story called *The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant*<sup>27</sup> has been compared to Job. The similarity begins with its superficial structure, for this composition, from the early second millennium BC, consists of nine semi-poetic speeches enclosed in a prose prologue and a prose epilogue. This in itself proves nothing, except the widespread use of the familiar design of Introduction, Middle, Conclusion for a literary work. Thus the Code of Hammurabi is a corpus of laws in prose framed by an introduction and conclusion in poetry. Such evidence has some value in Job studies in pointing to the integrity of the A-B-A design, at least negatively. That is, a mixture of prose and poetry in an ancient work is not evidence for composite authorship.<sup>28</sup> Of more interest is the dialogue in the Egyptian work. It consists of a series of appeals by a misused peasant for justice, with replies by the magistrate. The similarity to Job is slight. The central issues are entirely different. The peasant complains about untrustworthy craftsmen; Job's protest against injustice is levelled against God, not men. For the same reason Job cannot be placed alongside such 'protest' literature as the *Admonitions of Ipu-Wer*,<sup>29</sup> which complains about the collapse of public morality at the end of

25. *DOTT* p. 97; also *BWL*, p. 27. A full comparison, with ample quotations, is given by S. Terrien in *IB*, III pp. 878–884 and also by M. H. Pope, *AB*, XV, pp. LVI–LXXI.

26. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*<sup>2</sup> (1956), p. 331.

27. English translation in *ANET*, pp. 407–410.

28. See further, section 7 below, where the common opinion that Job consists of prose plus poetry plus prose will be rejected.

29. Translation, with bibliography, in *ANET*, pp. 441–444.

the Old Kingdom (late third millennium BC). This work consists of six poems which deplore the disappearance of the good old ways, but find no theological significance in the social convulsions of the times. It is the familiar voice of political reaction. The reversal of the status of rich and poor, which in the Old Testament is celebrated as a great and characteristic act of God, is bemoaned, but questions of right and wrong are not raised.

The speeches of Job have also been compared with the soliloquies met in the literature of pessimism. Despair over the chaos in society is expressed in another Egyptian work from the late third millennium BC. Again the composition begins as prose, switches to poetry, and ends as prose. This *Dispute over Suicide*<sup>30</sup> has the artificial form of a debate of a despondent man with his own soul. He maintains that self-destruction is the best solution to the problems of life. A poignant longing for death is expressed in words which invite comparison with chapter 3 of Job. But here similarity ends.<sup>31</sup> Weariness with life is a common enough theme. But Job is far beyond the self-pity of the Egyptian. The latter does not struggle through to the ultimate issues. He dismisses life as meaningless; Job resolutely searches. The Egyptian does not question the gods; Job insists on an answer from the Lord himself. Although Job sometimes soliloquizes, he is mainly engaged in a debate with his friends, that is, with established ideas. And Job never contemplates suicide. On the contrary, he rejects death by passionately demanding fulfilment in life. Job is hurt and angry; but he is never sour or cynical.

Different again from Job's moral outrage and the futile bad temper of the last two Egyptian works mentioned is the genteel meditation on death found in *A Song of the Harper*.<sup>32</sup> Since no-one has ever returned to tell us what death is like, the best we can do is to enjoy this life while it lasts. These sentiments remind us more of the hedonism of Ecclesiastes than the tough-minded arguments of Job.

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30. *ANET*, pp. 405–407; *DOTT*, pp. 162–167.

31. T. W. Thacker (*DOTT*, p. 163) admits the parallels, but concludes that there is no connection between the two works.

32. *ANET*, p. 467.

Some pessimistic writings from Mesopotamia also take the form of dialogue. The one nearest to Job is a discussion of a master with his slave on the emptiness of life.<sup>33</sup> Scholars have not been sure whether to take this work seriously or whether to regard it as satire.<sup>34</sup> Lambert acknowledges that there is a humorous strain in it.<sup>35</sup> Its lack of moral earnestness keeps it apart from Job. The problem is boredom, not suffering. The effete and languid master knows nothing of Job's agony. There is no real debate, since the slave merely echoes (mockingly?) his master's sentiments.

According to the book of Proverbs, it was the task of the 'wise' to teach others, particularly the young, the right way to conduct themselves in the world. The *content* of Job includes a lot of such material, and it is not surprising that parallels to its ethical teachings can be found elsewhere. On the theory that Job was primarily didactic, Hölscher (p. 4) finds affinities with such Egyptian instruction manuals as *The Sayings of Amenemope*.<sup>36</sup> That this work is connected somehow with the book of Proverbs cannot be denied, but the exact relationship between them has been vigorously debated.<sup>37</sup> Hölscher assumes that instruction in the form of dialogue in this work and in *The Instruction of Ani*,<sup>38</sup> a similar work, casts Job's 'comforters' in the role of teachers. But by no stretch of the

33. 'A Pessimistic Dialogue between Master and Servant', *ANET*, pp. 437–438 *BWL*, pp. 139–149.

34. E. A. Speiser, 'The Case of the Obliging Servant', *JCS*, VIII, 1954, pp. 98–105. Compare Gordis, pp. 58ff.

35. *BWL*, p. 139.

36. Translation in *ANET*, pp. 421–425; *DOTT*, pp. 172–186.

37. In addition to the bibliography attached to the translations in the preceding note, see the review of the question by Derek Kidner in *Proverbs* (TOTC, 1964), pp. 25–26. He admits that the balance of evidence favours borrowing from Egypt. But K. A. Kitchen refers to an unpublished study by J. Ruffle that seems to call for continued reservation (*Ancient Orient and Old Testament* [1966], p. 88, n. 3). See also B. J. Peterson, 'A New Fragment of *The Wisdom of Amenemope*', *JEA*, LII, 1966, pp. 120–128.

38. *ANET*, pp. 420–421.

imagination can Job be compared with a pupil in a Wisdom classroom.

In order to be called another 'Job' any similar work should resemble the biblical book in plot, form and content. A passing similarity here or there is not enough. To call every story of human suffering a 'Job' creates a false impression and obscures the uniqueness of the Israelite composition. Suffering is universal, and discussion of the reasons for it is sure to arise in any reflective culture. The human response ranges from vehement protest through agonized perplexity to placid resignation.

The literature of the ancient Near East has not yielded another 'Job'. There is a considerable list of writings from this region, and a few from further afield, which remind one of Job in this way or that. But none comes close to Job when each work is examined as a whole. Each shows more differences than similarities, and not one can be considered seriously as a possible source or model for Job.<sup>39</sup> The doleful Israelite in the grip of calamity did not have to read a Mesopotamian or an Egyptian work to raise the question of why God sends such experiences to men. The closest parallels are sufficiently explained by the common background of Wisdom tradition, without implying direct borrowing. The parallels can, however, be used piecemeal with real advantage to throw light on the individual verses in Job which they resemble.

Job stands far above its nearest competitors, in the coherence of its sustained treatment of the theme of human misery, in the scope of its many-sided examination of the problem, in the strength and clarity of its defiant moral monotheism, in the characterization of the protagonists, in the heights of its lyrical poetry, in its dramatic impact, and in the intellectual integrity with which it faces the 'unintelligible burden' of human existence. In all this Job stands alone. Nothing we know before it provided a model, and nothing since, including its numerous imitations, has risen to the same heights. Comparison only serves to enhance the solitary greatness of the book of Job.

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39. R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*<sup>2</sup> (1952), pp. 683f.