

Job's Concept of a Redeemer and an Advocate

September 9, 2018 - Job 16-19 - Read Online at epmkg.com/job16-19

Job 16

16:2-6 The leading theme here is 'words' and their lack of power. There was a similar opening in ch. 12, but the mood is now less aggressive, and it is mainly the feeling of disappointment at the friends' words that comes to the surface.

7-17 The mood changes from a mere sense of grievance to a feeling of oppression, as Job recounts the hostile acts of God against him. He thinks of God's assaults as if they were the attacks of various kinds of opponents: a wild animal (9-10), a traitor (11), a wrestler (12), an archer (12c-13a), and a swordsman (13b-14). It is like a rapid succession of still photographs in a film, one scene merging into the next.

18-22 God has, of course, not answered Job's demand that he tell him the charges that he holds against him (13:23). Job is still waiting, but in the meantime he tries a second line of argument. He has been wrongfully attacked by God, and he will probably die from the attack. So he appeals to the earth to take blood revenge for him once he is dead—upon God! The cry, '*O earth, do not cover my blood*' (18), is the same kind of cry as Abel's who was unlawfully killed (Gn. 4:10). The earth can respond only after Job is dead, of course; but even now, while he is still alive, he has a *witness*, an *advocate*, and *intercessor* in heaven (19-20). This can hardly be a reference to God, for Job believes God has been nothing but his enemy (7-14). What stands in heaven on Job's behalf is his protest that he is innocent, together with his demand that God should give an account of the reasons why he is assaulting him (13:18-19, 22-23). Even though he does not expect to be answered during his lifetime, the truth about his innocence has been placed on record in the heavenly court. His murder by God, when it happens, will be the final piece of evidence that he has been the victim of a miscarriage of justice.¹

Job 16

16:1-22 After Eliphaz's second, far less pastoral piece of advice to Job (Job 15; see above, pages 30-37), Job quickly brushes all such conventional theological wisdom aside (vv. 1-5). Describing the words of one's adversary in debate as "windy" appears to be a common rhetorical device (16:3; see 8:2; 15:2), but verses 2-5 put this summary rejection in the context of the profound failure of Job's "friends" to meet the demands of true friendship. If

¹ Clines, D. J. A. (1994). Job. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 471). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

their intent was to comfort Job (2:11), they have turned out to be the sort of “comforters” who only compound Job’s misery with their pious maxims (16:2). Suppose their roles were reversed, with Job at ease and his friends in despair. Would they be helped if Job followed their example, piling up arguments against them and holding them to blame (v. 4)? Or would it be the part of a true friend to stand by them and with them and for them, with words of encouragement and solace (v. 5)? (This verse can also be read as a sarcastic characterization of the friend’s hateful words as “encouragement” or “solace” when, in fact, they are the opposite. In either case, the empathy and support required of true friendship emerge clearly in verse 5.) If you have already peeked at the ending of the story, you are aware that just this kind of role reversal does take place (see 42:7). We shall see then how well Job is able to handle the costly demands of friendship hinted at in 16:5. Those who read Job 16:4–5 from a New Testament perspective can overhear in these verses something rather like Matthew 7:12.

For Job, however, neither his own outcries nor his own silences assuage his pain any better than his friends can manage (16:6). This is because of a depth of undeserved suffering that Job now describes in harsher and more disheartening terms than any we have yet heard him use (16:6–17). Job has met the enemy, and the enemy is God. If Job is now utterly “worn out,” utterly alone, shriveled and lean beyond recognition (vv. 6–8; see 2:12; compare Isa. 52:14), the sole cause is God. The implication of verse 8 is the conventional theological notion that God alone is the cause of such suffering. The external symptoms of suffering therefore bear witness that God has weighed Job in some inscrutable balance, found him guilty, and meted out just this horrific judgment against him.

In a series of devastating images, Job portrays “God the enemy” as a vicious predator (v. 9), a personal assailant (v. 12), an archer in command of a company of archers (vv. 12c–13), an attacking swordsman (v. 13b), a siege commander battering through protective walls (v. 14a), and a warrior intent on the destruction of the enemy (v. 14b).

Often in the Psalms the suffering of the righteous is described in terms of attacks by unnamed enemies, the “wicked” (see Psalms 3:1; 31:11–13; 38:12; see also Isa. 50:6), most often with the plea that God deliver the innocent from their depredations. Occasionally, these enemies are characterized as wild animals (Psalms 22:12–16; 57:4; 59:6–15). The injustice of God’s attack on Job is compounded by the accusation that instead of coming to the rescue, God has delivered Job into the clutches of these predatory enemies (Job 16:11).

As a result of this betrayal and God’s own ungodly attacks, the “sackcloth” of inconsolable mourning has become for Job like a second skin, weeping a way of life (see Psalm 6:6), the dust of death the repository of his strength, and “deep darkness” (or the “shadow of death”; see Psalm 23:4) the cast of his eyes. All of this, says Job, in spite of the

fact that his hands are guiltless and his appeal to God, on the grounds of his innocence, is spotless (vv. 15–17).

How else is Job to interpret what has happened to him, given the fact that God is indeed the one who has caused (or permitted) this suffering to befall him, according to Job 1:12; 2:6? How is Job to know that God’s confidence in Job’s unshakable integrity, not God’s anger against him, underlies the ungodly test to which Job is being put? Yet even here, in the very face of what appears to be God the enemy, Job will not knuckle under. Still he maintains that “there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure.”

But has Job “cursed God” with the reckless accusations of 16:7–17, as *hassatan* predicted he would? Job 16:18–21 suggests otherwise. At the very least, this remarkable passage still holds out the possibility that somehow, in some apparently impossible way, Job will yet break through to a hearing before God—a hearing whose only outcome must be the vindication of Job’s integrity before God. Verse 18 calls to mind Genesis 4:10, where God says to Cain, “Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!” Mother earth has been forced to drink brother’s blood, and she may not be expected to keep silence. In some such way Job now appeals to mother earth not to hold her tongue. If Job should indeed perish, let the word of this injustice not be silenced. Let the cry “Job is innocent yet suffers beyond measure” continue to reverberate after he is gone.

What follows in verse 19 has often been interpreted, perhaps especially among Christians, as a statement of Job’s confidence that some third party in heaven will take Job’s part and make things right between Job and God. The special temptation of Christians is to find here a veiled allusion to Christ, the “witness in heaven,” the one who “vouches” for frail humanity in the presence of God (see Rom. 8:34). But if indeed Job were placing supreme confidence in some “third party” here, rather than in his own integrity, then the book of Job might well end at this point, with this astonishing breakthrough of faith. If we read on, however, it is clear that Job has achieved no such decisive breakthrough. Job 16:22 through 17:16 continue with a litany of hopelessness as profound as any we have heard thus far.

What shall we make, then, of 16:18–19? In 9:33, Job laments the fact that there is no “umpire,” no third party, who might bring about a fair hearing for a mere human being in the presence of Almighty God. In 13:20–22, Job longs for a setting in which he could make his case before God in the absence of overwhelming divine terror. In 14:13–17, Job allows himself to speculate on the possibility that God might “hide [Job] in Sheol” and thus provide an opportunity even beyond death, when God’s “wrath is past,” for a tranquil resolution of the issues between them. Job 14:18–22 makes it clear, however, that he regards this “possibility” as quite impossible.

The common thread that runs through these passages, different as they are from one another, is simply this: If, by any imaginable means, he could finally make his case fairly before God, Job is supremely confident that God would vindicate Job’s integrity. From the

standpoint of Job 2:3, then, each of these texts demonstrates that Job “still persists in his integrity,” in spite of the special agony of not being granted such a hearing.

Perhaps for this reason some interpreters have thought Job’s “witness in heaven” is none other than God, even though verse 21 seems to point in the direction of a third party to the controversy (very like the “umpire” of 9:33). Such an interpretation might appear entirely inconsistent with all Job’s previous accusations against God and his frightful description of God as “the enemy” in 16:7–17. Yet Job’s longing for a hearing before God (expressed, e.g., in 9:33–35; 13:20–22; and 14:13–17) suggests that he has a last-ditch confidence that God is just, even in the face of his experience of injustice at God’s hands. The moral and spiritual depth of Job’s protest evaporates if we suppose that Job longs to bring his case before a God who is inherently unjust. There is no doubt that Job continually cries out *against* God. The wonder, however, is that these outcries are addressed *to* God, on the grounds of God’s *own* justice. Like the wounded prayers of Moses, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and the Psalms of Lament, Job’s outbursts against God are carried upon what may be called a kind of upsidedown trust: In spite of everything, God must be a God of justice and compassion as well as a God of power. *Therefore* one may cry out to God “out of the depths” (Psalm 130:1), even when there is no evidence that God knows or cares or is fair in the governance of human affairs. It is in just this astonishing, upside-down way that Job “persists in his integrity” toward God, not merely with respect to his own human behavior. Whether Job 16:19 refers to God or to some heavenly third party capable of securing Job’s longed-for fair hearing before God, Job’s twofold trust emerges clearly: trust in his own integrity and this curious, upside-down trust that an inherently just God must ultimately vindicate him. As in 7:7–8 and 10:18–21, Job 16:22–17:1 may contain a forlorn “warning” to God that time is running out. If this vindication is to occur, it must happen soon, before Job goes “the way from which I shall not return.”²

Job 17

17:1–2

My spirit is broken; my days are extinct;

the graveyard is ready for me.

Surely there are mockers about me,

and my eye dwells on their provocation.

² Wharton, J. A. (1999). *Job*. (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.) (pp. 76–80). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Job begins by making clear that he feels his life force is spent, the grave is imminent and he is surrounded by those who mock him (17:1–2). He is not only persecuted by God, but also provoked by man. He is alone and death is his only companion.

17:3–4

Lay down a pledge for me with yourself;

who is there who will put up security for me?

Since you have closed their hearts to understanding, therefore you will not let them triumph.

But then Job makes a surprising request and declaration (17:3–5). This is a section that must not be overlooked. It expresses daring faith and remarkable insight. He asks God to give him a pledge that he will not forget him (17:3; cf. Deut. 24:10–13). Earlier Job had said to his friends that he has not asked them for a pledge, even though it was the kind of thing that might be expected by one friend of another (see 6:14–23). This is an allusion to someone paying an oppressor to release a friend, or standing bail for him to guarantee that he will not flee the country but will turn up in court on the date when the case is due to be heard. But having no one else to do this for him, Job asks *the Judge* to be his surety! The psalmist does the same in Psalm 119:121–122.

This request is of the same sort as Job’s surprising testimony that God will somehow plead with God on Job’s behalf (see 16:19–21). To many commentators this tautology is inexplicable, but to those who know anything about the daring power of ‘faith without sight’ and the reality of the unseen realm there is nothing about this that is difficult to understand. All that is required is more revelation, more light, and that is supplied in 19:25–27 and the remainder of *Job* and, of course, in the New Testament. Even so, mystery, great mystery, remains for the Christian, and not only for Job.

Continuing in this daring frame of mind, Job declares that the Friends’ misreading of his condition is part of God’s will (17:4) and that if God allows their argument to stand, then not only will Job not be vindicated, but God will not be exalted. This appeal to God’s glory is an extra reason that Job uses in an attempt to constrain God to intervene on his behalf. Using a proverb of some sort, he castigates the Friends as behaving like traitors and vultures who at a time of calamity violate the law of sacred friendship for the sake of gain (17:5). He who has been made childless warns them that the same fate could befall them.

In a way that is not untypical of a sufferer, Job’s mood fluctuates once more (17:6, 7). He recalls how others mock and execrate him and how he is weary and weak because of it all. He descends again into a whirlpool of blackness, but once more he finds a measure of hope

and solid ground under his feet (17:8–10). There are, however, some difficulties in these verses.

17:8–9

The upright are appalled at this,

and the innocent stirs himself up against the godless.

Yet the righteous holds to his way,

and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger.

In the second line of verse 8 Job refers to two sorts of people and he contrasts them. They are the **'innocent'**, on the one hand, and the **'godless'**, or 'profane', on the other. Both words are singular adjectives that function as nouns, and so the two individuals that are in view here are probably representative of a larger number of persons in each case.

But what about the **'upright'** in the earlier part of the verse? This is a plural adjective. Who are these? They are spectators, or observers, of the innocent person who is afflicted. It is therefore likely that they are Job's 'upright' friends who are **'appalled'** because they see someone who is desolate and devastated by what to them appears to be divine judgement. Job is therefore describing himself as the person who is 'innocent' of the charges brought against him and also as the **'righteous'** person who resolves that, whether he is seen as righteous or not, he is going to persevere to the end (17:9), confident that extra strength will be given to him to do so. This is indomitable faith. He is maintaining his integrity.

17:10

But you, come on again, all of you,

and I shall not find a wise man among you.

In verse 10 Job is either calling on the Friends to come to a better mind—that is, to repent (the phrase translated **'come on again'** could be rendered 'turn', which is the word for 'repent')—or he is inviting them to try again to overcome him. The latter seems more likely in view of the fact that he closes by saying that not one of them will show that he is really wise.

17:11

My days are past; my plans are broken off,

the desires of my heart.

Verse 11 returns to the note that Job struck at the beginning concerning the brevity of life. But this time he also describes it as fragile. His plans are **'broken'** as well as his spirit. Death is his home and despondency is his next of kin (17:12–16). Darkness, dust and defeat seem to engulf his faith. But it has only been eclipsed and not extinguished. It will rise and emerge again.³

16:22–17:2. Since Job thought his life was drawing to a close (**only a few years.... my days are cut short**; cf. 7:6, 9; 9:25–26; 10:20; 14:1–2, 5; 17:11), with death being final (**no return**; cf. 7:9; 10:21; 14:12), he needed an intercessor's help right away. He was depressed (**my spirit is broken**), for all he could see around him with his tear-filled **eyes** (cf. 16:16, 20; 17:7) were his friends (whom he called **mockers!**) with **their hostility**.

17:3–5. Though God was against him (cf. 16:7–9, 11–14), only **God** could provide a **pledge** for him in court, a bond given to the defendant as a guarantee that no advantage would be taken against him. To **put up security** is literally, "to strike hands," a practice by which an agreement was ratified (cf. Prov. 6:1; 11:15; 17:18; 22:26). This arrangement with God was necessary since Job's cohorts were mindless of his innocence and even denounced him, hoping to gain some **reward** for supposedly defending God. Such faithless friendship meant that instead of a reward, judgment might come on their **children** in the form of blindness.

d. Job's dilemma (17:6–16)

17:6–9. Job's wish for a court spokesman and for bail from God was followed by another expression of hope and then a note of pathos. People sneered at him, speaking of him in a **byword** (lit., "a proverb"; cf. 30:9), and they spat (cf. 30:10) on his **face**, a most insulting, abhorrent act. So intense was his **grief** (*ka'as*, "agitation"; cf. 5:2, "resentment"; 6:2, "anguish"; 10:17, "anger") that even his eyesight was dimmed, possibly by tears (cf. **eyes** in 16:16, 20; 17:2, 5), and he was emaciated (a **shadow**; cf. 16:8).

Anyone who was **upright** and **innocent** would be **appalled at** (cf. 18:20) such outlandish treatment of Job. By this Job implied that his disputants were *not* upright. Even so, he would **hold to** and even grow in his convictions, certain of his **righteous** position before God.

17:10–16. Job sarcastically challenged the trio to **try again** to find some wrongdoing in him, but he knew they could not, partly because they were **not ... wise** (cf. 12:2). His life was fading and his **plans** and **desires** were unfulfilled, even though the friends had held out hope to him (by appealing for his repentance). However, such hope of restoration,

³ Jones, H. R. (2007). *A Study Commentary on Job* (pp. 144–147). Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press.

saying **light** was coming (cf. Zophar's words in 11:17–18) was unrealistic. Job thought his only **hope** was **the grave** where there is **darkness** (cf. 10:21–22) and **corruption** by **the worm** (cf. 21:26; 24:20) which would be closer to him in the tomb than his dearest relatives. As Job had said three times before (6:11; 7:6; 14:19), he had no **hope** of ever recovering. The hope they held out to him would vanish with him in the grave.⁴

Job 18

Black darkness

(Job 18:1–19:24)

In this section we have Bildad's speech and most of Job's reply. Breaking off at 19:24 will provide a context for considering Job's well-known and much-loved words that come immediately afterwards.

The light of the wicked is put out (18:1–21)

18:2, 4

How long will you hunt for words?

Consider, and then we will speak ...

You who tear yourself in your anger,

shall the earth be forsaken for you,

or the rock be removed out of its place?

In his first speech Bildad did offer Job a ray of hope, but it was on the basis that he would seek mercy from God as one who had sinned (see 8:5–6). In this second address there is not a glimmer of hope extended. In twenty-one verses all but three are a description of the wicked and his fate. This raises the question as to whether Bildad had given up all hope that Job might repent, with the result that he was intending to announce both verdict and sentence—while Job was still alive.

He begins with the same impatient words with which he first addressed Job: '**How long ...?**' (18:2; cf. 8:2). He certainly does not interact with anything that Job has said, but he does react to Job's claim that he had 'clean hands' (see 17:9). He had heard that much at least! But he chooses to regard it as a thinly veiled accusation that he and his colleagues are

⁴ Zuck, R. B. (1985). Job. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 739). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

‘unclean’. In addition Job’s appeal to the earth and his words about having a witness on high (16:18–19) leave him completely unmoved.

It might appear from our English translations that Bildad is addressing Job in his opening remarks. But that is so only in verses 3 and 4. In verse 2 the second-person verbs are plural. As the Hebrew text stands, Bildad is therefore describing Eliphaz and Zophar as **‘[hunting] for words’** (18:2). This use of the plural is so strange that several emendations have been suggested, but not one is free of some objection or other. However, there is an interesting possibility to consider that does not require any change in the text, and this is that Bildad is somewhat dissatisfied with what his two friends have said. (Satan sows discord everywhere!) Neither of them has been as categorical as Bildad believes the case now requires, which is that an unambiguous declaration of the doctrine of strict retribution is called for.

What is clear is that Bildad is exasperated with Job. He regards Job’s refusal to kowtow to him and his colleagues as an indication of his sense of superiority and disdain for them (18:3). He gives Job a name (of sorts) which it is difficult to express in English as pithily as in Hebrew. He calls Job a ‘tearer of himself in [his] anger’ (18:4). By this Bildad intends to defend God as well as to denounce Job. He is saying to Job that it was not God who was ‘tearing’ Job, as he had claimed (see 16:9), but that it was he who was ravaging himself by his own anger. Job is therefore the wild beast, and not God! So often Job must have resembled someone who was distracted, if not demented. Bildad thinks that Job is on a constant, mad search for words and is refusing to think and by making an appeal to the ‘earth’ (16:18) it was as if Job was expecting the order of natural things to be overturned in his favour (18:4).

18:5–6

Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out,
and the flame of his fire does not shine.

The light is dark in his tent,
and his lamp above him is put out.

18:21

Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous,
such is the place of him who knows not God.

But Bildad thinks that Job is also challenging the moral fabric of life on earth—and that is far more serious. He therefore expatiates on the justice of the moral order (18:5–21). He

thinks in terms of strict retribution. But his world view is not only characterized by this principle; it is totally limited by it—entirely and everywhere. He begins and concludes his peroration with synonymous terms whose meaning is ‘**Surely**’. There can be no variation and no exception to what he says. The wicked will be treated in this life just as he describes, and wherever such events occur, there the wicked will be found.

Even if Bildad is still thinking, perhaps even hoping, that Job may turn to God, his shock tactics are counterproductive. Although he is speaking in impersonal terms, it is obvious that he has Job in mind. Light and darkness are the operative terms in what Bildad has to say. Light is associated with God’s favour and therefore with strength (18:7, 12), with health (18:13), with home comforts (18:14), with wealth (18:16) and with a name—that is, with public regard and personal descendants (18:17). Job has lost all of these.

Darkness is associated with all sorts of snares that await him (18:8–10) because of his wicked schemes, and with all sorts of terrors that besiege him as a result (18:11). He is chased (18:11), tripped up (18:12), torn away (18:14) and thrust out (18:18). He presents a horrifying spectacle to all who see or hear of him, in the west or the east (18:20). Bildad concludes with a definitive declaration about the fate of the wicked.

All this is hardly likely to mollify Job’s agitation or to edify his understanding. It is more calculated to terrify him because it is a description that parallels his own experience in so many ways. Properly interpreted, all that Bildad says about the unrighteous, those who do not know God, is true. Filtered through the teaching of the New Testament about the Last Judgement, his declaration can be used in preaching. Its emphasis on suddenness, certainty, finality and justice is all in keeping with what the Lord Jesus had to say about the destiny and the destination of the wicked. The only thing that was untrue about it was that Bildad applied it to Job, who was *not* ‘**unrighteous**’ and who *did* ‘**[know] God**’.

So in accusing and condemning Job, Bildad is actually, if unwittingly, serving Satan’s purpose. Job has just spoken of his having an advocate and has asked God not to forget him. Bildad challenges that and denies it, and he does so in the name of all the Friends.⁵

SECOND SPEECH OF BILDAD

Job 18:1–21

⁵ Jones, H. R. (2007). *A Study Commentary on Job* (pp. 148–151). Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press.

Several things in Job's last speech had offended Bildad the Shuhite. He resented the way Job spoke of his friends; he took offense at the way he spoke to and about God. The principal theme of this discourse is the destruction of the wicked. Eliphaz had suggested that the punishment of a sinner came largely from his own conscience. Bildad, however, argued that the punishment of sinners is part of the fixed order of the world and the moral instincts of mankind.

A. Bildad's Indignation (18:1-4)

Bildad begins with the same exclamation of impatient astonishment ("How long?") that he used in his earlier speech (cf. 8:2). What Job has done in his former speeches is to "lay snares for words," i.e., hunt for words to create specious arguments. He is suggesting that Job's remarks were unintelligent ramblings. Job had accused the friends of lacking understanding (cf. 17:4). It was not they, but he who was without wisdom. If any progress is to be made in the discussion, Job would have to admit some basic principles. In answering Job, Bildad uses the plural "you" possibly because the patriarch had identified himself with righteous sufferers (cf. 17:6ff.) who were persecuted by the wicked (18:1-2).

Bildad resented the implication that he and his friends were stupid beasts (cf. 12:7-9). What was worse, Job was treating his friends as "unclean" beasts (cf. 17:4, 9-10). Much less should God be compared to a beast (cf. 16:9) who rips and tears. It is Job who tears himself in his self-righteous zeal. The earth is not going to be made desolate, nor is the rock to be removed from its place. The idea is that God is not about to overthrow the inextricable moral laws that govern the universe. God will not, Bildad argues, overturn the law that imputes wickedness to those who suffer (18:3-4).

B. The Principle of Retribution (18:5-11)

The rest of the speech of Bildad is devoted to his main theme: the destruction of the wicked. As in his first speech, Bildad employs graphic figures and proverbial sayings to argue his position. Bildad sets forth the moral principle that "the light of the wicked shall be put out." The beacon which marked his tent is extinguished, the flame in the hearth shines no more. His home is desolate (18:5-6).

Bildad employed a second figure to express the same thought. The firm, wide steps of prosperity become narrowed and hampered. Finally "his own counsel shall cast him down," i.e., the evil principles that guided his conduct ultimately lead to calamity (18:7).

The fall of the wicked is inevitable. The moral order of the world is such that wherever the wicked person turns he walks into a snare, a trap or a noose. In the end he realizes his predicament. "Terrors shall make him afraid on every side." He tries to escape, but the terrors pursue close behind him (18:8-11).

C. The End of the Wicked (18:12–21)

The last days of a wicked person are next described by Bildad. First, his strength is weakened for lack of food. Second, the sinner’s body is consumed by a terrible disease. That calamity here is called figuratively “the firstborn of death,” i.e., the strongest child of death. The reference is to a fatal disease. Third, the wicked one is rooted out of his “tent,” or home and is led away to “the king of terrors,” i.e., to death (18:12–14).

Next Bildad speaks of the extinction of the name and race of the wicked person. First, he presents two pictures of the fate of the sinner’s possessions. Either his possessions would pass into the hands of others, or be destroyed with a rain of brimstone from heaven. Second, the sinner’s “branches shall wither.” The tree is a figure for the family of the sinner. The sinner’s family perishes with him. Third, even the memory of the wicked man would perish from the land (18:15–17).

Bildad concludes his oratory with a description of the horror which people feel over the fate of the sinner. When the sinner was driven from the light of life to the darkness of death he would leave no offspring behind. Through the generations people would be horrified at the fate of that sinner. Bildad inscribes the picture which he has painted of the fate of the wicked with these words: “Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, the place of one who does not know God” (18:18–21).⁶

Job 19

‘He has set darkness on my paths’ (19:1–24)

It is important to keep pace with Job’s answer to Bildad in this chapter and not leap to a consideration of verses 25–27. This is because the background provided in verses 1–24 contributes significantly to the meaning and value of his ringing affirmation of faith. We shall use Job’s appeal in verse 21 as an integrating theme for these earlier verses and consider them as ‘a cry for pity’.

19:21

Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,

for the hand of God has touched me!

This is a seriously meant plea (he repeats it) in spite of all that Job has had to say about his hard-hearted friends. He is not being sarcastic. Unexpected it might be, but we have to remember that Job is a man in anguish, and people who are desperate do clutch at straws.

⁶ Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (Job 18:1–21). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

After all, the Friends had come in order to pity him and, indeed, had done so for a while; this is something that he had reminded them of before (6:14).

When anyone appeals for pity he or she is reduced to the direst of circumstances. After all, it is possible to be in agony but to be resolute. But to ask for pity is to be close to breaking point; in addition, pity is usually asked for from one's enemies, not from one's friends.

1. Unpitied by his friends (19:1–5)

19:2–4

How long will you torment me

and break me in pieces with words?

These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;

are you not ashamed to wrong me?

And even if it be true that I have erred,

my error remains with myself.

In verse 2 he declares that his friends' words, coupled with their looks and gestures, have had a tearing, crushing effect on him. His specification of '**ten times**' (19:3) is of course not to be understood literally, but figuratively. They have engaged in assault and battery of a verbal kind.

Verse 4 is not difficult if it is understood in a narrow sense. In it Job is asserting that his sin only affects himself—if he has committed any. His friends have been seeking to impose their views on him. They have completely discounted him in the interest of their theory. He has not done anything to them.

2. Unpitied by God (19:6–12)

19:7–8

Behold, I cry out 'Violence!' but I am not answered;

I call for help, but there is no justice.

He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass,

and he has set darkness upon my paths.

Job's charge is that God has been unjust. He sees himself as attacked by a surrounding army, or stalked by a preying animal. He has been dethroned (19:9), uprooted (19:10) and besieged (19:11–12).

3. *Unpitied by others* (19:13–22)

19:13

He has put my brothers far from me,

and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me.

19:20

My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh,

and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

There is no human sympathy forthcoming from any direction. Reviewing folk from whom he might expect to receive it, he lists his **'brothers'** and other friends (19:13–14), his household guests and servants (19:15–16), his siblings, his wife (19:17), little children (19:18) and his closest friends or colleagues (19:19). The reference to **'children'** in verse 17 is literally 'sons of my womb'. Understanding this as a reference to his blood brothers (**'the children of my own mother,'** ESV), and not to his own children, means that there is no contradiction between this verse and the record of the deaths of Job's children in chapter 1; it also means that the term **'brothers'** in verse 13 refers to clan members rather than just his immediate family.

Job is nothing but skin and bone and is barely alive. Not only is there no justice for him but there is no kindness either. The Friends (and others) are joining forces with God against him (19:20–22). Job is here at his lowest and Satan is at his strongest.

4. *'Oh that my words were written!'* (19:23–24)

19:23–24

Oh that my words were written!

Oh that they were inscribed in a book!

Oh that with an iron pen and lead

they were engraved in the rock for ever!

These two verses are of the utmost importance. Job is here declaring his determination to have things put on record. What exactly he is envisaging in verse 23 is uncertain. It might

be that he is thinking of a scroll made of strips of papyrus reed flattened and joined together. If this is the case, then he moves on in verse 24 to something more permanent, namely a **'rock'** with incised letters filled with molten lead or something equivalent. But, whatever the precise details, Job is interested in permanence, or that which is ineradicable.

But what does he want recorded? What does he mean by **'my words'**? This is a far more important question. Is it what he goes on to say in the following verses? In several translations (e.g. ESV) the word 'for' that stands at the opening of verse 25 encourages such a view, and there is no doubt that the declaration that follows would be worthy of permanent record. Indeed, it has been given it in a better format than rock that is liable to crumble, or engraving that can be defaced or become weathered!

The word **'for'** is too weak as a rendering of the Hebrew. The NASB has 'as for me', and that is better because it points to a contrast between verses 24 and 25 (cf. Ps. 2:6). What would be even better would be 'but I', or 'but as for me', because that would point up a strong contrast. This would mean that what Job wanted to have recorded was his plea of 'Not guilty'. In other words, there is a shift between verses 24 and 25 that is of exactly the same kind as that between verses 18 and 19 in chapter 16. It is the protestation of his integrity that he wants written as a kind of epitaph—and that leads to an encouraging intervention by God. The darkest hour is before the dawn.

A beam of light

(Job 19:25–29)

Verses 25–27 of this passage contain Job's best-known words. They have endeared themselves to many in the form in which they appear in the King James (or Authorized) Version and Handel's *Messiah*. But there are some difficulties with that translation that just cannot be avoided, as is evident from a comparison with recent translations.

19:25–27

KJV	ESV
<p>For I know <i>that</i> my redeemer liveth, and <i>that</i> he shall stand at the latter <i>day</i> upon the earth:</p> <p>And <i>though</i> after my skin <i>worms</i> destroy this <i>body</i>, yet in my flesh shall I see God:</p>	<p>For I know that my Redeemer lives,</p> <p>and at the last he will stand upon the earth.</p>

<p>Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; <i>though</i> my reins be consumed within me.</p>	<p>And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!</p>
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The words that appear in italic type in the KJV have no counterpart in the Hebrew text and were inserted by the 1611 translators in the interests of conveying some meaning. These do not appear at all in recent translations, and some of those extra words, namely **'day'**, **'worms'** and **'body'**, carry significant weight in the popular use or understanding of this text. In addition we shall see that there are alternative renderings for the words **'for myself'** and **'not another'** and that the meaning of the verb that is translated **'destroyed'** is difficult to fix with precision. Clearly, there are tasks of some magnitude to consider at a most basic level with regard to this text.

We are going to look at these verses in relation to the rest of the book of Job as a first step in considering them. We shall therefore examine the opening expression, **'I know'**, and then focus on the assertions that **'my Redeemer lives and ... he will stand'** and **'I shall see God.'**

'I know' (19:25)

As this verb is in the first person singular, what follows is an individual affirmation. Job is no longer giving vent to a wish amid the surrounding gloom; he lays claim to a knowledge that is characterized by tremendous, joyful certainty. This knowledge is the same as the assurance of faith; it is a believing of something that has been revealed to him. 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye' (after verse 24, so to speak, and like 16:18-19) God had somehow revealed himself to Job, and his **'I know'** introduces an account of what was revealed and his response to it. His 'I know', or 'I have come to know', is equivalent to 'I believe'. It is a testimony that has both content and effect, and that is how we shall consider them.

We shall begin by examining the content.

'My redeemer lives and he will stand' (19:25)

What Job knows is that he has a **'Redeemer'** who lives and who **'will stand'**. The object of believing knowledge is therefore a person and his activity. That is what is summed up in the term 'redeemer'. Questions have been raised about the suitability of this term as a translation of the Hebrew. But it can be allowed to stand provided that it is first thought of in Old Testament terms—that is, before any light from the New Testament is allowed to shine on it. The Hebrew word is used in a number of places in the Old Testament for a person's nearest blood relative who had an obligation to perform certain tasks in differing circumstances. Strictly speaking, it refers to someone's next of kin—which is precisely what Job has just said he does not have (19:13–17).

The circumstances in which the kinsman was to act varied from recovering a relative's lost property or liberty (Lev. 25:25–27, 47–49) to avenging his unjust death (Num. 35:9–34) or marrying his brother's childless widow (Deut. 25:5; Ruth 3; 4). Job has in effect lost all of these and needs a next of kin to restore and to release, to avenge and to perpetuate his name. Such recovery was often effected by the payment of a ransom, and that makes the term 'redeemer' entirely appropriate as a translation.

Clearly, the kinsman exercised a significant role in the cohesion of a community and nation, and it was not only in Israel that such a duty was recognized. It was family-based, going back to what was included in the mutual care of husband and wife before ever it was enshrined nationally. It was (and is) part of what it means to be created in the image of God. But it then became bathed in new light when Jehovah became Israel's next of kin by delivering them from bondage in Egypt (see Exod. 6:6).

Job describes his 'Kinsman' by stating that he **'lives'** and he **'will stand'**, and those epithets point in the direction of his being divine. It is possible that each of these verbs might be understood as equivalent to 'existing', on the one hand, and 'being erect', on the other, but that would be incredibly superficial and of little comfort to Job. What Job is saying is that he knows that his Kinsman has life and that he will perform his duty.

With regard to his having 'life', we should remember that Job has just been speaking of inanimate rock and of himself as a dying man. 'Life' therefore stands in contrast to both of those; Job's kinsman is not only alive at the time of speaking, but he will not die. The Hebrew word for 'living' that is used here is used elsewhere of God (Num. 14:21, 28; Deut. 32:40; 1 Kings 17:1). Job's 'Redeemer' is therefore the living God who will never die (Deut. 5:26; Job 16:19).

What is in view in the reference to his 'standing up' is equivalent to someone 'taking the stand' in order to act as a witness. Job is envisaging proceedings in a court of law. Earlier he has said that his physical condition rises up as witness against him (see 16:8) and later he will refer to God doing the same, but as a judge (31:14). The verb 'rise up' is also used of

false witnesses testifying against the godly (see Ps. 27:12) and of God himself whenever he intervenes to defend and deliver his people in times of need in answer to their prayers (Ps. 7:6; 68:1). It is also used in connection with God's appearing to judge all mankind (Isa. 2:19–21; Zeph. 3:8). Job is expecting that his Kinsman-Redeemer will intervene on his behalf and render a final verdict against which there can be no appeal. These words are therefore all of a piece with the Christian's expectation of being owned and vindicated at the Last Day through his Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The timing of his intervention

But when and where does Job think that this Kinsman/Vindicator will intervene? The answers to these questions are bound up with the latter part of verse 25 and the first part of verse 26. In the ESV they read: **'... and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed ...'**

There are two uses of the word **'after'** in these verses. The first is rendered in the ESV by the word **'last'**. Both relate to the timing of this intervention. The first use (19:25) is an adjective which lacks a noun and which is difficult to translate. It has therefore been suggested that it should be understood in the same way as Isaiah uses it when he speaks of God as 'the First and *the Last*'. This suggestion has not commended itself generally and it can be set aside without losing all reference in the text to the presence of God, given what has already been said about the word 'lives'.

As these verses are full of legal language and a courtroom scene is envisaged, **'last'** can be a reference to the witness whose testimony is decisive in the case. It is worth noting that, though 'the last word' in the dispute between Job and God comes from Job's mouth (see 42:1–6), it is Jehovah who has the last word as to Job's standing and character. What is more, he makes such a declaration four times (see 42:7–8). This part of Job's testimony could therefore refer to the end of the book, and not to the end of time.

The second use of the term (19:26) raises a question that is of material importance in relation to the timing of the Kinsman's intervention. It relates to what happens to Job's **'skin'**. Sadly, the meaning of the word that is translated **'destroyed'** is difficult to fix with precision because wherever it occurs in the Old Testament it is used metaphorically. As a verb it is used in only one other place (Isa. 10:34) and there it describes the clearing away of thickets in a forest; as a noun it refers to the 'beating' of olives from the tree (Isa. 17:6; 24:13). As it is skin (not body) that is being referred to in verse 26, the English word that seems to be most endorsed as a translation is 'strip' or 'flay'. Either would make good sense but neither settles the all-important question as to whether Job is thinking of 'torn flesh' or of the 'bare bones' of 'this' body as emaciated or as decomposed. As a provisional judgement I would suggest the former, even though it means saying that Job *did not intend* to express his belief in an encounter with God after death or in a resurrected body. Such a loss is to a large extent compensated for by seeing Job's testimony here as being an

effective (though unconscious) refutation of Satan's belief that stripping Job of his skin would strip him of his piety (see comment on 2:4–5).

The locale of this intervention

The next question relates to the locale of this intervention because in verse 25 we have the expression **'upon the earth'**. The Hebrew noun means 'dry earth' or 'dust' and Job's use of it in 28:2; 30:6 and 41:33 could be rendered either way. But it is also used in connection with an interred corpse (see 20:11; 21:26) and also for the abode of the dead (see 17:16). The *possibility* that Job has in mind an intervention on his behalf after his death ought not therefore to be dismissed, but whether it can be asserted confidently on the basis of the words in the text is another matter. We shall return to this below.

'I shall see God' (19:26)

Three times Job makes this assertion in verses 26 and 27, and he does so in slightly different ways. Again there are translation questions in connection with each of these.

First, and most doctrinally significant, is the preposition **'in'**, which introduces **'my flesh'**; this would be better rendered *'from my flesh'*. The ESV includes an alternative rendering as a footnote, and this is *'without my flesh'*. The difference between these two readings is obvious and, seeing that it is so great, someone might well wonder whether one and the same Hebrew expression can have both meanings. But the fact of the matter is that both renderings are accurate. The question that is inevitably raised is whether Job is referring to a sight of God 'from within' his flesh or 'from without' his flesh—that is, when he is in a disembodied condition.

If the latter view is adopted the question that then has to be faced is what is meant by **'eyes'** in verse 27. If he was disembodied Job would have no eyes. The reference to his 'eyes' would therefore have to be construed metaphorically, but this would appear unlikely, given the threefold emphasis on sight in this statement. I therefore take the view that Job is referring to the eyes of his present body and so render the expression '[from] in my flesh'.

But when would this be? Does adopting that interpretation mean that Job was declaring that he would see God after he had died and had been given a new body? We have already seen that verse 25 and the first part of verse 26 do not *have to* be understood in this way in order to be treated *fairly*. To regard them as expressing Job's confidence that he would have a personal encounter with his Kinsman-Redeemer while he was in an emaciated condition—in *extremis*, so to speak—which would result in his being vindicated before death is a sufficient exposition of these words in their immediate context. It is also a wonderful testimony of faith against incalculable odds. The following three reasons support this view:

First, in verse 27 he envisages seeing his Kinsman-Redeemer **‘for myself’** and **‘not another’**. **‘For myself’** can be translated as ‘on my side’—that is, for him and not against him—and **‘not another’** as ‘not a stranger’. This means that reconciliation will be effected and fellowship will be restored through the intervention of his Redeemer. God will be for Job and no longer far from him.

Secondly, this is what Elihu holds out to him in 33:24–28.

Thirdly, this is what actually came about when Job said, ‘Now my eye sees you’ (42:5). Jehovah did vindicate him before he died and he did see God. All that he lost—no, twice as much—was restored to him. He enjoyed life on earth with God again.

Taking this view entails regarding Job 19:25–27 as presenting no advance on what Job had said in chapters 14 and 16 with reference to death. In chapter 14 he considers the possibility of life after death with some longing, but in the most tentative way. In chapter 16 there is no reference even to such a possibility, even though he refers to a witness on high in the face of its imminence. Similarly, there is no clear and firm *textual* evidence in chapter 19 that Job asserted life beyond death. And, most significantly, there is no mention of it afterwards when Job is speaking of death (see chapter 21)—and that is surely to be expected if this passage is speaking of a future resurrection.

But this interpretation will be unacceptable to many, and so I want to state clearly that I do not mean that the ‘popular’ understanding of 19:25–27 should be entirely given up. We have only been exploring the question as to what Job meant by his words, and doing so contextually—that is, from within the book that bears his name and the era of revelation recorded in it. Not much had been revealed by God of life beyond the tomb up to and during the patriarchal era, beyond Enoch’s total and mystifying disappearance. It is therefore not surprising that Job 19:25–27 does not exhibit anything like clarity on the matter. The surprising thing is that it contains as much as it does.

But there is a larger context to be borne in mind, the larger canonical context. Viewed through that lens, Job 19:25–27 *is* messianic in character. It anticipates the beatific vision in glory—and the resurrection of the body. It does have Christological and soteriological dimensions.

But on what basis can such an assertion be made? Is it only because of the fact that *Job* is as much part of divinely inspired Scripture as is Revelation? No. That is certainly true, but there is more to it. There is an expression used in *Job* which is exceedingly important in giving instruction as to how the Lord’s appearing, and all that follows it, is to be understood. It is: ‘The Lord restored the fortunes of Job’ (42:10). Rendered literally, the Hebrew means ‘The Lord turned the captivity of Job.’ This expression is first used in Deuteronomy 30:3 in connection with Israel’s deliverance and restoration from God’s covenant displeasure—that is, from exile—and it is also used of Israel’s deliverance from

bondage in Egypt (see Ps. 126:1). The appearance of the Lord as Kinsman-Redeemer brings Job's captivity to Satan to an end, restores him physically and blesses his latter days much more than the ones before he was afflicted. Our consideration of the Epilogue (42:10–17) will seek to demonstrate that it is an anticipation of heaven expressed in Old Testament terms.

As in many other matters, Christians should understand more of what is presented in the Old Testament than Old Testament figures did. This applies to the words of Job that we have been considering. Magnificent though Job 19:25–27 is, it is less than 'the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality *to light* through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1:9–10, emphasis added).

The effect of Job's testimony

This knowledge produces an upheaval of two kinds—emotional and mental.

1. Emotional

Job says, '**My heart faints within me!**' (19:27). This describes the emotional effect of what he now knows. The term he uses is literally 'kidneys'—thought to be the most sensitive organ in the human anatomy, and which earlier he had described as having been slashed open by God (see 16:13). Now he says something like, 'My kidneys have ended up in my chest', which is clearly a metaphor. (We have a similar expression in English, namely to 'have one's heart in one's mouth', which we use to describe apprehension. But Job is not apprehensive; he is overjoyed.) Faith is not fact without feeling; it is certainly not feeling alone, but it is equally certain that it is fact that is felt.

2. Mental

This upheaval occurs in the realm of the understanding. Being enlightened, Job is now able to warn the Friends of the judgement of God (19:28–29). He sees that the Friends are persecuting him, believing that the explanation of all his suffering lies within himself. But his new-found certainty enables him to see the unsure ground on which they are standing. He warns them of the '**sword**', which is a metaphor not only for death, but also for the wrath of God (see 15:22; 27:14) and 'the judgement'.

There are so many wonderful statements in Scripture prefaced by the words, 'I know', but this one (limited as it is) deserves to be ranked among the greatest of them.⁷

⁷ Jones, H. R. (2007). *A Study Commentary on Job* (pp. 151–166). Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press.

Job's Fifth Speech (Job 19)

- A. *Hostility from his friends—19:1–6*
- B. *Hostility from his God—19:7–12*
- C. *Hostility from everyone else—19:13–22*

The statement in v. 20, “I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth”, may mean, “I’ve barely escaped” or “I had a close call.” Or it may be a reference to his gums! In other words, he may be saying that disease had destroyed his teeth and only his gums are left.

- D. *Hope remains for him—19:23–29*

“Hope” is not to be identified as mere wishful thinking (such as, “I hope the stock market goes up” or “I hope I win the lottery”). Hope is *present confidence in a future certainty*. Job here declares his hope in a **kinsman redeemer** (v. 25) who will come to his defense. This is a reference to an ancient Israelite custom by which the nearest kin guaranteed the security and rights of his fellow kinsman. A “redeemer” was a vindicator of one unjustly exploited, a defender of the oppressed, a champion of the weak, an advocate of the accused. The term “kinsman-redeemer” also functions as one of Yahweh’s titles (Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77:15).

- Note that Job refers to God as “**my**” redeemer, indicating that notwithstanding all that’s been said, he is confident that God is still on his side.
- Job anticipates that this will occur “in the end” or “at the last.” Thus he takes the “long view” of ultimate vindication.
- The prospect of vindication by his “kinsman-redeemer” causes his “heart” to “faint” or to “yearn” within him. It is clearly an intense and emotionally overwhelming experience.⁸

19:1–29 Job’s reply to Bildad in 19:1–22 can be read as a direct response to the vindictive hostility that dominates this latest attack. He is being tormented, broken in pieces, reproached, and wronged shamelessly by “friends” who have betrayed the very meaning of friendship (19:1–3; see 6:14–29; 16:2–5; 17:5). The next verse (19:4) seems to suggest that even if Job were guilty of some error worthy of divine retribution (which Job does not

⁸ Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: Job* (Job 19). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

concede), it would not be the part of a true friend to take sides in an issue that could be resolved only between God and Job. But these friends have used the occasion of Job's suffering not only to turn it into an argument against him but to vaunt their own moral and spiritual superiority over him (19:5).

The issue between Job and his friends, of course, was set up by the ungodly test contrived by God and *hassatan* in the heavenly council chamber: It will appear to Job and all who know him that he has been singled out as the special object of God's wrath. The question in heaven is whether Job will be able to "persist in his integrity" even under this groundless assault of suffering and loss (2:3). From the earthly standpoint of Job and his friends, the question is not so subtle. What is at stake between them is whether God has indeed attacked Job "without cause," as Job maintains, or whether Job has defied God so enormously that all his suffering and loss represent God's just judgment against him. The friends are no more able than we are to understand how a just God could allow such catastrophes to befall a genuinely innocent human being. From their standpoint, it is simply a blasphemy against God's justice for Job to persist in maintaining his innocence.

Job, in contrast, having lost everything else, has nothing to rely on except his own fragile human integrity. But following the demands of his integrity, Job is bound to tell the truth. God in fact has stretched out God's hand against him "without cause." In his second reply to Bildad, Job once again identifies God as the one who has "put me in the wrong" (19:6–20). Nothing new appears in Job's indictment of God in 19:6–20, particularly after what has been said in 16:7–17. God is a "hunter" (v. 6), a deaf judge (v. 7), an imprisoner and a sender of darkness (v. 8), a despoiler of all honor and dignity (v. 9), a ravager and an uprooter of hope (v. 10), an implacable enemy general who has laid Job under siege (vv. 11–12).

Perhaps more poignantly than elsewhere, 19:13–19 laments the unbearable social isolation, the dreadful loneliness into which God has placed Job. Family, acquaintances, relatives, close friends, houseguests, wife and children, intimates, loved ones, all the people whose presence can make even the intolerable somehow endurable—all have been stripped away, and not all by death. Most agonizing for Job is the deliberate abandonment: "All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me" (19:19; see 6:14–21, and note the recurrence of this theme in Psalms 38:11; 55:12–14; 69:8).

It is the wholly unwarranted onslaught of God that has brought all this about, leaving Job an utterly lonely and skeletal ruin, having come through it "by [or perhaps 'with'] the skin of my teeth." Does this mean with nothing at all? Scholars have made a number of efforts to emend and interpret the rather obscure Hebrew text of verse 20 in order to arrive at a clearer meaning. The translators of the nrsv have chosen (wisely, I think) to render the verse, obscure as it may be, in the traditional way, perhaps in view of the fact that it has

provided us with one of the most memorable (if still not quite clear) phrases in the English language.

The litany of abandonment in 19:13–19 is rendered even more poignant by Job’s direct appeal to his friends (19:21–22), who must surely have recognized references to themselves in 19:14–15. Since God is the cause of Job’s distress (and not Job’s guilt), surely it is the part of a friend to show compassion to the innocent sufferer (v. 21). Instead, Job is appalled to discover that they have followed God’s lead, pursuing him like prey and tearing at his flesh like insatiable predators (v. 22). The power of this renewed accusation lies in its capacity to bring the crisis between God and Job closer and closer to what may be called “critical mass,” the point at which the crisis must simply explode into an encounter with God in which Job is either annihilated or vindicated. At the same time, 19:2–22 makes the gulf that separates Job from his friends even wider, if not altogether unbridgeable.

Apparently despairing of any human support for his cause, Job now cries out longingly for some indestructible record to be made, one capable of bearing witness to his innocence beyond all the ravages of time and human mortality (vv. 23–24). Whether verse 24 refers to inscribing letters with a metal stylus on a leaden tablet or another such practice, perhaps forcing malleable lead into letters previously incised in stone, the intent is equally clear. On the very brink of death (19:20), Job is not willing for the justice of his cause to be “interred with his bones.”

In my view, the interpretation we place on 19:23–24 may well provide the key to understanding the notoriously difficult and perennially fascinating words of verses 25–27. In 16:18, Job expresses his longing for a permanent witness to his innocence using very different but, I think, fully comparable imagery. There, Job calls on “mother earth” herself to keep his cause alive by refusing to “cover [Job’s] blood,” just as Abel’s blood is said to have cried out to God “from the ground,” testifying that an innocent man was wrongfully slain. Stripped of its imagery, the intent of Job 16:18 is clear: Job is *innocent*, as innocent as Abel was, and the event of Job’s death must not be allowed to extinguish the fact that he died undeserving of all the wretchedness he had been forced to endure. Earlier, we looked at the possibility that Job’s apparent confidence in his “witness in heaven” (16:19) may not represent a spiritual breakthrough, as if he had been granted some sort of visionary assurance of vindication through a heavenly advocate, whether God or a third party. The alternative possibility is that the extravagant language of 16:19–21, like the extravagant language of 16:18, is designed to convey Job’s last-ditch confidence that his cause is just and therefore must—somehow—be vindicated. (In my view, this accounts best for the fact that Job immediately reverts to the language of bitter lamentation in 16:22 through 17:16.)

Glancing ahead to 19:28–29, one can see that Job’s mighty affirmation in 19:25–27 similarly issues in renewed argument with his friends, not in a cry of final triumph. Perhaps 19:25–27, like 19:23–24 and 16:18–19, is to be understood, above all, as an extravagant way of expressing Job’s confidence that he must be, and somehow will be,

vindicated. If so, then this confidence forms the basis for the not-so-veiled threat Job issues to his friends in 19:28–29. If they continue to persecute Job on the grounds of his presumed guilt (v. 28), they are walking on dangerous ground indeed. When Job is vindicated, the tables will be turned. They, not Job, will be disclosed as having been in opposition to God and therefore justly deserving of “wrath,” “punishment,” “judgment” at God’s hand (19:29; see 13:9–11).

With these thoughts in mind, one may turn to 19:25–27 with a somewhat less frantic urgency to solve all its riddles and comprehend all its details. For Christians who cherish Handel’s *Messiah* in its faith dimensions, “I know that my Redeemer liveth” (19:25) can hardly be torn free from its connotation of Easter celebration. The words have simply achieved a life of their own in the heart-language of Christian faith, and that language is not finally subject to correction by technical exegesis of Job 19:25. It is important for Christians, however, to recognize that when we identify the “Redeemer” of Job 19:25 with the risen Christ of the Gospels, it is *our* faith we are expressing, not the faith of Job. This becomes unmistakably clear when we ask what Christians mean when they sing, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” Christians require the mediation of Christ the Redeemer because we are painfully aware that we have “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” The function of Christ the Redeemer is to be “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

But look at what happens to the whole story of Job if he suddenly becomes aware that his Redeemer, by this definition, is not only alive but prepared to intercede on his behalf. All the meanings in the book of Job are knocked into a cocked hat. Job is, after all, a sinner in need of redemption, just as Eliphaz said we all are, as early as Job 4:17–21. Job is quite wrong in affirming his innocence—and so is God, if we take 1:8 and 2:3 seriously. *Hassatan* would also be vindicated, along with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, if it turned out that Job was a sinner in need of a redeemer. From the beginning, *hassatan* questioned whether Job could possibly be the unique example of human integrity God thought he was. In short, the traditional Christian conception of Christ as the “Redeemer” of Job 19:25 simply won’t do—not if we respect the book of Job as Holy Scripture and commit ourselves to listen carefully to what Job has to say.

If we rule out the risen Christ as Job’s “Redeemer,” what options are left open? By most accounts, the Hebrew word *go’el*, “redeemer,” appears to be rooted in the very ancient notion of the “avenger of blood.” According to the biblical story, the right of blood revenge was extended by God to Cain, as a peculiar gift of grace to an unrepentant murderer, in order to quell the anarchy of unrestrained violence, even against one who deserved no such protection (see Gen. 4:13–15). While the word *go’el* does not appear in the Genesis passage, the connotation of “avenger of blood” does crop up in texts such as Numbers 35:16–28; Deuteronomy 19:6–12; and 2 Samuel 14:5–11. The common denominator of all the Old Testament references to *go’el* seems to be the notion of “blood relationship,” that is,

someone who is so closely kin to another that the cause of the one becomes the cause of the other. In some contemporary Near Eastern cultures it is still the case that the cause of an individual clan member becomes instantly the cause of the whole clan, through its acknowledged leadership. Within that social structure, one who intervenes on behalf of a clan member, whatever the cause, may be said to fulfill the role of the biblical *go'el*.

According to the book of Ruth, Naomi had two just claims on Benjaminite tribal law when she returned as a widow from Moab. By right, the parcel of land that had once belonged to her dead husband should have remained in the family. It was the right of Elimelech's (male) next of kin (*go'el* in Hebrew) to claim this land for the family. Along with this right came the responsibility to incorporate the dead man's name in his inheritance (Ruth 4:1–6). In the entirely male-dominated society within which the story of Naomi and Ruth unfolds, these two widows appear to lack any means of bringing their just claims into “the gate” (4:1; that is, the “civil court” where matters of legal right were adjudicated). Even though he is not Elimelech's closest male relative, Boaz begins to function as *go'el* when he brings the case in the gate, to the attention of the man who is. As the story turns out, the closest kinsman declines his right to the land because of his unwillingness to accept responsibility for Naomi and Ruth, pleading that this would dilute his own inheritance (4:6). This opens the way for Boaz to function as *go'el* and thus secure for the two widows the legal rights they deserved but could not otherwise have enjoyed. (See Ruth 4:1–12. Genesis 38 and Deuteronomy 25:5–10 throw additional light on this issue of justice, even though the terms that governed it were obviously not identical at all times or in differing social situations.)

For the interpretation of Job 19:25, all this suggests that whoever Job's *go'el* may be, the function of such a figure is not to win forgiveness for Job or even to strengthen the case for his innocence. At most, he could bring Job's case into “the gate” of God, so that it might be fairly heard. If Job requires the intervention of a *go'el*, it is because Job has otherwise despaired of achieving such a fair hearing before God on his own (see Job 9:2–3, 11–20, 28–35; 13:13–16). Yet there is nothing Job longs for more (see 9:34–35; 10:2; 13:3, 20–24; 14:13–17), and his confidence in his innocence is such that he occasionally speaks as if he is certain the longed-for moment of his vindication before God must ultimately come (see 13:18; 16:18–19; 23:10).

Job 19:23–25 is best understood as yet another extravagant projection of this apparently contradictory certainty: Beyond all this agony and despair, beyond all the evidence that God has blocked off any access to a fair hearing, beyond Job's passionate denunciation of God's injustice in the ordering of human affairs, Job's vindicating moment can, and must, and *will* come. Somehow Job's “eyes shall behold, and not another” (19:27; that is, not the eyes of some later archaeologist of the spirit, who might conceivably read Job's testimony “engraved on a rock forever”; see 19:23–24). Unfortunately, the Hebrew text of 19:25–27 bristles with so many difficulties of grammar, syntax, and word meanings that no two

scholars interpret these verses in precisely the same way. This is especially true of verse 26, where there is competent scholarly support for two diametrically opposed readings: Either Job is to behold God from within his own ruined but still living flesh or this vision will be accorded him only after his flesh has been destroyed. (The translators of the rsv and the nrsv appear to have differed on this point.) The notion of a postmortem vindication is perhaps especially appealing to Christians, for whom both the “resurrection of the body” and the coming of the risen Christ to “judge the quick and the dead” have been wrought into ecumenical creeds. But such notions fly in the face of what Job has said clearly about this possibility in 14:7–22. Perhaps more important, if Job 19:25–27 relates a kind of “Damascus road” experience that answers all Job’s questions and assures him of victory, the book should surely end here. Yet the tired old quarrel with his friends is picked up immediately in 19:28, and the argument continues without letup until 27:23.

In short, the detailed meaning of 19:25–27 remains a riddle. All interpretations of these verses known to me appear to agree on two counts: (1) Whoever the *go’el* is taken to be, and whether Job expects to be alive or dead when it happens, Job expects to be ultimately vindicated; and (2) God is the one who will ultimately vindicate him. Each of these themes has become familiar to us throughout the speeches of Job. At the heart of each theme is Job’s confidence in his innocence and his unwillingness to settle for anything less than a face-to-face vindication before God. This confidence forms the basis for the dire warning to Job’s friends with which chapter 19 concludes (vv. 28–29).⁹

⁹ Wharton, J. A. (1999). *Job*. (P. D. Miller & D. L. Bartlett, Eds.) (pp. 86–92). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.