CHAPTER 3

JOB 3: THE EMBRACEMENT OF DEATH AS RESTORATION OF LIFE

The primary theological matrix within which the book of Job responds to the problem of Job’s suffering is that of creation. Our interest in this chapter does not concern Job’s suffering as a theological problem in itself, but rather the theme of creation as a theological matrix, and the place attributed to the motif of death within this theological matrix. For this purpose we will consider the text of Job 3, which offers the most acute expression of Job’s experience of the reality of suffering in the book as a whole. The themes of creation and death are intricately related in this verbalisation of Job’s agony. We will also consider the wider implications of this creation-death relation for reading the book of Job, and to what extent it is representative of the book’s wider theological landscape.

Exegetically and hermeneutically, the book of Job challenges its readership. This also applies to the consideration of creation and death as theological themes in Job 3. In this chapter we will again consider the delimitation of the text (§3.1), followed by a consideration of the structure (§3.2) and genre (§3.3) of the text. This is followed by a translation of the text (§3.4), while the analysis of Job 3 (§3.5) paves the way for the thematic discussion of the themes of creation and death (§3.6), followed by a conclusion (§3.7).

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633 R.N. Whybray, Job (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 40 argues that Job 3 “does not pose intellectual questions concerning such matters as the reason for human suffering or divine justice, but simply exposes the rawness of Job’s feelings in a way that is very rare in the Old Testament.”
634 Job 3 shakes the foundations on which the Wirklichkeitsverständnis of the book of Job rests, Yet the book of Job does not contain a single, uniform worldview, as reflected by the prose and poetic sections.
635 In a real sense the book of Job is a polyphone text in which different voices, i.e. theological perspectives, operate simultaneously. Cf. C.A. Newsom, The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84-85.
636 An investigation into the book of Job comprises more than a mere pragmatic and functionalist explication of hard words and unfamiliar customs, but implies a wrestling with the text and imagery, and the structures and ideas operative in the text. Cf. D.J.A. Clines, Job 1-20 (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1989), xiii.
637 In this regard W.P. Brown, Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 61 argues that the multi-level network of metaphors employed in Job 3 sets in relief the two foci of life and death.
3.1 Delimitation of the Text

Job 3:1-26, as soliloquy, constitutes an independent literary unit. This does not mean that it could be considered in isolation from the rest of the book of Job, given its relation to the prose prologue and poetic dialogues, particularly the divine speeches in Job 38-41. Job 3:1 commences with a which refers back to the events related to Job’s misfortune as recounted in the prose prologue of Job 1-2. It also introduces a new stage in the development of the plot of the book. This is indicated by the shift from prose to poetry, as well as Job’s change of tongue, i.e. that his patient response and actions develop into a raw utterance of despair in Job 3. The introduction of a new phase is further indicated by the phrase “Job opened his mouth and cursed his day” as a way of introducing Job’s first speech and to continue or elaborate on the theme introduced in Job 3:1. Job’s opening self-speech is brought to a close in 3:26, and here as a way of bringing the speeches of the friends that follow, the first being that of Eliphaz, introduced in 4:1 by means of . But more importantly 3:26 indicates the end of Job’s first speech.

While those elements that set Job 3 apart from its immediate literary environment has been pointed out, it is particularly in terms of content that it is also related to that

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638 I.e. it is not addressed to a second party. God is merely implied in the lament, which also applies to the friends and Job’s wife.
639 Westermann, Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob, 30-32 assigns Job 3 its own place in terms of his structural division of the book as a whole, and points out that with chapters 29-31, Job 3 stands outside the disputes, being “bloße Klagen.” The build-op of the book of Job is presentable in the following way, namely 1-2; 42:7ff (prose prologue and epilogue); 3 (Job’s opening self-speech); 4-31 (the dialogues); 28 (the hymn to divine wisdom); 32-37 (the Elihu reason); 38:1-42:6 (God’s response and Job’s closing speech).
641 Three leading themes encountered in Job 3 make a re-appearance in the following speeches of Job. Cf. Ha, Frage und Antwort: Studien zu Hiob 3 im Kontext des Hiob-Buches, 93-144. So the creation motif reappears in the third (9-10) and ninth (26) speech of Job, while the death-wish motif reappears in the second (6-7), third (9-10), fourth (12-14) and fifth (16-17) speech of Job and, finally, theme of divine oppression reoccurs in the second (6-7), third (9-10), fourth (12-14), fifth (16-17) and sixth (19) speech of Job. In this way the reception of the main themes of Job 3 in the wider context of the book of Job is clear.
643 In 3:1 probably refers to the seven days and nights of silence recounted in Job 2:13.
644 A shift in the characterisation of the friends pre- and post Job 3 is also noticeable. Cf. Fretheim, God and World, 221.
645 Here a contrast is identifiable between Job 3:1-2 and Job 2:10 where it is said that “Job did not sin with his lips” ( ). Now his speech takes on a very different character indeed. The pious Job becomes the protesting Job.
646 See also 6:1; 9:1; 21:1; 16:1; 19:1; 21:1; 23:1; 26:1; partially in 29:1; 42:1 where is used as a set formula for introducing the speeches of Job, but also of the friends as well as the divine speeches.
647 Job 4:2 presents the first attempt at dialogue after the seven days of silence, since Job 3 is essentially a soliloquy, lacking any direct address.
which precedes and follows on it.\footnote{This does not impact on the delimitation of Job 3:1-26 and for this reason will be discussed as part of the analysis of the text (§3.5).} 3.2 The Structure of the Text

Various suggestions have been made concerning the structure of Job 3.\footnote{Most notably that of J.P. Fokkelman, \textit{Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: at the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis}, Vol. I: Ex. 15, Deut. 32, and Job 3 (SSN 37; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1998), 150ff, who argues for the uniqueness of the poem in terms of strophe construction, seeing that within the book of Job strophes consisting of 2-3 lines are used, while in Job 3 strophes of 3-4 lines occur. Also D.N. Freedman, “The Structure of the Book of Job,” \textit{Biblica} 49 (1968) 503-508; P.W. Skehan, “Strophic Patterns in the Book of Job,” \textit{CBQ} 23 (1961): 125-142. P. van der Lugt, \textit{Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job} (OtSt 32; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 55f offers an overview of suggested strophic structures of Job 3.} It is not the intention here to offer an exhaustive discussion of the various arguments, but rather to establish in what way the structure contributes to, or is determinative for the relationship of creation and death as theological themes in Job 3. Since Job 3:1-2 is still prose and presents a narrative transition between the prose prologue of Job 1-2, and the poetic text of Job 3:3-26, is not part of the poem proper.\footnote{It should be noted that the MT places a Petucha (ה) between 3:1 and 3:2, indicating that 3:1 should be seen as a small textual unit, beginning with Job 2:11. Job 3:1 could also be considered as functioning as a heading for the following poem in vv 3-26. Cf. K. Engljähringer, \textit{Theologie im Streitgespräch: Studien zur Dynamik der Dialoge des Buches Job} (SB 198; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 23.}

Arguments concerning the structure of Job 3 fall basically into one of two categories. The first entails a two-strophe division, namely vv 3-10 and 11-26, with vv 3-10 constituting a curse and vv 11-26 a lament.\footnote{For this structural division see Clines, \textit{Job 1-20}, 75-76; Driver and Gray, \textit{The Book of Job}, 31-40; A. de Wilde, \textit{Das Buch Hiob} (OtSt 22; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 95-96; G. Fohrer, \textit{Das Buch Hiob} (KAT; Stuttgart: Verlag Gütersloher, 1963), 108-109; Freedman, “The Structure of Job 3,” 505-506; R. Gordis, \textit{The Book of Job} (Moreshet Series II; NY: JTSA, 1978), 28-30; F. Hesse, \textit{Hiob} (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), 45-46; F. Horst, \textit{Hiob 1-19} (BKAT 16/1; Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 36-37; Maag, \textit{Hiob: Wandlung und Verarbeitung}, 102-107; Westermann, \textit{Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob}, 57; Whybray, \textit{Job}, 37-40; Van der Lugt, \textit{Rhetorical Criticism}, 57.} The second involves a three-strophe division, namely vv 3-10 (strophe 1) constituting a curse, while vv 11-26 as lament are sub-divided into vv 11-19 (strophe 2) and 20-26 (strophe 3).\footnote{Clines, \textit{Job}, 75-76. Also Ha, \textit{Frage und Antwort}, 53-56. See also G. Fuchs, “Die Klage des Propheten: Beobachtungen zu den Konfession Jeremias im Vergleich mit den Klagen Hiobs.” \textit{BZ} 41 (1997): 219-220.} Here the argument is supported that the vv 3-10 entail Job’s curse of his day of conception and birth, while vv 11-19 express the wish that if he had to be born, he could have died at birth, and vv 20-26 express a wish that what did not happen in vv 3-19, should now happen.\footnote{S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, \textit{The Book of Job} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 30-40. They acknowledged that the two paragraphs are of unequal length; N.C. Habel, \textit{The Book of Job} (London: SCM, 1985), 98-100; M.H. Pope, \textit{Job} (AB; NY; Doubleday, 1965), 26-27; J.E. Hartley, \textit{The Book of Job} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 88-89. Here the argument has also been proposed that the curse and lament of Job are complementary, with the curse breaking the silence of Job and his friends, while the lament depicts Job’s personal conditions. Cf. Habel, \textit{Job}, 102.}
In terms of the two strophe structure, the structure of each of these two units consists of a framing device in which the opening statement announces the subject of the outcry *dba* (impf.) in v 3 and *hnh* in v 11, as well as the reason for the outcry established by a *yk* clause at the end of each strophe, namely vv 10 and 24-26. Such a two strophe division is plausibility, but it does not pay sufficient attention to the disjunction between vv 19 and 20.\footnote{For van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 58, such a structural division is not tenable, seeing that vv 11-26 cannot be disconnected from vv 3-10 as a lament from a preceding curse.}

In terms of a three strophe division, strophe 1 commences (v 3) with the imperfect of *dba* “let it perish,” while strophe two (v 11) and three (v 20) are introduced by *hnh* “why,” indicating that we are now dealing with a lament.\footnote{Here we can note the argument of Fokkelman, *Major Poems I*, 153 namely that v 20 (*hnh*) does not introduce a new section, but rather v 11. It is unlikely that the two-fold occurrence of *hnh* does not have a particular rhetorical and structuring value. For this reason the argument of Fokkelmann is not shared.} Here it can also be argued that each strophe is introduced by a thematic statement that is subsequently worked out further in the following verses of the strophe.\footnote{Clines, *Job*, 75-76.} In this way *strophe 1* commences with the theme of the “perishing” of day and night (v 3) and is followed by an elaboration of the day of his birth (vv 4-6) and the night of his conception (vv 7-9), ending with a motive clause introduced by *yk* (v 10). Within the context of the curse, day and night constitute a merism, indicating the all encompassing nature of his curse, even though it is directed toward his own creation and motivated by his own situation. *Strophe 2* is introduced by *hnh*, i.e. “why” he did not die (vv 11-12) and elaborated by a discussion of rest envisioned to be found in Sheol (vv 13-15), a continuation of the introductory theme (v 16), again elaborated by a discussion of rest in the underworld (vv 17-19). *Strophe 3* (vv 20-26) deals with Job’s present experienced reality, which is introduced by the theme of why (*hnh*) light and life are given to the miserable (v 20). It is then elaborated by the theme of those who are seeking death (vv 21-22), with a continuation of the initial theme (v 23). This in turn is elaborated by the theme of Job who fails to find rest (vv 24-26), while his experience of unbearable pain continues.\footnote{Fokkelman, *Major Poems I*, 153.}

The structure and thematic division of Job 3 indicate that both curse and lament are constitutive elements of Job’s wish to die. In each of the three strophes elements of light and darkness, indicative of life and death, are employed (cf. §3.3).

### 3.3 The Genre and Language of Job 3

In §3.2 the question concerning the genre of Job 3 has already been raised.\footnote{See also P.W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (CBQMS 1; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971) for a discussion of language, genre etc. in Israelite wisdom literature.} It should be reiterated that the text of Job 3 consists of both a curse (vv 3-10, with v 10 serving as motive clause introduced by *yk*) and lament (11-19, 20-26, both introduced by *hnh*), and in this way we can speak of a conglomeration of genres.\footnote{In this regard Westermann, *Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob*, 59f aptly argued that “Grundbestandteile des Kapitels sind dann: Verfluchung des Tages der Geburt mit Begründung: v. 3 mit 10 (formal der Feindklage entsprechend); die Ich-Klage v. 11…und die Anklage Gottes v. 23; den Abschluß bildet die}
attention to the nature of the curse and lament encountered in Job 3.\textsuperscript{660} Is Job’s self-curse in vv 3-10 really intended as a curse proper, with the intended effect of bringing about his death? Or should it rather be interpreted as an extreme form of lament, as Job’s reaction to his ill fate and as a desperate attempt to gain the attention of the God, whom Job holds responsible for his creation and existence?\textsuperscript{661} If this is the case then Job’s curse and lament are complementary. With both having the same intent, namely seizing the attention of God, which would bring about a change in Job’s situation. He longs for death in the hope of finding rest in Sheol. Concerning the nature of the lament, we will consider the argument that vv 11-26 contains two instances of the self-complaint or Ich-Klage (v 11f; 24-26) as well as a God-complaint or Gott-Klage (v 23). First we will consider the nature of Job’s curse (vv 3-10) and lament (vv 10-19; 20-26). While the curse and lament in Job 3 might be complementary, each contributes to the peculiar tone of the poem in its own way.

The self-curse of Job in vv 3-10 parallels the curse in Jer 20:14-18.\textsuperscript{662} Together these two texts present the only occurrences of the self-curse genre in the HB.\textsuperscript{663} Yet the self-curse in Job 3:3-10 is set within the wider context of Job 3 which also contains a complaint against God (vv 20-23).\textsuperscript{664} The theme of Job’s opening complaint also corresponds with his closing complaint in Job 30:24-31.\textsuperscript{665} Further, Gen 1:1-2:4a offers a textual background for the language employed in the curse of vv 3-10.\textsuperscript{666} The creation language of Gen 1:1-2:4a is utilised in Job’s self-curse, but is applied to Job’s situation rather than creation in general.\textsuperscript{667} Job wishes for the reversal of his own

\textsuperscript{660} Engljähringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch*, 25-26 poses the question whether Job 3 should be regarded as a curse of his birth and conception or rather a wish that these events had never occurred or that it should be made undone.

\textsuperscript{661} According to M. Bauks, *Die Feinde des Psalmisten und die Freunde Ijobs: Untersuchungen zur Freude-Klage im Alten Testament am Beispiel von Ps 22* (SBS 203; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 67 the Feind-Klage in Job 3:3-9 has been transformed by means of the cursing of his day of birth.

\textsuperscript{662} Fuchs, “Die Klage des Propheten.” 212-228.

\textsuperscript{663} Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1993), 65. It is significant that this self-curse genre was not taken up in the HB Psalter. It has been proposed by Westermann, *Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob*, 59 that this too “wild” to be taken up in the liturgical material of a religious community. He states that it found its way into the book of Job as part of the canonical material of the HB. It is indicative of tolerance toward theological diversity. For the theme of self-cursing in the HB, it should be noted that the practise of swearing an oath, as in Gen 15, does contain an inherent moment of self-curse.

\textsuperscript{664} Fuchs, “Die Klage des Propheten.” 220.

\textsuperscript{665} In Job 30:24, commencing with עַזֶּה “surely,” Job is lamenting God’s apparent disinterest in his situation. Within the context of Job 30:16-31, vv 24-31 is part of his lament concerning God’s hostile attitude towards him. Cf. Ha, *Frage und Antwort*, 156ff.

The sequence of the incantations in Job’s opening speech in general follows the progression of events in the creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a. The theme of “rest” (j גָּלַשׁ, which is taken from the seventh day (פָּנֵי) of the creation account in Gen 1 is negatively developed within the self-lament of Job (cf. 3:11-19, 26). A similar pattern of the reversal of the order of creation and turning the order of the created world into chaos and darkness is encountered in Jer 4:23-26. Cf. M. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern.” *VT* 21 (1971): 153-155.

\textsuperscript{666} Habel, *Job*, 104. He observes that in the structure of Job’s curse “it is his personal origin rather than Israel’s fate which is made contemporaneous with the primordial through the ritual act of execration.” Also Whybray, *Job*, 38.
The “pattern of reversals” presents the main literary feature of Job’s opening self-speech, particularly in vv 3-10. This reversal of creation in vv 3-10 is reminiscent of the envisioned reversal of Jer 4: 23-26. Job’s self-curse is directed toward past events and in this way gains a rather unrealistic dimension. For this reason the question arises whether vv 3-10 should rather be regarded as an extreme verbalisation of Job’s experienced agony, which could better be described as a Fluchwunsch or Verwünschung. But the style of these verses are clearly that of a curse, even if the intent of these uttered words is considered as bringing about a change, rather than an end to Job’s existence. For this reason it is fitting to speak of Job’s self-curse. After all, this is Job’s first reaction after breaking the silence. He cursed his day. That ⼊j is used instead of Montserrat (also absent in Jer 20:14-18) does not detract from the urgency and intensity of the language employed in vv 3-10.

In considering Job 3:11-26 as lament we should note the distinction between two types of lament in these verses, namely the self-lament (vv 11-19, 24-26), and the God-lament (vv 20-23). The significant point concerning the self-lament in Job’s opening speech is that it is not aimed at bringing about an improvement of his situation. Characteristic of the lament in Job 3 is the “why” (why) question (vv 11, 12, 16, 20, 23) as well as the depiction of the sad state of the lamentor, which Westermann termed the “primordial individual lament.” The self-lament in the book of Job serves to introduce his personal condition, but also introduces his central complaint against God, namely that by means of his present experience of suffering...
his “purpose” (ûrd) has become obscured by God, and as such his life has become pointless (3:23). In vv 12-23 the theme of turmoil and rest are developed by means of a series of “why” exclamations (vv 12, 16, 20, 23), interspersed by portrayals of the realm of the dead and those who long for death. A progression within the “why” exclamations is noticeable, seeing that the first two relates to Job’s own condition, while the latter two have a broader interest concerning the question of suffering. Within the first two laments the theme of ‘light’ (rwa) is of central importance and serves as a transitional term between the two sets of exclamations. All these exclamations lead to the climactic question of Job 3:23, namely why light (inferred from v 20, serving as metaphor for life) is given to a person whose way is hidden and whom God has hedged in. In terms of Job’s lament, such a life is not worth living, which in part provides a reason for his longing for death.

While the text of Job 3 entails elements from both the genres of curse and lament, the question regarding the function of the text remains. In essence Job’s opening self-speech, by means of employing the language of curse and lament, serves to announce his distress, breaking the seven days of silence, and does so in a way that invites a response from his friends and eventually from God. As such Job’s opening self-speech functions as the “springboard” for the following dialogue. Job will not allow that his present dilemma to function as proof of his guilt. This theme reoccurs in his following responses to the arguments of the friends. The opening speech of Job presents a departure from tradition, while the following arguments of the friends stay resolutely within the parameters of tradition. As already pointed out, Job’s opening self-speech does not intend the improvement of his situation, though within the wider context of the book of Job, it marks the beginning of his transition into the sphere of the living, since his present situation is indicative of someone being in a state of death, or at least near death (cf. Ps 88).

678 Idem, 105.
679 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 77 argues that the function of Job’s opening self-speech “is suggested by the forms it employs together with its position in the book.”
680 Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 91, 92-93. This is an apt argument, even if, as she observes, the response of Eliphaz (4:2) seems to be the first attempt at initiating dialogue. Newsom further observes the difference between the opening of the Babylonian Theodicy and the opening speech of the dialogue in Job. The prose prologue (chs. 1-2) gives Job a different function and character. The dialogical style in the Babylonian Theodicy functions to establish the presence of a listener, but in Job the prose prologue already serves this purpose.
681 In reference to the divine response from the whirlwind Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 186 observes that while Job wants to wish away creation, inviting the return of chaos, God’s description of the created world affirms that the chaos for which Job is longing is part and parcel of that world. Thus, Job’s curse of creation is eventually matched by God’s or reaffirmation of the goodness of creation. Cf. W.P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 325.
682 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 77. This is seen from the authorial perspective and in the greater contexts of the book of Job. From Job’s own perspective the poem seems to have been designed for no purpose at all.
3.4 Translation of Job 3

1 a After this Job opened his mouth,
   b and cursed his day.
2 And Job answered and said:

3 a Let the day perish in which I was born,
   b and the night that it was said, A male is conceived.
3 b That day, let it be darkness;
   c and let Eloah not regard it from above,
   d let not light shine upon it.
4 a Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it;
   b let a cloud dwell upon it;
   c let the darkness of the day terrify it.
5 a That night, let darkness seize it;
   b let it not be joined unto the days of the year,
   c into number of the months let it not come.
6 a Behold, that night, let it be barren,
   b let no joy come therein.
7 a Let them utter a curse, the cursers of the day,
   b who are ready to rouse Leviathan.
8 a Let the stars of the twilight;
   b let no joy come upon it;
b  let it wait for light, but for naught;  
c  and let it not see the eyelids of the dawn.  
10  a  For it did not shut up the doors of my mother’s womb,  
b  nor hid sorrow from my eyes.  
11  a  Why not from the womb did I die, from the belly I came out and die?  
b  I should have slept then, there would have been rest for me;  
12  a  Why did the knees meet me, and why breasts for me that I should suck?  
13  a  For now I would have lain down and been quiet, I should have slept then, there would have been rest for me;  
14  a  With kings and counselors of the earth,  
b  who build desolate places for themselves,  
15  a  Or with princes that had gold,  
b  who filled their houses with silver.  
16  a  Or as a hidden miscarriage had I not been;  
b  as infants which never saw light.  
17  a  There the wicked cease from troubling;  
b  they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.  

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702 Or “dawning of the day.” The LXX reads Ἰψοὶ ἔστησαν ἀπατεύοντα, i.e. “see the morning star arise.”
703 The subject of this verse can be either “night” or Job’s “day.” Ha, Frage und Antwort, 50 suggests God as subject. Also Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 151 who reads “he,” i.e. God, instead of “it.”
704 Here ἐστὶ is problematic. That the LXX reads Μῆτρος in 3:10a could serve to specify the owner of the ἐστὶ, but 1:21a should not be left out of consideration as motivation for the use of Μῆτρος. Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 41. Lines, Job 1-20, 71 understands “my womb” as the “the womb that carried me and gave me life.” Also Ha, Frage und Antwort, 50.
705 Here ἐστὶ can also be translated with “trouble” and would fit this context.
706 Such a literal translation is a bit forced, but aids in grasping the gist of the text.
707 Another translation for ὄβεγκτι is “womb.”
708 The use here of ὃντι instead of the expected τοῖς is noteworthy.
709 Here ὕποκεισθαι could also be translated with “wherefore.”
710 The precise meaning of ὅσιος in this context is unsure. For ὅσιος the LXX reads συναντάω “to meet,” supporting a translation of the knees “meeting” Job in the MT.
711 Here ἁλία and ὅτι functions as euphemisms for “being dead.” Cf. ὠξυ in v 13b.
712 Here ἀρχάι stands in contrast to ἐστὶ in v 10b.
713 Dead kings and counsellors are implied. Here Ἄρα may be read as a reference to Sheol.
714 The use of ἡρά “place of ruin” is significant. See also Lev 26:33; Isa 5:17.
715 Here ἄρκτος and ἀρκτίος indicates status or worth, contrasting the fact that all end up the same way.
716 The reason for the use of ἁρκτος remains unsure.
717 Here ἀρκτος could also be translated with “stillborn.” For v 16a the LXX reads “Or as a stillborn coming from the mother’s womb?” As in 3:10 Μῆτρος is added. Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 41.
718 Here ἄρα (“child, stillborn”) parallels ἀρκτος “miscarriage”).
719 In this context ἁρκτος may imply “dying.”
720 For 3:17 the LXX reads “There the ungodly burst forth in fierce anger” (ἐκεῖ ἀρκτος ἐρέθισα... ὕφη). Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 42. This reading could be related to developing ideas in the Hellenistic environment concerning the underworld.
721 Here ἄρκτος is refers to life and ability. One of the features of the dead is the loss of strength and ability (cf. Ps 88:4). Death also deprives the wicked of the ability to work iniquity.
722 The use of ὃντι indicates the communal and egalitarian character of Sheol.
723 Here ἄρα refers to the one guarding the prisoners, but also the one bringing about turmoil.
19 a Small and great are there; b and the servant free from his master.

20 a Why is light given to the sufferer, b and life to the bitter soul?

21 a Who wait for death, but it does not come, b though they dig for it as if for treasure;

22 a Who rejoice greatly, b they rejoice for finding the grave.

23 a Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, b and Eloah has covered it?

24 a For before my bread comes my groaning, b and are poured out like water, my roaring.

25 a For the dread I have dreaded has come upon me, b and that which I have feared has come unto me.

26 a I was not at ease, and not was I quiet, b and I was not at rest, but it came, turmoil.

3.5 An Analysis of Job 3:1-26

In this section we will give a further consideration to the text of Job 3, which will serve as a preamble for the thematic discussion of §3.6.

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724 Here \( \text{Lv} \), as implied in v 18, indicates location. Verse 19 continues the theme of v 18.
725 The LXX reads “And the servant not fearing (\( qa\p\w\n \)) his master.” Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 49.
726 The LXX reads “Why is life given to those in bitterness, or life to those souls in grief?” Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 43.
727 Here \( \text{mr} \) and \( \text{r}\w \) functions synonymously.
728 Here \( \text{rm} \) functions as qualification of \( \text{wp}\). See also Job 21:25.
729 In 3:21a the LXX adds \( \text{T}a\p\w\n \) (“to hit”), perhaps as explanation of \( \text{wp}\). Dhorme, Job, 38. It could also be taken from 3:22 where \( \text{k}\t\w\n \) (“to hit ones mark, be successful”) serves as a translation of \( \text{wp}\). Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 45.
730 See also Job 24:16 “In the dark they dig through houses which they have marked for themselves in the daytime…”
731 The LXX reads \( \text{peri}\c\r\f\m\s\i\n \) \( \text{de; e}\g \text{e\m\nt\o, e}\p\r\n \text{k}\t\w\n \), i.e. “and they would be very happy should they find it,” that is if they are successful.
732 Compare Isa 40:27b that reads “My way is hidden from YHWH” (\( \text{hym}\rd\r\t\s\n \)).
733 Only here, indirectly, is God mentioned by name (\( \text{hw}\a \)).
734 Alternatively \( \text{dks} \) (here \( \text{Hi} \)) implies “hedged in.” See the analysis of v 23.
736 The LXX reads \( \text{d}\k\w\m \) \( \text{de; e}\g \text{w}; \text{sunc\m\nt\o} \) \( \text{f}\\w \), i.e. “and I weep being gripped with fear.” Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 95. Here “groaning” (\( \text{h}\j\n \)) and “roarings” (\( \text{h}\g \)\n) have a parallel function.
737 The verbs \( \text{dp} \) and \( \text{dy} \) functions in parallel, while the “dread” (\( \text{d}\p \)) in v 25a serves as preamble for \( \text{zg} \) in v 26b.

88
Verses 1-2: Narrative Transition

In the opening verse of Job 3, a tension is reflected between the prose prologue and the poetic dialogues.\(^{738}\) While Job 3:1-2 still constitutes prose, a change in theme and style, particularly concerning the character of Job, is evident. It is indeed indicative of a narrative transition, as shown by the opening phrase \(kAyrja\) (“after this”) in verse 1, indicating a separation from and continuation of the preceding prose narrative.\(^{739}\) By means of \(kAyrja\) an end is brought to a period of seven days of silence (Job 2:13), which have become too much for Job to bear.\(^{740}\) As a result, Job opened his mouth and cursed his day (\(wmwyAtallaqyw\)).

This Joban conduct stands in stark contrast to that of the pious Job of the prologue, where Job (2:10) rejects his wife’s suggestion (2:9) to “bless” (\(ûrb\)), i.e., “curse” God as an appropriate response to his present experience of turmoil and as a means of bringing it to an end.\(^{741}\) He does not sin with his lips. But in 3:1 Job explicitly “curses” (\(llq\) his day (\(µwy\), i.e., his own creation by means of his mouth,\(^{742}\) with the intent of bringing about an end to it. While the cursing of God would certainly have led to his death, Job follows a different path in chapter 3. His curse is directed towards his own creation and not against God.

The genre of Job 3:3-10 as “curse” was considered in §3.3.\(^{744}\) But the precise nature of the use of \(llq\) (Pi, “declare,” “curse”) in 3:1 remains open for discussion. Its meaning here should be established in the broader context of the poem.\(^{745}\) It has already been argued that we can here indeed speak of a curse, even if the object of Job’s cursing, i.e. a past event, is quite absurd, seeing that it is non-reversible.\(^{746}\) It is

\(^{738}\) The opening line of Job 3 does more than simply indicating the shift from prose to poetry, since Job’s curse is integral to the book’s plot. Cf. Habel, *Job*, 102; Clines, *Job 1-20*, 78. Horst, *Hiob*, 38 regards Job 3:1 as part of 2:11-13, with Job 3:2 indicating the beginning of a new section. He shares the argument that Job 3:1-2 confirms Job’s curse as an essential part of the story, carrying the plot further.

\(^{739}\) Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 22.

\(^{740}\) The seven days of silence can also be read in view of Israelite mourning customs, given that in some cases seven days indicated a period of mourning. In Ezek 3:15, Genesis 50:10 and 1 Sam 31:13 the period of seven days signify a complete period of suffering or mourning. Cf. Habel, *Job*, 98 who compares the change occurring in Job with that occurring in the figure of David in 2 Sam 12:15-23.

\(^{741}\) The result of Job’s opening of his mouth is a continuation of and departure from the prologue. Cf. Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 23.

\(^{742}\) Job’s response here is also in contrast to his action in Job 1:5, where he sacrifices on behalf of his sons, in case they might have “cursed” (\(ûrb\) God in their hearts. The use of the euphemistic \(ûrb\) in the prologue (1:5, 11; 2:5, 9) is contrasted with the use of \(llq\) in Job 3:1. Cf. Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 23 who argues that the use of \(ûrb\) in the prologue does not prepare the reader for Job’s curse in 3:1.

\(^{743}\) Brown, *Character in Crisis*, 61. This recalls the Satan’s suggestion in Job 1:11, that Job will “curse” (\(ûrb\) God in His face. Job’s curse is rather directed at his own creation.

\(^{744}\) Job 3 should not too easily be read as constitutive of early Israelite thoughts on cursing, since the curse, despite the acute nature of the language employed, is ineffectual. For Clines, *Job 1-20*, 79 the power of the curse is “wholly literary,” while its extravagance reflects “the violence of Job’s feeling.”

\(^{745}\) Clines, *Job 1-20*, 79. R.P. Gordon, “\(llq\) in: W.A. VanGemeren (ed.), *NIDOTTE* (vol. 3; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 926-927 points out that in Akkadian *qalatu* has the meaning “to discredit,” while the Aramaic \(llq\) can mean “to curse.”

\(^{746}\) By cursing his day, Job is also trying to bring to an end a yearly occurrence, i.e. to wipe away his day from the calendar, as such bringing an end to the ritual of remembrance. Cf. Habel, *Job*, 107. The veneration of his name by his children was cancelled out with their death (Job 1:18-19), and now Job wants all traces of his existence to be wiped away. Cf. Habel, *Job*, 107 regards curses such as that uttered by Job in the ANE as “automatic agents,” with the words thereof being efficacious formulae and the powers they summoned were released in the utterance of the formula.
important to note that Job’s curse is directed toward “his day” (םַּיִם), i.e. his personal situation is the immediate context of his curse.⁷⁴⁷ For this reason we should be cautious in considering the curse of Job as directed toward creation as such. By means of cursing “his day” (of birth), Job is cursing that moment that marks his entrance into the sphere of the living. By means of his curse he is wishing for its undoing, seeing that he already finds himself in a near death state.⁷⁴⁹ Job’s curse is real, and not merely an extreme expression of grief, i.e. lament.⁷⁵⁰ In a rather ironic fashion, Job’s curse functions as a catalyst for setting in motion the process of his re-entrance into the land of the living.⁷⁵¹ This process takes place in the ensuing dialogues, but in the immediate context of Job 3, no longing for life occurs.

Verse 2 serves as a continuation of the theme introduced in 3:1. Together these verses serve as a preamble for what follows in the remainder of the poem, particularly vv 3-10, in which the theme of curse is further developed. The use of כָּנָּה 3:2 is problematic in the sense that Job’s addressee, and that to which he would be responding is unclear, particularly in view of 3:1. This is further indicated by the fact that what follows constitutes a soliloquy. For this reason כָּנָּה has the meaning of “breaking into speech”⁷⁵² instead of answering. Further, given that that which follows in 3:3ff does not provide an answer, כָּנָּה introduces the content of Job’s curse, which is also pointed out by רָנָּה.

A: Verses 3-10: Curse

The poem proper commences with verse 3.⁷⁵³ Here the theme of Job’s day is continued, but מַיִם is used instead of שַׂמִּים. In v 3 the theme of Job’s “night” (הָלְיוֹן) is also introduced. Both the day of his birth (תֶּלֶב) and the night he was conceived (רֶחֶם)⁷⁵⁵

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⁷⁴⁷ Clines, Job 1-20, 78 favours a reading of שַׂמִּים as equivalent to Job’s life, since מַיִם by itself does not elsewhere have the meaning of one’s day of birth.

⁷⁴⁸ Gordis, Job, 32. For a different view see J. Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 51-52. He observes that Job’s curse is not only directed at his own situation, since the the disasters which befall Job in the form of hostile raids and meteorological disturbances affect not only Job, but also his family and the entire land of Uz. This implies that “Job’s protest against the God of traditional religion is not limited to the disasters inflicted on his own person…”

⁷⁴⁹ Cf. the reaction of the friends in Job 2:12, that is comparable to a weeping for the dead.

⁷⁵⁰ Here Ruth 1:20-21 is comparable, with Naomi (“sweet”) changing her name to Mara (“bitter”), for Shaddai dealt bitterly with her. YHWH afflicted her and Shaddai brought calamity on her. She expresses her grief by means of a symbolic change of name. Job does it by cursing his day of birth.

⁷⁵¹ Job’s curse is recalled in Job 23-24, though applied in a very different way in terms of Job’s ambiguous longing for a rendezvous with God in Job 23 (responding to a speech of Eliphas in Job 22) and Job’s questioning affirmation of the judgment of the wicked in Job 24.

⁷⁵² Gordis, Job, 32 argues that כָּנָּה can occur at the beginning of a chant or address, e.g. Exod 15:21 or Deut 26:5, and does not have to indicate a response to another speaker.

⁷⁵³ For van der Lugt, Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job, 60 the leading idea of Job 3 is partly found in v 3, which is further elaborated in vv 4-10. He argues that v 3 (“objective malediction of Job’s origin”), together with vv 16 and 13 (“subjective filling in of the preceding curse”) form the key thought of the poem.

⁷⁵⁴ The LXX reading νυξ implies that the messenger rather than the night is to be cursed. But seeing that “day and night,” as “light and darkness” presents a merism, the reading “night” is preferred. The lacking definite article of מַיִם and הָלְיוֹן can be found in that of כָּנָּה in v 4. Cf. Gordis, Job, 32.

⁷⁵⁵ The sequence of תֶּלֶב and רֶחֶם is not problematic, since Job 3 is not a physiological report.
are to perish (dba). This is a step further than merely wishing for death. Job longs for the absolute annihilation of his existence. In this regard it has been suggested that what we encounter here, and in the greater context of vv 3-10, is more than just a wish of a person struck by ill fortune. The words of Job reflect a rejection of his creation, and by implication a rejection of his creator. But Job does not curse God as his wife suggests in 2:9. His curse is also not directed toward his mother or his father (prohibited in Lev 20:9), who contributed to his coming into existence. As such Job is not “sinning with his lips” (2:10; also 1:22). But the discontinuity with his character in the prologue is clear. At issue is Job’s own creation. Job proclaims a return to the mother’s womb in 1:21 as the natural course of events. What is also significant is the reversal of the usual value ascribed to the birth of a “male” (rbg) in the ANE. Since rbg has the connotation of “health” or “vigour,” its use here adds to the bitter irony of Job’s curse. By cursing the day of his birth and the night he was conceived, the process of the reversal of his beginnings is set in motion. In this curse day (µwy) and night (hlyl) become two personified figures that Job wishes to annihilate, since this will bring an end to his miserable state of being.

Job’s desire to find rest from his experienced predicament is further highlighted by the cosmic language in verse 4. He employs the language of creation in an attempt to undo his creation. This is indicated by the specification of “the day” (µwyh) by means of awhh. It is the day of his birth, mentioned in v 3 that should become (hyh) darkness (ûvj). This day should not be regarded (vrđ) by God (hwla) from above. Light

756 The object of Job’s cursing in vv 3-10 presents a difference with Jer 20:14-20. For Clines, Job 1-20 the curse in Job 3 is focussed on the night of conception rather than the actual day of birth. Job calls for a reversion of (his) creation on his account. Job’s call for the reversion of creation is challenged by Bildad (Job 18:4), “…shall the earth be forsaken because of you, or the rock be removed out of its place?”

757 The argument of Fuchs, Mythos und Hiobdichtung, 68-69 that Job’s outcry reaches kosmische Dimensionen is partially correct, but Job’s use of creation language applies it to his own situation. Cf. Jer 20:14-20 where this is likewise not the case. Unlike the Babylonian Theodicy, Job does not curse his orphaned state, but his birth. See also Gen 25:22, 27:46, 1 Kgs 19:4, Jonah 4:3, Tob 3:6, 10, 15 and 1 Macc 2:7, 13 for such a lament of life or state of being alive. The thought expressed in Job 3 is not entirely unique, but part of the larger Israelite religious heritage. But even so Job 3 stands contra the typical Israelite attitude towards life. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 83. He finds a search for parallels from the ANE uneccesary.

758 Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 25 sees here a “deliberate and determinative design of the poet.”

759 For Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 24 this is a point where Job and Qohlelet diverges regarding the value of life. He contrasts Job 1:21 with Qoh 7:1 where the day of death is valued above the day of birth.

760 Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 26 identifies in Job 3 a “step-by-step rebuttal of Job’s manifesto of faith in 1:21.” In the prologue Job chooses for integrity (µt), but in Job 3 he longs for death (twm).

761 Clines, Job 1-20, 82 does not share this view, regarding rbg as merely indicative of the essence of Job’s being.


763 The nature of Job’s curse serves as catalyst for the ensuing dialogues, including the divine response from the whirlwind (Job 38-41). Job wants to solve the problem of his suffering by wishing away his creation and inviting chaos. God responds from the whirlwind by re-describing the created world and unapologetically affirms that the chaos Job wishes to engulf his creation belongs to “the warp and woof of the cosmic fabric.” Cf. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 186.

764 The cosmological images that Job employs, namely darkness, gloom, cloud, sea, night, and underworld, are all associated with death.

765 A return of the primordial darkness (ûvj, Gen 1:2) is what is here desired. Cf. Noort, Een Duister Duel, 13. By means of the wordplay day, night and darkness, the curse of Job obtains an above
Job wishes for the undoing of his creation by means of bringing about a reversal of the first divine act of creation in Gen 1:2. However, he still accredits God (ḥwl) as creator, and ultimately presiding over his existence and predicament. This lies behind his wish that God should not regard (vrd) “that day” from above. It can also be regarded as recognition of his own inability in bringing about a change in his situation and an undoing of his creation, in contrast to the ability of God. In v 4 as in the greater context of Job 3, light (metaphor for life, cf. vv 16, 20, 23) and darkness (metaphor for death, cf. 10:21-22, 23:17) constitute a binary opposition, with Job wishing that the light would be swallowed by darkness. Without the light which is given by the personal character. As a result the curse is not merely intended to undo his conception and birth, but in effect creation per se. But the return to chaos and darkness applies first and foremost to Job’s creation, with his day as object of the curse. For other uses of ʿuvj in Job cf. 10:21; 12:22; 15:22; 23, 30; 17:12, 13; 18:18; 23:17; 24:16; 26:10; 28:3; 29:3; 37:19; 38:19 and as object in 5:14; 12:25; 19:8; 22:11. 768 The use of l (rem) indicates a distance between God and Job, but also the envisioned location of God. The use of ʿhrhn is a hapax and according to Gordis, Job, 32-33 presents a Hebraized form of the Aramaic noun arwhn. In view of the relation with Gen 1:1-2:4a the reader might have expected rwa. 770 In the HB ʿpy is used in reference to the light of the sun only in Job 3:4. Cf. Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 159 on this point in his consideration of the relation between YHWH and the Sun. See also Deut 33:2 where ʿpy(Hi, ṣḥḥa) is used of YHWH. 771 Darkness” (ʿuvj) is an important theme in Job’s soliloquy and occurs elsewhere in connection with creation (Job 26:10, 38:19), with turmoil (Job 29:3), with representations of death (Job 10:21, 15:22f, 15:30, 17:12f, 23:17) and the combination of representations of death and darkness as inanimate place (Job 18:18). 772 Cf. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 153 for the use of this term. Also T.N.D. Mettinger, “The God of Job: Avenger, Tyrant, or Victor?” in: L.G. Perdue and W.C. Gilpin (eds.), The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 43. 773 Job’s call on darkness (ʿuvj) as a means of bringing about “rest” in v 4 contrasts with Job 23:17, where ṣḥḥa lacks this “positive” quality, and where Job does not long for it. 774 Habel, Job, 104; L.G. Perdue, Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job (JSOTSup 112; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 97-98. Brown, Character in Crisis, 61 argues that the commencement of Job’s curse presents a structural and theological antithesis to Gen 1 (Job 3:4a). His exclamation ʿuvj ʿḥy contrast with the divine fiat rwa ʿḥy of Gen 1:3. The seven days during which the friends of Job do not speak are also indirectly contrasted with creation in the P account, where God speaks and orders creation into being. Essentially, Job wants creation as imagined Gen 1:1-2:4a to be reversed. 775 The use of the singular form ḥwl for the deity (41 times in Job) came into use especially during the postexilic time. Fohrer, Hiob, 118. 776 It has been suggested that vrd belongs in a magical context, or that it is frequently found in association with magical terms. Cf. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 153. Given its use here with ḥwl as subject it is unlikely that it latches unto the motif of cursing. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 84. The wish that YHWH should not regard his day does present a departure from the longing for divine providence, as experienced in earlier days (cf. Job 29:2). 777 Thus ʿuvj and ʿṭḥḥa (3:5) are associated with the netherworld (Job 10:21-22; 17:12; 38:17), but could also be a designation for death (Ps 35:6, 1 Sam 2:9).
God, creation remains in a state of darkness, i.e. chaos (e.g. Gen 1:2), which is the theme of the first line in v 5.\textsuperscript{778}

In verse 5 Job’s day is still the object of the curse, with an elaboration on the theme of darkness.\textsuperscript{779} Here darkness (ûvj) and the shadow of death (twmlx)\textsuperscript{780} are called upon to stain (lag)\textsuperscript{781} his day. Further, a cloud (hn\textsuperscript{[}\textsuperscript{[}])\textsuperscript{782} is to dwell (÷kv) upon it. To crown his invocation in v 5, the blackness (ryrmk)\textsuperscript{783} of the day should terrify (t[b])\textsuperscript{784} it. The intense nature of Job’s longing for deliverance from life is reflected in the desperate language employed in this verse. That which is terrible is called upon to undo a past event. But his wish is as intense as it is ineffectual. For he calls on that over which he has no authority, while his curse is directed at an event that cannot be made undone. Death can bring his present dilemma to an end, but Job is in effect calling for more than this. Absolute annihilation is what he has in mind.

For Wolfers the vocalisation of the twmlx in the MT demands the translation “the shadow of death.”\textsuperscript{785} If one reads twm as having a superlative force, twmlx could be interpreted as “deep darkness.” The connotation of darkness as death’s shadow is most probably present in Job’s summoning the forces of darkness or chaos.\textsuperscript{786} The root of yryrmk most probably stems from rmk “be black” or rrm “be bitter.”\textsuperscript{787} Dhorme interprets “blackness of day” as “fogs,” while Pope considers the “bitterness of day” as a reference to an eclipse (cf. Am 8:10 for a reference to the ‘bitter day’ rrmw\textsuperscript{[}).\textsuperscript{788} In


\textsuperscript{779} Longing for death, Job “…flirts with mythic powers beyond his control by exhorting the precarious darkness to seize and destroy, and Leviathan to subvert the cosmos (vv 4-6).” Cf. Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos, 323. Leviathan, darkness and the shadow of death become entities called upon, thus achieving a mythic status.

\textsuperscript{780} For twmlx in Job, cf. 10:21, 22; 12:22; 16:16; 24:17 (twice); 28:3; 34:22; 38:17. Here the precise meaning of twmlx is uncertain, but in Job it is associated with darkness (16:16; 28:3), and with Sheol (10:21-22; 38:17). The LXX also attests to the notion “shadow of death” (\textsuperscript{[}\textsuperscript{[}ki; qanavτου.)

\textsuperscript{781} The root lag can be translated with the basic meaning to “cover,” implying either protection or defilement. Since it can also means “to pollute” (Isa 63:2, Mal 1:7), the connotation of “defilement” is appropriate. Wolfers, Deep Things, 319 suggested a translation “to reclaim,” but is unnecessary. The basic meaning in this context is clear, namely Job’s day should be restored to its original condition of darkness before creation. Cf. Gordis, Job, 33.

\textsuperscript{782} Here hn\textsuperscript{[} can reference to a “black thundercloud” as in Job 37:11. For Habel, Job, 108 the context of Job 3 has in mind a more “ominous cloud,” eradicating all light (cf. Ezek 30:3; 32:7-8; 34:12; Joel 2:2). Job 3:5b contrasts the cloud in the Exodus tradition as indicative divine presence, nearness and protection. Cf. Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 161.

\textsuperscript{783} The root of yryrmk most likely stems from rmk “be black” or rrm “be bitter.” Here rmk fits the context. In Deut 32:24 yyrms parallel to \textsuperscript{[}vr, the Northwest Semitic god of pestilence. The medieval commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra identified in 3:5 a reference to “demonic spirits of the noon.” Cf. Gordis, Job, 33. The use of the plural yryrmk in the construct relation with \textsuperscript{[} supports the notion that personified forces of destruction are implied.

\textsuperscript{784} The use of t\textsuperscript{[}b in conjunction with mu yyrmk indicates the personification of the mu yyrmk as a means of undoing Job’s day of birth.

\textsuperscript{785} Wolfers, Deep Things, 376.


\textsuperscript{787} Habel, Job, 100. A connection has been made with the Arabic mara, “to be hostile.”

\textsuperscript{788} Pope, Job, 29.
3:5b  niño seems to anticipate  Arra “those who curse the day” in 3:8. A wordplay could exist between Arra ‘curse’ and Arrmbitter’.789

In verse 6 a shift takes place concerning the focus of Job’s curse. While the day of his birth presents the object of his cursing in vv 3-5, Job now goes back a step further in directing his curse at the night of his conception. This shift is immediately clear from the use of  hlyh at the beginning of v 6. As the day in v 4a, the night is specified by means of  awh, i.e., “that night,” referring back to  hlyh in v 3.790 Here the object of Job’s cursing is just as ludicrous as in vv 3-5, also being directed at a past event. Rather ironically, the night of his conception is to be seized ( hcj)791 by darkness (lpa).792 It should not be “joined” (hdj)793 among the days of the year, nor should it come (awb) in number of months.794 I.e., his night of conception should not find a place in a yearly calendar.795 This would further eliminate any possibility of his remembrance.796 The basic meaning of the curse is that it’s object, i.e. Job’s birth, never should have been, or that it should only have been short lived. In both vv 5a and 6a, darkness is personified as a force that can “seize” or “reclaim.” The difference is the object of that which is to be reclaimed.

In verse 7 the personification of night as “barren” (dwmlg) resumes the motif that the night in some way determines Job’s origin, as in 3:3.797 As in 3:6  hlyh is specified by means of  awh, with  hnh adding to the seriousness of Job’s curse. The night of Job’s

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789 Habel, Job, 100.
790 Here Job curses the night of his conception, but in 3:3 his curse is aimed at the night announcing (rra) his conception. It is not necessary to delete  awh  hlyh.
791 Here  qj indicates Job’s desire that darkness should seize his night of conception, but also that it should be “carried away,” i.e. as if it had never been. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 85.
792 That the night is cursed by means of  lpa is odd, but deliberate. Here  lpa may refer to Sheol (cf. 10:22; 28:3) and thus latches unto the first line of v 5, where  ûvj is used instead of  lpa. The use of  lpa indicates that more is at stake than mere darkness, given the association of disaster and evil with  lpa and the related  hlpa (cf. Exod 10:22; Prov 4:19; Joel 2:2). In Job 30:26  lpa is parallel to  fr.
793 The root of  dj y in v 6b is uncertain. Suggestions include  dj y ‘be reckoned, joined,’” as a Ni of  yj “let it not see,” or  dj y “to rejoice,” as suggested by the vocalisation of the MT. Cf. Habel, Job, 100; Gordis, Job, 34. For Gordis  dj y exemplifies  talhin, i.e. where two meanings are simultaneously intended by the author, namely be ‘reckoned’ (primary) and ‘rejoice’ (secondary). For the latter he suggests the root  hdn (cf. Exod 18:9), allowing a translation “let it not rejoice.” Given the theme concerning the undoing of Job’s creation, a meaning of “not being joined” is fitting. L.L. Grabbe, Comparative Philology and the Text of Job: A Study in Methodology (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 32 observes that most early versions translated the word in this way, suggesting that they understood it to have the meaning “join,” i.e. from the root  dj y As such maintaining the lection difficilior in the MT is preferable. See also Gen 49:6. Van der Lrugt, Rhetorical Criticism, 51, favours a reading “let it not unite with.”
794 For the verbs  dj y and  ybn a reading  yechad / yodeh has been suggested, which results in the double meaning “be united / rejoice” and “enter / desire.” Cf. Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy,” 48-51. Such a double meaning could have been apparent to readers of the consonantal text.
795 Wolfers,  Hiob, 117. He argues “Die Verwünschung des Geburtstages ist letztlich eine Verwünschung seines Lebens.”
796 Wolfers, Deep Things, 377 maintains the vocalisation of the MT, since v 6 has an important function, indicating that Job’s curse is “looking-forward.” As such Job is cursing the day / night every time it reoccurs annually, rather than retrospectively. This view is not shared by Clines, Job 1-20, 85 since Job wishes that his night of conception had never been, and not that his day should be wiped from the calendar. Yet both interpretations support the notion of absolute annihilation.
797 Habel, Job, 108. Cf. Isa 49:21 for such a personification.
conception is to be barren (דֹּמִה, 978) i.e. the night of his conception should never have been. 979 But this undoing of his (past) creation presents another futile wish. 806 The wish that no joy (קטן) should come into the night of his conception both points to the process of procreation leading to his conception, which he now wishes had never taken place, and that that night should not be considered as any cause for joy. In terms of his present experience it would have been better had it never taken place. By means of the specification of the night, Job’s curse is still directed toward the anguish of his own existence, and not creation in general (cf. §3.3). 801

The focus on the night of Job’s conception is continued in verse 8, though the content of the verse is quite different from the preceding. For here he calls on “them,” i.e., the “curcers of the day” (נֵבָרֵי וָיִם) to utter a curse (בָּכָה), and thus introduces other participants as part of this process of cursing his day of birth and night of conception. Those who are invoked to curse are further qualified as those ready (כֹּל) to arouse 802 Leviathan (תָּלִים). An immediate question concerns the identity and nature of the “curcers of the day,” who are ready to arouse Leviathan. 803 It could be that magicians or some or other cultic officiates are implied here. But since such characters have no other role within the book of Job, it remains unclear. 804 Still, we have no real alternative. 805 A point of concern regarding the “curcers of the day” (נֵבָרֵי וָיִם) is the suggested emendation to read יִבָּר (sea) instead of יִבָּר (day). 806 In this way יִבָּר presents a parallel with תָּלִים (cf. Isa 27:1). In terms of this emendation Job is calling on the forces of chaos (תָּלִים and יִבָּר) to engulf his night of conception. The occurrence of

978 Job’s wish for “barrenness” in v 7 contrasts the divine imperative of Gen 1:28a that humans should be fruitful and multiply. While God qualifies creation as good and bestows His blessing thereupon, Job does not regard his own conception and birth, i.e. his creation as a reason for joy, but rather as an occasion for a curse and lament.

979 The use of דֹּמִה implies “childlessness” (cf. Isa 49:21), here as a result of the night’s barrenness. It presents a parallel with Job 3:6b.

800 Clines, Job 1-20, 85; Fohrer, Hiob, 118. Also S. Terrien, Job: Poet of Existence (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 64.

801 Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 322.

802 Reading מָרֵיָּם Pol of מָרָה “to rouse, wake up” is comparable with Isa 14:9, where the shades (מָרָה) in Sheol are “roused” (Pi of מָרָה) to meet the one about to descent to Sheol. Cf. Gordin, Job, 34. Cf. Habel, Job, 108, 109.


804 The forces of chaos in conjunction with magic, appears only in Job 3:8 (תָּלִים) and Exod 7:8-13 (יְתָלִים). Cf. R. Schmitt, Magie im Alten Testament (AOAT 313; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 95. The suggestion of H. Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895) 59-61 that here an “angel of God” is intended is unfounded.

805 Pope, Job, 30 suggests that Job is here invoking the help of a “master curser” among the gods.

806 Originally suggested by Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos, 59 who identified a mythological allusion in v 8a and b, in view of Ps 104 and Job 40f. All the versions however reads “day.” Grabbe, Comparative Philology, 35-36 points to the prevelance of יִבָּר particularly since the Ras Shamra texts (Baal and Anat Cycle) showed both Yam and Leviathan as part of an elaborate mythology. Cf. O. Loretz, “Ugaritisch-Hebräisch in Job 3:3-26.” UF 8 (1976): 123-127. In this regard see also Isa 51:9-10 where יִבָּר is paralleled with יָת. Cf. Habel, Job, 101. Support for reading יָת also concerns the parallelism found in Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur were we read, “I enchant you with the adjuration of Yam, and the spell of Leviathan the serpent.” Cited in Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 160. He identifies the use of Leviathan and Yam as archetypal precedents for magical practice and important for the interpretation of Job 3:1-13.

the *Chaoskampf* motif in the broader context of the book of Job is supportive of reading **µy**. Creation in the book of Job is nowhere explicitly described as the result of a struggle between God and the forces of chaos. Rather, particularly in the divine speeches of Job 38-41, chaos is not eliminated from creation, but rather assigned to its proper place in creation (cf. Job 38:8-11). The emendation **µy** is suggestive, but various scholars prefer to maintain the reading of the MT, i.e. **µy** which fits the immediate context well. We also opt for this reading. Here **µy** suggests a wordplay on the themes of light (life) and darkness (death). Reading **µy** also supports the idea that the curse is first and foremost directed at Job’s own creation, i.e. his day, and not creation in general.

It is significant that in v 8 Job does not call on his creator for help, but rather on those that he envisions to have dominion over the forces of chaos, and who are able to summon chaos to bring about an end to his existence. In terms of his present predicament and resultant experience, God is not regarded as able to change his situation. Or, perhaps, regarding God as instigator of his predicament (3:23), calling on God at this stage would be quite ineffectual. The desired effect of this rousing of Leviathan is unclear, but it could be to swallow up the sun and moon (i.e., light / life), causing an eclipse (i.e. darkness / death). Or, that the mythic Leviathan may

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808 Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 100 discusses God’s conflict with the dragon and the sea in the HB. He identifies Job 3:8, 7:12, 9:8, 13; 26:12-13, 38:8-11, 40:15-41:26/34 as representative of such instances. In Job 9:8, 13; 26:12-13; 38:8-11 the context of the conflict is that of the creation of the world. In Job the *Chaoskampf* motif it is a prominent theme, but is basically absent from the broader wisdom corpus of the HB. For Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 100 this suggests that the author of Job employed cultic psalms of praise in which such conflict is visible (cf. Job 9:8, 13).

809 Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 319-327 considers the notion of chaos in Job 3, particularly vv 3-13 and v 8, and argues that an identification of “chaos” in Job 3 should be rejected (contra Day).


811 Habel, *Job*, 101; Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 151-167. Reasing **µy** allows for a clever wordplay, preserving a so-called dual mythic tradition. Namely that of the dragon’s battle with Baal and of his causing an eclipse. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 118-119 does not share this view of Fishbane, since Job is calling on magicians who can place a curse on only a part of divine creation.

812 The vv 7 and 9 the theme of night is at issue and this might make a reading **µy** in v 8 seem out of place. The theme of night brings into focus the theme of chaos, and for this reason reading **µy** as representative of chaos with **µy** is not inappropriate.

813 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 87. For Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 153 Job’s cursing of his day as in 3:1, presents an unrestrained death-wish for the whole of creation.

814 The “keepers” (**yr** [ ]) in 3:8 is comparable with Dan 4:10, 14, where the “keepers” are indicated in Aramaic by **yrd** (plural **yrd**), from the root **yd**. I.e. Job is calling on the “keepers” of chaos. Cf. Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung*, 66-67.

815 In the second divine speech (40-41) Leviathan is referred to as ferocious when “roused” (**rm** and that only God can confront him (41:1-2, MT). As such Job is seeking for a means beyond God in bringing an end to his creation. Also Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 324.


817 Also Job 7:12 where Job complains, “Am I the sea (**µy** or a whale (**yd**)) that You set a watch (from me) over me?” Now Job calls on these forces over which God has set a guard, that his creation might be wiped away by a frenzy of chaos. Cf. Gordis, *Job*, 35.


819 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 87. Job’s night of conception would have been consigned to the power of the underworld by means of the activity of Leviathan, being raised up by those skilled to do so. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 119 does not share this view, arguing that Leviathan “…hat nichts mit einem Himmelsdrachen zu
swallow up Job’s night of conception, preventing his day.\(^{820}\) The basic theme is that of darkness, and the extinguishing of (Job’s) life.\(^{821}\)

In verse 9 the themes of night and darkness, here related to the night of Job’s conception as in v 7 are continued, while the style of v 9 matches that of v 7. So also the imagery employed in v 8, for the roused forces of chaos should bring about darkness and prevent a finding of light (i.e. life), or a seeing of the dawn. Those introduced in v 8 should prevent the transition from darkness into light. With this juxtaposition of light and darkness, a tension is brought about between the themes of life and death. This juxtaposition of the forces of light and darkness entails that the stars of the twilight (\(\text{wpvn} \\text{ybk}\)) should be dark (\(\text{ûv}\)), that no light (\(\text{rwr}\)) should be found (\(\text{ša}\)) despite the “search” (\(\text{hwq}\)) for it, and that the “dawning of the day” should not be seen. Here the ability to see (\(\text{har}\)) is indicative of being alive, which is exactly what Job here does not wish to be.\(^{826}\) In view of the significance of the imagery of the “dawn” in the ANE, as the time of the epiphany of the sun god, coming into action against all forms of evil and injustice, it may be considered whether such a connotation of the dawn is here reflected. But this is not the case, since Job is not wishing for justice, but for death before dawn. At most such a potential time of divine help is “wished away.”

In verse 10, the Leitmotif for Job’s curses directed at his night of conception is provided, as indicated by \(\text{ykJ}\). The night could have aided to prevent his conception, but instead it aided in the facilitation of the event of procreation, leading to Job’s day of...
birth, which eventually gave rise to his present experience of suffering (\( \text{l rm} \)). It did not shut (\( \text{rgs} \)) the doors (\( \text{tl d} \)) of his mother’s womb (\( \text{fb} \)), and as a result it did not hide (\( \text{rts} \)) sorrow (\( \text{l rm} \)) from his eyes (\( \text{y} \)). The resultant experience of suffering (\( \text{l rm} \)) and trouble (\( \text{zgr} \)) is in direct opposition with his longing for the rest and tranquility that he hopes to find in Sheol, which will be facilitated by the event of death. In v 10 and the following lament of vv 11-19 we have a parallel with Jer 20:18 (“Why did I come forth from out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?”). In both v 10 and Jer 20:18, \( \text{l rm} \) serves as *Leitmotiv* for the ‘complaint against life.’

**B: Verses 11-19: Lament**

With **verse 11** the tone of the poem changes from that of curse to lament, as indicated by the use of \( \text{rnh} \). Lament rather than malediction is at issue in vv 11-19. Job’s opening lament, an *Ich-Klage* or first person lament is comparable to that in some of the lament Psalms (e.g. Ps 10:1; 22:1). The distinction however lies in the fact that Job is not wishing for an improvement in his predicament, but rather for the dissolution or negation of his life. Since we are here dealing with a first person lament, \( \text{rnh} \) does not require an answer, having no specific addressee. In vv 11-19 Job’s outcry takes on the form of a death wish, rather than a curse directed at his day of birth and night of conception as in vv 3-10. In v 11 \( \text{ur} \) (womb) and \( \text{fb} \) (belly) are used synonymously, but also latch on to the theme of v 10. The use of \( \text{rmn} \) v 11 indicates a specific time, namely that Job wishes he had died immediately after emerging from the “womb” (\( \text{ur} \text{rmn} \text{ fb} \)). Thus the immediacy of his wish, in the

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830 Some regard “the day” (\( \text{wyh} \)) as subject of \( \text{rgs} \). Cf. Gordis, *Job*, 35. But “the night” can also be the subject and fits the immediate context.
831 The MT reading \( \text{fb} \) is problematic, causing the LXX to read *gastro; mhtro\'v mou*, thus making apparent what is implied in the MT. Cf. Job 1:21.
832 J. Reindl, *Das Angesicht Gottes im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments* (ETS 25; Leipzig; St. Benno-Verlag, 1970), 90 discusses the Hi \( \text{rts} \) under the rubric of “God hiding his face.” He notes five instances where \( \text{rts} \) is used with the meaning to conceal something (Job 3:10 - sorrow; Ps 119:19 - law; Isa 29:15 - plan; 1 Sam 20:2; Prov 25:2 - \( \text{rbd} \)) and can also be translated with “keep secret.” See also Job 13:20; 34:22; 3:23; 28:21 (Hi) and 3:10; 13:24; 14:13; 34:29 (Hi).
833 Eliphaz (4:8; 5:6) and Zophar (11:16) interpret Job’s reference to \( \text{lm} \) as misery resulting from sinful action. Their arguments stay within the parameters of the *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*.
835 For Clines, *Job 1-20*, 89 the malediction of the previous unit is given up since it does not have the desired effect, unable to change his experience of \( \text{lm} \).
836 Fohrer, *Hiob*, 121. Job is appealing for the “Verneinung seines Daseins,” freeing him from his present experience of being enslaved by his own existence.
837 God rather than the friends is the propable addressee, who is responsible for Job’s coming into existence. Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, 89.
838 Supported by the LXX reading \( \text{e\'ugu}=\) i.e. “immediately.” Clines, *Job 1-20*, 89 points to the parallelism of \( \text{turbde} \) // \( \text{ur} \text{expire} \) in 14:10, while the parallelism of \( \text{ur} \) ‘womb’ // \( \text{fb} \) ‘belly’ occurs in Job 10:18-19, 13:15; Ps 22:11(10), 58:4 (HB); Jer 1:5. Also see 2 Bar 10:6 and 4 Ezra 7.116. This verse contains conventional language, familiar in the broader early Jewish context.
form of lament, is indicated. He should not have experienced even a single moment of life.  

The basic theme of v 11 continues in verse 12. The interpretation of the first line of v 12 is unclear. By means of ["wherefore"] in 12a and ["why"] in 12b, the language of lament is continued. The question concerns the subject of the feminine noun ["knee"]; cf. 2 Kgs 4:20 as a reference to the "mother's lap"). This image implies that the mother's knees meet (["and"] Job, i.e., she takes the infant on her knees so that it can "suckle" (["suck"]).  

But in the wider context of the ANE, it can also refer to a symbolic act of the father taking the infant on his knees, thus recognising the child as his and by laying it on the mother's breast indicates the will to preserve its life.

Give the immediate context of v 12, the former interpretation is fitting. Since Job's conception and birth could not have been prevented, perhaps the absence of life-giving nourishment could have brought death that he longs for so vehemently.

Verse 13 marks the midpoint of the poem and is comparable to v 26. In both verses the themes of quiet (["be still"]) and rest (["rest"]) are prominent. The ["let"] in v 13 serves to indicate the reason for Job's lament in vv 11-12. If he had died from the womb, he would have lain down (["lie down"]) and been quiet (["be still"]); he would have slept (["sleep"]) and would have been at rest (["be quiet"]). This description of Job's envisioning of the underworld, with the leading theme being that of quiet and rest, is in contrast with his experience of the land of the living, where ["rest"] and ["sleep"] are the leading themes. This positive envisioning of Sheol contrasts with that of other lament texts such as Ps 88, but also with other parts of the Joban dialogue (10:21-22). This envisioning of death as an inviting domain brings about a (desperate) reversal of traditional conceptions. However it should be evaluated in the context of Job 3, seeing that the book of Job does not contain a uniform depiction of the underworld. As result of his present experience of ["rest"], the curse and lament of Job indeed reflects a radical "reordering of

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839 In parallel with Qoh 4:2-3. In Qoh 6:3 an untimely birth is better than a person without a proper burial, since the name of such a person shall be covered in darkness (cf. Job 24:20). In Job 3 this is exactly Job’s wish. See also Hos 9:11 for such language of brevity. Cf. Gordis, Job, 35.


841 In Gen 50:23 Joseph’s grandchildren are said to have been born upon his knees.

842 Clines, *Job* 1-20, 90.


844 Job’s inability to sleep (["sleep"] a hapax in Job) results from his experience of ["rest"]. In the HB sleeplessness can indicate the severity of that which is troubling a person (e.g. Isa 38; Ps 102; Job 7; 30). Cf. T.H. McAlpine, *Sleep, Divine and Human, in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 38; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 21. Sleep should not be equated with death too hastily, but the HB does contain non-metaphorical descriptions in which death is evaluated as some kind of sleep and vice versa. Cf. McAlpine, *Sleep*, 135-136.

845 For Clines, *Job* 1-20, 91 the images used to describe Sheol and the state of existence within Sheol in vv 13-15 and 17-19 "portray in inverse mode Job’s present experience…".

846 A connection between death and rest is also encountered in the Gilgamesh Epic (X.vi.33-35):

"The resting and the dead, how alike are they!
They do not compose a picture of death,
The commoner and the noble,

reality," which includes his depiction of Sheol. But Job 3 does not go as far as in Job 17:12-16, where it said that one embraces the pit as father and maggots as mother. Still, Sheol is preferable to the land of the living.

Verses 14 and 15 do not move in the same direction as the verses which precede or follow on it. But this does not suggest that vv 14-15 have a mere decorative or elaborative function concerning Job’s vision of Sheol. If vv 14-15 are read in view of the social order dictated in vv 17-19, they form part of the larger argument and have more than an aesthetic purpose. In view of vv 17-19 they contribute to the notion of death as the great equaliser and that in death all are equal. In the world of Job, people are simply not equal “and that what is desirable about Sheol is not its egalitarianism as an abstract principle, but the absence of the strife between unequal humans that constitutes ‘trouble’ in the upper world.” In terms of the description of Job in 1:3 as “greatest of all in the east,” he fits quite well with those described in vv 14-15. In v 14 it is with (מ) kings and counselors (ב of the earth (האר), the builders (הבר) of desolate places (הבר) that he will find rest in Sheol.

The theme introduced in v 14 continues in verse 15. Job adds to his list of co-habitants of the underworld princes (רכ) who had gold (בר), filling (אל) their houses (תי) with silver (ס). Just as the building projects of kings and counselors eventually amount to nothing, so the gathering of riches provides no safeguard against descend to Sheol. In this life they know only agitated unrest, and for this reason the stillborn of v 16 is judged to be more fortunate (as in Qoh 6:3) than those insatiable souls described in vv 14-15. Job’s experience of turmoil instigated a change in his evaluation of the worth of human labour, i.e. that it has no lasting value. In this way the argument here is brought in proximity to that of Qohelet. But the emphasis in these verses is on the peace and rest offered by the grave and not on the futility of human labour in the first place.

Various suggestions have been made concerning the position of verse 16 in Job 3. Some scholars suggest that it should be moved up three verses and read with vv 11-12, or that it should be placed between vv 11 and 12. Some even suggest its

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849 Isa 14:9-11 reflects a tradition in which former kings and heroes have a continued shadowy existence in Sheol. But the notion that Sheol is a place where rest can be found in comparison with the turmoil encountered in life is hard to parallel in the HB. Qoh 6:5 is comparable, though some read it as an idiosyncratic text. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 91-2.
851 Dhorme, Job, 31. The presentation of Sheol in these verses is that of the great equaliser and the ultimate meeting place of all humanity.
852 Clines, Job 1-20, 94. In vv 14-15 and 17-18 eight groups of persons are described, dividable into two basic categories, namely the oppressors and the oppressed.
853 Here (ע) (“ruins / desolate places”) is somewhat problematic. It can allude to the practice of restoring ruined cities by kings of the ANE (e.g. Isa 58:12). Cf. Pope, Job, 31. Also Horst, Hiob, 51. Habel, Job, 102 maintains the MT, but regards this verse as reference to the end result of royal building enterprises, rather than the object of building itself. For (ע) as object in the HB, cf. Ezra 9:9, Isa 5:17, 44:26, 51:3, 58:12, 61:4 and Mal 1:4.
854 For Newsom, The Book of Job, 95 the subtle irony in vv 14-15 is “at the expense of the great ones, whose lives were characterised by restless but ultimately futile activity…”
855 De Wilde, Hiob, 99; Dhorme, Job, 30; Van der Lugt, Rhetorical Criticism, 50-51. For Whybray, Job, 38 µ, which occurs in 17, 18, and 19 has no antecedent unless it follows immediately after v 15,
omission from the text.\textsuperscript{857} But v 16 can be maintained in its present location.\textsuperscript{858} For the futility of the great ones described in vv 14-15 prompts Job to evaluate the hidden (\textit{mīšāq}) “miscarriage” (\textit{l pr})\textsuperscript{859} or stillborn (\textit{l lê}) that never saw light (\textit{l waf})\textsuperscript{860} as more fortunate (cf. Job 10:18). It is more fortunate because it will never know the strife, tribulation or futility that characterise the land of the living. This envisioning of Job is not unlike Enkidu’s report to the king concerning the order of the netherworld and the status of its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{861} The use of \textit{l waf (“there”)} in vv 16 and 17 emphasise Sheol as the place where the subject of v 16 will find rest.

In verse 17 as in vv 18-19, Job’s envisioned state of the underworld is continued, with \textit{l waf} functioning as a reference to Sheol. There the wicked (\textit{l vê}) cease (\textit{l di}) from troubling (\textit{zgr}),\textsuperscript{862} and there (\textit{l waf}) they rest (\textit{j waw}, weary (\textit{l yapr}) of strength (\textit{l jk}). Scenarios in the present with which Job is familiar, are altered in Sheol. Indicative hereof is that even the activity of the wicked comes to an end in Sheol. Here resulting from their changed condition, i.e. being “weary of strength.”\textsuperscript{863} The later idea of the wicked being separated in Sheol is lacking here. All find rest in Sheol, where the differentiating structures functioning \textit{Diesseits} have become obsolete. This view concerning the fate of the wicked also puts a question mark behind the basic tenets of the \textit{Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang}. If all share the same fate, ending up in Sheol, what value, or profit, to use the term of Qohelet, would a life lived according to the principles of wisdom have? Perhaps the point is that within the wisdom material of the HB the value of wisdom and the \textit{Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang} is to be found in this life.\textsuperscript{864} The profit of the wise is to be found in this life. In death all share the same fate, regardless of earthly conduct. However, the primary concern of v 17 is to continue the description of Job’s vision of Sheol.

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857 Pope, \textit{Job}, 31. If the negative particle \textit{al} is retained (instead of reading \textit{Wl “o that, if only”}), the line can be read as a question, namely, “could I not be / have been.” Also Freedman, The Structure of Job 3, 504-5, though he does not regard such a textual rearrangement as crucial. He regards the present location of v 16 as enclosing vv 13-15 within the statement of the main theme of the poem, resuming the earlier contention while also introduces a parallel set of anticipated conditions in Sheol (vv 17-19).


860 Here \textit{l waf} is employed as metaphor for life (cf. v 23).

861 In the Sumerian text of the Gilgamesh Epic we read of Enkidu’s report on the netherworld:

‘Did you see little stillborn babies, who knew not names of their own?’ ‘I saw them.’ ‘How did they fare?’ ‘They play amid syrup and ghee at tables of silver and gold.’

‘Did you see the man who died a natural death?’ ‘I saw him.’ ‘How does he fare?’

‘He lies drinking clean water on the beds of the gods.’ Cf. George, \textit{The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic} vol. 2, 776 line 268 r 1 – s 2. Job experiences neither the tranquility of the stillborn or that associated with a natural death.

862 The LXX reads \textit{ęš kā w “to burn out” (the fury of rage). But any notion of punishment of the wicked in Sheol is absent.

863 This view of the dead as weary of strength (Ps 88:4) is in closer proximity with the more traditional view of the dead, e.g. as the \textit{l yapr}. Cf. Job 26:5 for the only occurrence in the book.

864 The value of a good name, so important in Proverbs, is reiterated. It is remembered and lives on \textit{Diesseits}, even when the carrier of the name have descended to the underworld.
The theme of rest in Sheol is continued in verse 18. In Sheol prisoners (גֵּרֵם) are “at ease” (אָכְלָה) together (דַּי) and they do not hear (לִשְׁמָא) the voice (לָעַן) of the “taskmaster” (כָּפָא). While the prisoners should not be equated with the wicked in v 17 too quickly, a connection between these two groups cannot be ruled out. Here we encounter another reversal of conditions typical in life and in this way it further contributes to Job’s positive portrayal of Sheol as place of rest and equality. In terms of Job’s lament, death has come to present a radically different configuration of social relations compared to that of his present life, which merely offers Job מַחְרֵף, and that in isolation. Job casts himself in solidarity with those who long for death (3:21-22).

In verse 19 Job’s depiction of the state of the dead in Sheol is brought to a close. Social status differentiation in this life is again turned on its head in v 19. Small (לְדָעַה) and great (לְדָעַה) are there (לְדָעַה), and the servant (לָעַן) is free (לָעַן) from his master (לָעַן). That small and great function in parallel with the servant and master is clear, indicating that such difference in status is dissolved by means of death. Sheol is indeed the “house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23), where all social divisions are erased and, freedom is to be found. By means of his curse and lament, Job longs for the “democracy of the dead.” In terms of Job’s present experience of מַחְרֵף and מַעְרִית, life has become a form of slavery and enforced labour (cf. Job 7:1-2). He wishes to be set free from this life, i.e. to die. For Job, and others in his situation, death offers a viable alternative to life. Job ultimately longs for a Dasein that is as peaceful as

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865 In Prov 1:33, Jer 30:10 and Job 46:27 אָכְלָה is contrasted with fear, with the use of being at “ease” or “quiet.” For Clines, Job 1-20, 97 the ease of the dwellers of Sheol does not result from a new found liberty, but is rather a matter of being released from fear. These two reasons are complementary.

866 Here דַּי illustrates the notion of union or community.

867 Thus, the fear associated with the voice of the taskmaster is dissolved.

868 Given the use of גֵּרֵם, translating the participle כָּפָא with “taskmaster” fits this context. Fohrer, Hiob, 124 identifies a possible Egyptian influence with the reference to כָּפָא give the motifs encountered in the Egyptian Dispute over Suicide. Cf. ANET (3d ed. 1969) 405-407. Further, the text might recall Israelite labour under Egyptian oppression, since the כָּפָא is the Egyptian “taskmaster” (cf. Exod 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13, 14). But this interpretation stands apart from Job’s lament.


870 After loosing his family and place in society Diesseits, Job now looks through “the threshold of death toward a new establishment of social ties that knows no boundaries.” Cf. Brown, Character, 62.

871 For the the translation of אֲכָל מֽוֹ / לִדָעֵךְ לָעַן as “the small and the great are there,” מַעְרִית מִי seems to be required. But since אֲכָל מֽוֹ can mean “the same, alike” an emendation of the MT is unnecessary. Cf. Gordis, Job, 38. The emphasis here is more on status differentiantion than actual location.

872 Here מַעְרִית does not have any special social significance. For Fohrer, Hiob, 124 its original meaning is that of being freed from forced labour, particularly in connection with the task of “building.” Clines, Job 1-20, 97 does not share this view, but the notion of “oppression” is certainly present.

873 For Clines, Job 1-20, 97 the attraction of the underworld lies not in the dissolution of distinct social classes, but in the dissolution of the strife between those belonging to the different social stratifications. Nevertheless a reversal of conditions fits this context of lament well, even if a statement about the inherent equality those in Sheol is lacking.

874 Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos, 323.

875 Habel, Job, 111. Due to Job’s present conundrum, “the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3) can now identify himself with a very different social group.

876 For Fohrer, Hiob, 124 Job’s actual wish in terms of his desperately uttered words is not death, but rather a peaceful life. He hopes to find it in Sheol.

877 Life rather than death has become the limiting factor for Job. Cf. Brown, The Ethos, 323. The order of life Diesseits enslaves, while the chaos Jenseits liberates. This idealised depiction of Sheol in vv 13-19 is countered in Job 10:18-22, offering a more traditional understanding of Sheol.
his vision of the grave and Sheol. This longing should be interpreted in terms of his suffering in this life.

While we are here still dealing with the *Ich-Klage*, it has been suggested that the *deva* should be identified as Job’s taskmaster, and even that here refers to God, the one responsible for Job’s misery and enslaved existence. While such an interpretation is suggestive, it is not necessary, given the general lack of a subject for Job’s lament. The emphasis is on the enviable condition in Sheol, where God, who is partially responsible for Job’s misery, is absent. Job’s vision of the underworld includes a particularly harmonious existence. Wisdom had as its task the safeguarding of such a harmonious existence *Diesseits*, but in terms of Job’s experience of *λύθη*, wisdom has failed. As a result of the absence of order in the world of his experience, Job is now longing for Sheol as a place where order is to be found. This entails an order where absurd conflicts have made room for “a pacific meaninglessness.”

C: Verses 20-26: Lament Continued

C1: Verses 20-23

Job’s lament continues in verse 20, as indicated by *hml*, which here, as in v 11, functions as a structural marker. While this third strophe (vv 20-26) also contains a *Gott-Klage* (v 23), it corresponds with the foregoing lament in that no real answer is expected. While vv 11-19 provide a glimpse of Job’s vision of the underworld and the state of the dead, it is striking that v 20 resumes the theme of “light” (*rwa*) and “life” (*µyyj*), here used synonymously, as indicated by the parallelism. As such v 20 is differentiated from the previous section, where darkness and death are prominent themes. For the tormented Job it remains incomprehensible why light (*rwa*) is given to the sufferer (*l ryh*) or life (*µyyj*) to the bitter (*rm*) soul (*vpn*). Here (vv 20-23) his lament has a more general character, other than vv 24-26, in which he reflects on his own situation. In v 20 the concern is not on the one responsible for Job’s present dilemma, but rather on the inescapability of life. The life that Job is experiencing has lost all dimensions of meaning. What he longs for in his curse and lament has not.

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*Job*, 38 interprets these two different modes of viewing the underworld as an indication that in Job’s present experience, “overcome by a sense of hopelessness, his normal repugnance towards death and its aftermath has been driven from Job’s thoughts.”

878 Contra depictions of Sheol in Ps 88 6-7 or Isa 14:11.
879 In Job 18:4a Job’s interpretation of his experience of and resultant wish to die is countered by Bildad, asking “You who tear yourself in anger – shall the earth be forsaken because of you?”
882 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 105.
883 In Job 9:21; 10:12 *µyyj* occurs as object; in 7:7 as subject, and also 10:21; 24:22; 33:20.
884 Barth, *Die Errettung*, 29. The use of *rwa* in v 20 is motivated by the earlier use of cosmogonic imagery in Job 3: 4-5, 10, 16.
885 Newsom, *Job*, 96. For Job the “intentionality of human existence” has been lost amidst experiences of *λύθη*. Only death remains as a means of bringing relief. See also Sir 30:17, “Death is better than a miserable life, and eternal rest than chronic sickness.”
886 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 99; Horst, *Hiob*, 54. The reality of his suffering occupies his horizon totally, excluding the thought of who is to blame for the suffering.
yet eventuated and he realises the ineffectual nature of both curse and lament. This is indicated by the desperate nature of the imagery employed in v 21, communicating a sense of urgency.

Verse 21 elaborates on the sufferer and bitter soul of v 20. By means of this elaboration the theme of the purposelessness of life given to those who cannot profit from it is also continued. In this way they “yearn” (hkj) for death (twm) and they dig (rpj) for it as if it is a treasure (unim). Here the theme of death (twm) is contrasted to that of life (lyj) in v 20. Unlike Ps 33:20 or 106:13, the afflicted here does not yearn for YHWH and his counsel, but rather for death. This characterises the use of hkj as rather ironic, and so also the image of digging for death as if for a treasure. It also presents a very apt and vivid description of the intense longing for the reprieve that death will bring. An intensification of the yearning for death is indicated by the fact that the “yearning” of v 21 proceeds to “digging” in v 21b. Here we can note another comment on the failure of wisdom (hmkj) in terms of Job’s experience of lm]. The search for wisdom was supposed to bring and ensure life, also as a reward. Here the sufferer yearns for death, digs for it and rejoices greatly on finding it, as stated in v 22. Here finding death, rather than wisdom presents a cause for joy.

While the theme of v 21 is further elaborated in verse 22, the translation of this verse is rather tricky, given the three terms used to indicate rejoicing. The result of the yearning and digging for death in v 21 is described in v 22, namely they rejoice (hmc) exceedingly (lyg), rejoicing (cwc) for finding (axm) the grave (rbq). Since the normal result of death would be mourning, the irony in this response of joy in finding the grave is clear. Finding the grave has the same result as finding a hidden treasure. In terms of Job’s positive depiction of Sheol and conditions in Sheol in vv 13-19, the joy of those digging for it on finding it is comprehensible. What they will find in Sheol, in terms of Job’s depiction, serves as motivation for their digging and cause for their resultant joy on finding it. But in Job 24:19 Job argues that “Sheol engulfs those who have sinned.” It has however been suggested that this is exactly the point

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887 K.J. Illmann, Old Testament Formulations About Death (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1979), 169 cites vv 20-21 with other texts where death and life are presented as opposites, requiring a correct decision.
889 In wisdom literature rpj also refers to “searching / desiring.” Clines, Job 1-20, 100 favours this interpretation.
890 The graves (yrboq) are ready for Job (cf. 17:1b).
891 This image of “digging for death” contrasts Job 28, where humanity’s capacity to search the earth for natural riches is contrasted with their inability to discover wisdom (hkj). Cf. Habel, Job, 111.
893 The critical apparatus of the BHS suggests lyc (“heap”) for lyc allowing a reading “burial heap,” constituting a parallelism with rbq. For Gordis, Job, 39 “exultation” is the primary meaning and “burial heap” secondary. Also Grabbe, Comparative Philology, 38. Ha, Frage, 51-52 follows the suggested reading of the BHS. But such an emendation is unnecessary and as Grabbe, Comparative Philology, 41 argues, v 22 makes good sense if lyc is interpreted as “rejoicing.” Cf. Hos 9:1.
894 In view of the reference to twm v 21, it seems probable that death is here intended as object, of which the grave here serves as metaphor.
895 Fohrer, Hiob, 125. Not finding the grave they are again confronted with the bitterness of their being, causing them to dig or to search even more vehemently for the grave and the reward that it brings. The background of this image could be grave robbers who rejoice at finding the grave and the promise of treasure that it holds.
that Job is repudiating, namely the doctrine of individual retribution.\textsuperscript{896} An identification between Job 29:22b and Job 3:22b has also been suggested, in the sense that the former is influenced by the latter in terms of the metaphors employed therein.\textsuperscript{897} But at issue here is the qualification of the result, i.e. joy, in finding the grave.\textsuperscript{898}

**Verse 23** presents a further qualification of the one yearning and digging for death, namely as the man (\textit{rbg})\textsuperscript{899} whose way (\textit{ûrd}) is hidden (\textit{rts}), and has been “covered” (\textit{ûks}) by God (\textit{hwla}). Again, the meaning of this verse is quite clear, but its translation remains problematic.\textsuperscript{900} In v 23 we are dealing with a \textit{Gott-Klage} rather than an \textit{Ich-Klage} (cf. §4.3).\textsuperscript{901} His complaint is directed against God.\textsuperscript{902} Further, by employing the singular \textit{rbg} Job moves closer to his own situation.\textsuperscript{903} Important here is the reference to \textit{ûrd}, which in Proverbial wisdom is used with the meaning of a “way” of life.\textsuperscript{904} Wisdom has the function of “steering” (\textit{twlbjt}, Prov 1:5; 11:14; 12:5) the wise through life, but in terms of Job’s experience wisdom has lost its ability to perform this function.\textsuperscript{905} Here God is accredited with bringing this situation about, since He is the one that “hedges in” (\textit{wlb hwla ûsyw}).\textsuperscript{906} He is held responsible.\textsuperscript{907} We cannot however speak of a direct accusation against God,\textsuperscript{908} as encountered at a later stage in


\textsuperscript{897} Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 91.

\textsuperscript{898} Job’s longing for death and idyllic depiction of Sheol is reminiscent of the Egyptian text \textit{A Dispute Over Suicide}, where death is portrayed as a land of pleasure and release from captivity, sickness and confinement of living.

\“Death is in my sight today
Like the recovery of a sick man,
Like going out into the open after confinement.
Death is in my sight today
Like the odour of myrrh,
Like sitting under an awning on a breezy day (line 131-136)
\”

Death is in my sight today
Like the longing of a man to see his house (again)
After he has spent many years held in captivity” (line 141-143). Cf. ANET (3d ed.; 1969) 405-407.

\textsuperscript{899} In Job 3:3 \textit{rbg} refers to a male infant. In Prov 30:19 it refers to a strong or young male person.

\textsuperscript{900} For v 23 the LXX reads, “Death is rest to such a man, for God has shut him in.” Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 44-45. He regards \textit{qanato~} in 3:23a as reflection of \textit{rbq} in 3:22b.

\textsuperscript{901} A tension is felt with his praise of God in 1:21. For Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 30, vv 24-26 provide a thematic counterpoint.

\textsuperscript{902} A relation between v 23 (\textit{rbgl}) and 20 (\textit{lm[l}), as in the case of vv 16 and 11 has been suggested. V 23 depends upon the \textit{tyrnh} in v 20. Cf. Freedman, “The Structure of Job 3,” 505.

\textsuperscript{903} Here \textit{rbg} can refer to any person in Job’s situation. Cf. Clines, Job, 101. By means of the use of the third person, the gap is bridged between references to humanity in general in the previous verses and vv 24-26, where the first person refers to Job’s own situation.

\textsuperscript{904} In proverbial wisdom discovering or knowing the correct “way” (\textit{ûrd}) is of central importance for success in life (Prov 4:10-19).

\textsuperscript{905} Resultantly, Job lost the ability of purposeful action. Cf. Newsom, Job, 96.

\textsuperscript{906} Gordis, Job, 39.

\textsuperscript{907} Job’s accusation that God has hedged him in (\textit{ûks}, used negatively) reverses the Satan’s allegation in 1:10 that Job’s integrity was conditioned by a hedge (\textit{ûkc}, used positively) of divine blessing. Cf. Habel, Job, 111-112. For Driver and Gray, Job, 39 \textit{ûkc} in 1:10 refers to God’s protection of Job, while in 3:23 it refers to the “mental embarrassment” which God’s treatment of Job had brought about. See also Job 38:8, where the sea (\textit{µy}), as symbol of chaos, is “hedged in” (\textit{ûws}) by God.

\textsuperscript{908} For Hesse, \textit{Hiob}, 49 the lament has been intensified to an accusation. Clines, Job, 101 does not hare this view, since divine restriction does not equal divine hostility. Job’s lament affirms the inescapable reality of his situation.
the Joban dialogue (Job 19). Still, here Job’s lament against the futility of (his) life is clear.

C2: Verses 24-26

In verses 24-26 the *Ich-Klage* is resumed, and here the lament is clearly applied to Job’s own situation.\(^909\) But the particle *yk* in verse 24 points to its relatedness with vv 20 and 23.\(^910\) The *yk* also provides a reason for Job’s earnest wish to be dead. The translation of v 24 is tricky. Here Job’s “groaning” (*hjna*) and “roarings” (*hgav*) have become, metaphorically speaking, his food and drink.\(^911\) Bread (*µjl*) and water (*µym*) no longer serve as basic forms of nourishment in the face of *lma* and *zgr*. Rather, his “groaning” accompanies his food and his roarings are “poured out” (*ûtn*) like water. By means of this imagery a very vivid picture is painted of Job’s experience of suffering.\(^912\) It is indeed comparable to a description of mourning.

The translation of verse 25 is likewise tricky. Literally it could be rendered “I feared a fear and it has come upon me, and that which I feared has come unto me.” By means of the use of *dp* (x 2) and *gy* the theme of fear and dread is the main concern.\(^913\) It has arrived (*hta*) and it has come (*awb*).\(^914\) The subject of this fear and dread remains elusive.\(^915\) A further question is whether v 25 concerns Job’s present or past experience.\(^916\) The rather strange temporality of v 25, indicated by the verb tenses, seems to indicate that what Job is encountering, i.e. that which is come upon him, did not take him by surprise. Seeing that no “past events” are recounted in the book of Job which could serve as background for his present experience, it seems most likely that what is at issue is his present experience, i.e. the events recounted in the prose prologue. Against the background of these experiences, no surprises are left.

The basic question of v 25 also applies to verse 26. Job was not at ease (*wlv*),\(^917\) he was not quiet (*fqv*), he had no rest (*jwn*),\(^918\) yet trouble (*zgr*) came. This can clearly be a reflection on the result of Job’s experience of suffering and turmoil and the absence of rest (vv 10, 17, 20, 26), resulting from the events narrated in the prose prologue (Job

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\(^909\) Van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 60, regards vv 24-26 as an independent strophe from vv 20-23.\(^910\) Clines, *Job*, 102.\(^911\) In Job 4:10 and Ps 22:2 *hgav* (“roarings”) is used of a lion in pain. Job’s roarings are comparable.\(^912\) Clines, *Job*, 102. Wolfers, Deep Things, 320, suggests the translation “For I confront my bread with sighing; And outpoured like waters are my groans.”\(^913\) Here *ûtn* (“pour out”) is comparable with Jer 42:18, 44:6, Dan 9:11, 27; 2 Chr 12:7, 34:25.\(^914\) Job 7:3-6; 30:15; 31:23 elaborates on this portrayal of his suffering.\(^915\) The LXX reads *ef th* (*think, consider.*) i.e. the terror of his meditation has come upon him.\(^916\) For Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 94 the language of v 25 consolidates Job’s suffering into a single experience “that has the quality of a ghastly encounter.” This LXX supports this notion, reading *sunhvnthsevn* “to meet.” i.e. that which Job feared is come to meet him.\(^917\) The LXX reading suggests that v 24b (“and I weep being beset with terror”) anticipates v 25a. For that which Job fears (*gr*) reappears later in his speeches (13:21, 30:15, 31:23), and that of the friends (15:21; 22:10).\(^918\) Clines, *Job*, 102-3. V 25 may refer to Job’s conflict with others, or to his “inner conflict.”\(^919\) In 16:12 Job laments the fact that he was at “ease” (*wlv*), but that God brought about a change in his situation, shaming him to pieces and setting him up for target practice.\(^920\) Job continues to endure a threefold absence of peace, rest and quiet in the land of the living, which is contrasted with a threefold exaltation on discovering the grave. Cf. Habel, *Job*, 112.
contrasted with the rest and quiet which he expects to find in Sheol (vv 13-15, 17-19). The reference to trouble that comes, leaves a question mark behind the nature of the trouble referred to. While the nature of \textit{zgr} is uncertain, its cause is clear.\footnote{922} It reflects back on that, i.e. the conditions of the “bitter soul,” described in the foregoing lament,\footnote{923} but also that it expects the responses of the friends in the ensuing dialogues. It is most probable that the imperfect \textit{abyw} is indicative of the continuation of Job’s experience of agony.\footnote{924} His curse and lament hitherto has had no effect on his situation.\footnote{925} The only result is a series of dialogues, including that of the divine. Instead of escaping \textit{zgr}, it continues.\footnote{926}

In v 26 \textit{zgr} is a keyword, but also as keyword for the entire chapter, providing the dominant tone.\footnote{927} It summarises his immediate experience, as well as his continued experience brought about by the dialogues. As such it provides a fitting conclusion to Job’s opening self-speech.\footnote{928} While death and the desire for death presents the main theme of the poem, the image of restlessness in v 26 serves as an indication to the reader that it will not be Job’s last words, preparing them for the continuation of the Joban tale.\footnote{929} If Job were to have died at this stage, his death would certainly be characterised as a bad death.\footnote{930} But as a result of his intense experience of \textit{lm} and \textit{zgr}, the rest that Sheol offers \textit{Jenseits} is preferable to a blessed name \textit{Diesseits}. Job still longs for the peaceful communion of Sheol, where even the “raging” (\textit{zgr}) of the wicked cease (3:17). Ultimately, in his present state of being, death is preferable to life (cf. 7:15).

\section*{3.6 Thematic Discussion}

The preference of death over life is not an unqualified preference.\footnote{931} Here we will consider the significance of the socio-historical context for interpreting Job 3 (§3.6.1), followed by the themes of creation (§3.6.2) and death (§3.6.3) as they function theologically in Job 3.

\begin{quotation}
\footnotetext[921]{In 2 Sam 22:8, Amos 8:8, Hab 3:7 \textit{zgr} describes the physical shaking of inanimate objects, and in 2 Sam 19:1, Jer 33:9, Joel 2:1, Ps 99:1 intense emotional agitation.}
\footnotetext[922]{Given that which Job feared in v 25, \textit{zgr} can refer to the reversal of the cosmic moral order, now perceived as chaotic. Cf. Clines, \textit{Job}, 103, 105. For Whybray, \textit{Job}, 40 it provides the reason for Job’s longing for death, namely, his world has become shattered. This argument is not conclusive.}
\footnotetext[923]{For Newsom, \textit{Job}, 94 \textit{zgr} should be read retrospectively, i.e. within the light of his curse.}
\footnotetext[924]{De Wilde, \textit{Das Buch Hiob}, 101}
\footnotetext[925]{Job 29-30 demands a declaration of innocence from God, without an expectation of His adherence.}
\footnotetext[926]{In this regard Brown, \textit{Character in Crisis}, 63 argues, “The peaceful communion for which Job desperately yearns among the dead is about to be displaced by strife among the living.” Here an expected logical movement, Job following the advice of his wife (2:9) and finding rest in Sheol, is interrupted.}
\footnotetext[927]{Clines, \textit{Job} 1-20, 77, 104. He regards v 26 as nodal verse in Job 3, since it contains in positive and negative form the dominant image of the poem, namely the presence of “turmoil” and absence of “ease.”}
\footnotetext[928]{The placement of \textit{zgr} sums up what, for Job, is wrong with life and what is desirable about Sheol. Cf. Clines, \textit{Job}, 104.}
\footnotetext[929]{Such an expectation is already created by means of the violent nature of Job’s death wish in vv 3-9.}
\footnotetext[930]{Cf. Job’s consideration of the contrast between one dying in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet (Job 21:23), while another dies in the bitterness of his soul (Job 21:25). Yet both will lie down alike in the dust (Job 21:26).}
\footnotetext[931]{Cf. Job 10:1; also 10:8-12, where Job reminds God of his being created, contrasting Job 3.}
\end{quotation}
3.6.1 The Context of the Book of Job

The search for a socio-historical context of the book of Job often results in an impasse of scholarly opinion. But despite the difficulties in establishing a context for the book of Job, it remains significant, since a better understanding of the conditions of the book’s composition can contribute to a better understanding of the theological questions it addresses, why such questions became pertinent, and the response that it offers to these questions. This applies particularly to the tenets of Israelite wisdom theology. Unfortunately the book of Job reflects very little of the times and conditions of its composition. The widely shared notion of multiple authorship indicated by the lack of stylistic uniformity, further complicates the question pertaining to the book’s composition.

Attempts at establishing a context for the book of Job are mostly based on ideological, linguistic, or literary grounds. In terms of a focus on ideology, the conditions of the Persian period have potential for comprehending the theological questions raised in the book of Job. The question of context is closely related to the envisioned audience of the book of Job. In this context the complaint of Job might be reflective of the changed socio-economic conditions experienced by the Israelite elitist class in the Persian period. As such it is comparable with the conditions under Persian rule attested in Neh 5:1-5. But evidence from the book of Job is too meagre for

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933 Both the real-time and narrative frame reflected in the book.


935 Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 240 argues that the Sitz im Leben of the Joban dialogue is most likely that of the first generation of the exile, between 585-570 BCE.

936 R. Albertz, “The Sage and Pious Wisdom in the Book of Job: The Friend’s perspective” (trans. L.G. Perdue), in: L.G. Perdue et al., The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 248, 260 interprets the lack of any clear eschatological thinking in the book of Job as indicative that Job and the friends belonged to a specific social class, and that their “conceptual horizons” are limited to one social class. Traditional wisdom thus became questionable as a result of social developments of the time.

937 R. Albertz, “Der sozialgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Hiobbuches und der ‘Babylonischen Theodizee’,” in: L. Perlitt and J. Jeremias (eds.), Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 349-372 regards the character of Job as an old fashioned aristocrat, contra the new elite of the Persian period who do not care about their social obligations toward the poor and the needy. They are the wicked in the book of Job. This implies that the social standing and interest of the author is comparable to that of Nehemiah’s author. L. Finkelstein, The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith (3d ed.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), 231-32 regards the book of Job in its original form as an accusation against God and the elite, with notions of equality reflected in Job 3:19 and 31:31. This indicates that the book was not written by a “man of wealth” in the 4th century BCE Jerusalem. For Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition, 65 the debate within the book of Job is between educated farmers, and not between members of an elite or professional class, thus supporting the argument of Finkelstein.

postulating such a specific context and concern.\textsuperscript{939} The theological issues raised in Job are also of such a nature that no uniform or particular audience is identifiable.\textsuperscript{940} Further, a much wider audience than merely an elitist class would be able to identify with the persistent theme of theodicy. It is not the fate and suffering of the elite that is specified in Job, but rather the fate and suffering of the righteous.

Difficulties encountered in trying to establish a context for the book of Job do not deter some scholars, such as Albertz, from interpreting Job 3 as a representative part of the theological wisdom of the dispersed Israelite elite.\textsuperscript{941} As such the development that takes place within the book of Job, that is from the hatred of life to its positive affirmation (cf. 3; 7:11ff; 10; 29:2ff; 31), is regarded as having a social function, addressed to the flabbergasted Israelite elite.\textsuperscript{942} This argument is not without merit,
but again it points to the class-specific limitation of Job’s theological wisdom, and as stated, the book of Job’s theological argument and implications transcend class specific boundaries.

The search for linguistic evidence has equally proven itself as an unsatisfactory avenue for determining a context for the book of Job. So, for instance, scholars often identify a variety of Aramaisms in the book of Job, indicative of a late compositional date, i.e. the Persian period, due to the advance of Aramaic as lingua franca. In this regard the criticism has been uttered that care should be taken when using the term Aramaism in reference to the material of the MT. Also in the book of Job such evidence remains disputable. The numerous hapax legomena occurring in the book of Job also complicate attempts at establishing a compositional context for the book of Job based on linguistic evidence. Literary evidence concerns both the literary form of the final shape of the book of Job (e.g. the prose prologue and epilogue and poetic dialogues), as well as the literary relation between parts of the book of Job (e.g. Job 3) and other texts in the HB (e.g. Gen 1:1-2:4a and Jer 20:14-18), and the wider literary familiarity of the character of Job in the HB (cf. Ezek 14:12-20). Literary, linguistic and ideological evidence offers insufficient grounds for establishing a certain historical and compositional context for the book of Job. This prompts the suggestion that the final form of the text should serve as point of departure for trying to determine a context for the book of Job. That is, acknowledging that the book of Job is the product of redactional labour, implying that the narrative frame (earlier) and poetic dialogues (later) stem from different periods and authorial hands. In view of these difficulties in establishing a context for the book of Job the question should rather concern the minimum that we can deduce from the text of Job. As such linguistic, literary and ideological approaches point to a late date (4th century BCE) for the book of Job. The book of Job in its final form is a literary work that does not merely try to address a particular audience within a particular socio-historical context grappling with a theological issue pertinent for a specific audience. The author rather followed the way of traditional wisdom thinking

righteousness, transcended the limits of death.” He suggests that it was among the upper classes that the recognition came that death could not simply be the end of their personal relationship with God.

Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion Vol. II, 517. This ideological-critical approach of Albertz and Crüsemann is reflective of a particular Zeitgeist in Germany in the 1970’s, with student revolts etc. and found its way into biblical scholarship.

Habel, Job, 40. A. Hurvitz, “Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered.” HTR 67 (1974): 17-34, made such an attempt and concluded that the book should be dated no earlier that the 6th century BCE.


Habel, Job, 41.

The relevance of references to “Job” in Ezek 14:12-20, with Noah and Dan(i)el, is problematic, since the prophet Ezekiel operated at the time of the destruction of Judah and the Babylonian Exile. For Clines, Job, lvii this reference is of no historical value, since it is probably a reference to an ancient folktale, rather than the character encountered in the book of Job.

and created a work with universal dimensions. In this way its readership and theological implications are not bound and limited to a socio-historical context. A further implication is that the book of Job does not lend itself very well for tracing a linear development in wisdom thinking and theological argumentation. In the case of Job 3 the familiarity with existing theological traditions (P and prophetic) at least points to a late date for the text.

### 3.6.2 Creation as a Theological Theme in Job 3

The primary theological matrix of the book of Job is that of creation. This is also the case in Job 3. How the theme of creation functions theologically in Job 3 requires further consideration, as well as the rhetoric of God within the creation language of Job 3. First we will consider creation as a theological theme within the broader context of the book Job, and then focus on the text of Job 3.

#### 3.6.2.1 Creation as a Theological Theme in the Book of Job

Creation provides the parameters for the soliloquy in Job 3, and remains a pertinent theme throughout the book. The author(s) incorporated traditional ideas within the framework of his (their) own theological agenda, complicating attempts at determining its precise nature. Technical terms for creation as encountered in the Priestly tradition (e.g. arb) or Deutero-Isaiah (e.g rxy) do not occur in the book of Job. But it does share the use of creation terminology such as hnb (“build”) and hc[

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949 Habel, Job, 42. Wolfers, Deep Things, 75 also argues that the content of Job does not confirm to any real or specific social setting. Though the prologue reflects an attempt to place the book within a certain socio-historical context (that of the patriarchs), this does not account for all the features of Job’s existence reflected in the book.

950 Clines, Job, lvii. Similarly Roberts, “Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition,” 114 argues that if it is accepted that the author of the book of Job stood in a long literary tradition, the actual dating of the composition of the book becomes irrelevant for exegetes, since the same issues being addressed also occur within a wider literary and cultural context. As such it is not necessary to assume that the book was composed within a period of national crisis, since this is not a prerequisite for addressing the issues at hand in Job. It does not have to be connected with the Israelite national history.


953 Fretheim, God and World, 227-228. A motivating factor for setting the dialogue in terms of creation is that Job’s most immediate experiences of suffering and ill-fortune are directly related to nature, or natural events, i.e. fire and windstorm (1:16-19), and disease (2:7-8). The question of Job’s suffering also brings into question the nature of God’s creation and His continuing relationship with it. Thus it is not surprising that God responds (38-41) to the speeches of Job by referring to creation.


955 It occurs only in Qoh 12:1 (as participle) in the HB wisdom literature.

956 For hnb in Job cf. 3:14; 20:19; 27:18 (Qal); 12:14; 22:23 (Ni).
This contributes to a correspondence with and deviation from the creation theology in other theological traditions of the HB.\textsuperscript{958} Further, the book of Job does not reflect a uniform creation theology, as evidenced by the poetic dialogues. This demonstrates the book’s polyphone nature.\textsuperscript{959} These contesting voices are not unrelated, but rather constitutive of the larger theological debate (or inner dialogue),\textsuperscript{960} in the sense that the different voices respond to one another. However, within the parameters of this theological debate a theological constant is identifiable, namely God’s portrayal as omnipotent creator – which is experienced both positively and negatively by the different characters of the Joban plot (cf. §3.6.2.3).

The book of Job contains a topsy-turvy theological landscape, and its creation theology is no exception.\textsuperscript{961} Not merely in Job 3, but also in the divine speeches (38-41).\textsuperscript{962} Overcome by his experience of suffering and turmoil, creation as Job knew it has come to an end. This is particularly evident in his opening soliloquy, expressing his desire for oblivion. But Job is offered a new perspective on creation in the response from the whirlwind. In this sense we can speak of an initial deconstruction (Job 3) and an eventual reconstruction of creation (Job 38-41) in the book of Job. In between these two poles we encounter the attempts of the friends who try to uphold the pillars on which the basic tenets of proverbial wisdom rest. This implies an ordered creation, governed by the principle of retribution (\textit{Tun-Ergebnis-Zusammenhang}), for which a just creator God is responsible. While these diverse perspectives at times constitute a tension within the book of Job, it is significant that they were retained, rather than dissolved by means of editorial labour. The centrality of creation as a theological theme in the book of Job is identifiable in the sense that it expands Job’s vision of the world, calling him to deepened faith that goes beyond mere human understanding.\textsuperscript{963}


\textsuperscript{958} E.g. the motif of being fashioned in the womb (31:15), being formed from clay (Eliphas, 33:6), being made and fashioned by the hands of YHWH (10:8) and the breath of every living being belonging to the creator (12:10). Creation can also be called to witness (12:7-8).

\textsuperscript{959} According to Clifford, \textit{Creation Accounts}, 185-6 Job sees God’s creation as a violent and careless manipulation of things and living beings (9:5-13, 10:8-13; 12:13-25), while Bildad holds on to the concept of order and majesty in the created works of God (25:1-6, 26:5-24). For Eliphas nature forms the basis for unquestioning awe (36:24-37:24). The reflection on creation within the speeches of God (38:1-40:5, 40:6-42:6) differs from all the foregoing, while at the same time engages in a dialectical discourse with the perspectives of Job and the friends. Also Wagner, “Schöpfung im Buche Hiob,” 183-189.

\textsuperscript{960} In contrast to the inconsistent way in which death is addressed within the book of Job, it is rather consistent in its portrayal of God as omnipotent creator, though this omnipotence may be positively or negatively interpreted.

\textsuperscript{961} The Joban rhetoric and vision of creation stands in a critical relation with creation theology of Proverbial wisdom. Cf. H.D. Preuß, \textit{Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur} (KUTB 383; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 93. The creation theology in the book of Job fits within the framework of the \textit{hymnisch-weisheitliche Tradition}. This view is comparable to the doxological perspective on creation and the creator within Ps 104 (God as the “playful creator”).

\textsuperscript{962} Here Job’s anthropocentric perspective of creation is challenged, since humanity is marginalised in terms of the divine response. These speeches stand in closer proximity to Ps 104, and both stand in contrast to Gen 1:1-2:4a.

\textsuperscript{963} D. Bergant, “The Greening of Creation: The Wisdom Tradition and Creation.” \textit{Theology Today} 47 (2000): 124-134, at 25. The absence of a reference to the creation of humanity in the divine speeches may be indicative of a move from an anthropocentric to a cosmocentric worldview. Anthropology is re-incorporated into a new cosmology, requiring the re-examination of various tenets of traditional faith.
3.6.2.2 The Rhetoric of God in the book of Job

In the book of Job the person of God is intriguing and difficult to comprehend. An immediate difficulty is that the book does not portray any single image of God, but rather a plurality of often contrasting images. Thus, in a sense, too much is known about the Deity. There are too many contesting theologies operative in the book of Job. However, the diverse designations and depictions of the deity in the book of Job indicate that the author(s) of the book of Job did not hesitate to scrutinise existing views of the deity, while at the same time refusing to discard tradition. In Job the transition from prose to poetry brings about a different picture of the deity. Ultimately, through a process of vigorous theological debate, it is the (informed) traditional view of the deity that is confirmed in the book of Job. In this way the rhetoric of God in the book of Job is dynamic rather than static. Nevertheless the deity remains the Deus creator omnium in Job, responsible for all that exists, and envisioned as being above.

The rhetoric of God in the book of Job brings into focus the variety of designations for God. In the prose prologue God is referred to within the earthly realm by the name µyhla and in heaven by the name hwhy. In the poetic dialogues between Job and his three friends, God is referred to by a variety of names and titles, each with its own connotations and implications. For example, in the opening chapters of the book, Job refers to God as “the God of creation,” “the God of the universe,” and “the God of the heavens.” These names and titles serve to highlight the various aspects of God’s nature and character, and to underscore the importance of understanding God in the context of the book’s overall narrative.

In the poetic dialogue with Job, God speaks directly to Job, using a variety of names and titles to describe his nature and character. These names and titles are used to emphasize God’s sovereignty, wisdom, power, and majesty. For example, God speaks of himself as the “LORD,” “the God of creation,” “the God of the universe,” and “the God of the heavens.” These names and titles serve to underscore the importance of understanding God in the context of the book’s overall narrative.

The book of Job is a profound exploration of the nature of God and the relationship between God and humanity. It raises important questions about the nature of suffering, the role of God in the world, and the nature of human freedom and responsibility. Through the dialogues between Job and his three friends, and between Job and God, the book presents a complex and nuanced understanding of God that is both challenging and rewarding to explore.

References:
Burkes, God, Self and Death, 38. Also Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 129. Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, 221 argued that in Job it is not so much the question of suffering that has become problematical, but God.

Wolfers, Deep Things, 77 judges the designation of the deity in Job as presenting a “convention in the use of the divine names which is unique to that Book, with a very meticulous restriction placed on the use of ‘The Lord’ as an indication of His ‘presence’ and personality as distinct from his function, status and power.” He does not share the notion of a lack of theological uniformity in Job.


According to Mettinger, “The God of Job,” 48 the deity encountered in the Job is not an amoral God who has brought about an amoral creation. Rather, “It seems that the idea of God as the preserver and protector of his creation has a more important place in the author’s agenda than the question of the ultimate origin of evil.”

Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, 217 argued that in the poetical responses of Job there is a new tone in which God is presented as the direct enemy of humankind. Also Crenshaw, “The Concept of God,” 11.

The author(s) of the book of Job can at least be considered a “critical Israelite.” Cf. Habel, Job, 40.

God is referred to as “maker” in Job 4:17; 9:9; 40:19 (pte. of hc); also 32:22; 35:10; 36:3 (pte. of l[p]). See also Job 26:5-14 which describes the power of the deity as creator.

Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment, 60-61. Here Job differs from Qohelet, for whom God (µyhla) is above all Deus absconditus.


Cf. Job 1:1, 5, 8, 9, 16, 22; 2:1, 3, 10 and as object 2:9.

Cf. Job 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 21; 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7.
and the friends, §a and §hwa are predominant, thereafter §yd while §µhå occurs rarely, and §hwhy and §yta only once. In the Elihu speeches §a is predominant, while §hwa and §yd occur with equal frequency, while §µhå occurs twice. Within the divine speeches §µhå and §a occur three times each, §hwa twice and §yd once. In the prose epilogue only the name §hwhy is used (ET, 42:1, 7, 9, 10-12). In addition the name §hc is also used by Elihu, Eliphaz and the deity. Bildad uses only §a and in parallel also §yd. In Job 28, the poem on wisdom, Job uses the name §yta (28:28) as well as three rare names, §vidq (5:1; 6:10; 15:15), §yfpv (9:15, as Ptc.) and §ylag (19:25, as Qal ptc.). This diversity of designations for the Deity contributes to the complex theological landscape of the book of Job, and contributes to the elusive nature of the deity in the book of Job.

In the prose prologue, God is presented as the one who dialogues (1:7; 2:2), who negotiates (1:11; 2:6), who is appeased by offerings (1:5), who gives and takes (1:21), who is responsible for both good and evil (2:10) and who destroys (2:3). Job’s wife judges God to be responsible for the fate that befell Job (2:9). In response to His actions God may be either blessed (1:21) or cursed (2:9). Later in the Joban dialogues, the image of God as destroyer is latched unto, with Job proclaiming God to be his adversary (cf. 16:9-14; 19:11-12), destroying (§hlk) the blameless (§µt) and the wicked (§v); cf. 9:22). This picture of God, as active “persecutor,” conflicts with Job’s complaint regarding God’s absence (cf. 13:24) or His observation of Job’s suffering without delivering him (30:20). The depiction of God as absent implies that Job cannot establish a rendezvous with God to present his case of innocence before Him (23:8-9). God is simultaneously experienced as too distant and too close. God is the Deus ludens who can make or break Job (Job 9:1-35). Ironically He remains Job’s only source of hope. This is achieved particularly by means of Job’s recollection of his former relationship with God, which has now become tension-filled. If we consider the way in which God is addressed in the speeches of Job, a progression is

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979 Cf. Job 5:8; 20:29; 32:2; 34:9; 36:2; 38:7; as subject 28:23; 31:6; 33:12; 35:10; 39:17.


983 The traditional imagery of God as divine warrior “is redirected so that the deity is not understood as a cosmic benefactor, beating back the forces of chaos, but as a demonic figure devouring his own helpless creatures.” Cf. Burkes, God, Self and Death, 39. See also Job 9:24, 6:8-9, 7:20, 10:3-8, 13:24-25, 14:18-19, 30:21-23 for instances where God is depicted as destroyer and watcher of humanity.

984 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 40. Job’s bitter complaint concerning God’s absence presents a sharp contrast with Ps 139:7-10 that reads “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.”

noticeable. In his first speech God is addressed directly, while in the second and third speeches, God is spoken of in a vague manner. This creates the impression that He is some distant reality, not immediately present (cf. 11:7-8).

These contrasting depictions of the Deity are not readily accepted by Job’s friends. God is depicted in the speeches of Bildad (8:1-6), Zophar (11:6) and Eliphaz (22:5-11) as doing no wrong and rewarding each according to their deeds (34:10). This supports the notion of a just creator God governing an ordered creation. In fairness to the friends, room is allowed for the possibility that God both wounds and heals, as Eliphaz argues (5:18), while Elihu regards God’s adversity as a tool for instruction, leading to deliverance (37:13). Zophar maintains God’s justice, though his description of God’s incomprehensible nature (11:7-9) has implications for his own attempts to defend the justice of God. This is also the case in the description of God’s greatness and incomprehensibility in the speeches of Eliphaz (22:1-3) and Elihu. In this way their view of God differs significantly from the prose prologue and epilogue, since they do not accept that human action affects the Deity in any way. Such a view of the Deity however raises the question concerning divine justice and mercy, given that creation is subject to the volatile will of the Deity and that the Deity remains out of human reach.

In the divine speeches God is first and foremost depicted as the powerful creator, the grand architect of creation, who measured everything to the point of perfection (cf. 38:5-6) who cares for every aspect of creation, and also nourishes (38:39-41). The motif of God as divine warrior reappears in the second of the divine speeches (cf. 40:9), particularly in the references to Behemoth (40:19) and Leviathan (41:34). But within this context divine omnipotence is positively portrayed, i.e. hedging in the forces of chaos, ascribing to everything its proper place. Indeed, the Deity rejoices over creation.

This positive depiction of the Deity is continued in the prose epilogue, where God is portrayed as the restorer of Job’s good fortune (42:10f), requiring a sacrifice from the friends and intercession from Job on the friends’ behalf, as intercession for the friends.

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986 Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 98.
987 This is partially so because they cling to the notion of God’s justice and power, refusing to accept Job’s innocence.
988 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 41.
989 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 42. This presents a contrast with Job’s own declaration of the greatness of God, as the creator of everything in 9:1-21. In the speeches of the friends, statements regarding God are far removed from deuteronomistic theology that states God’s expectations and the consequences of human actions.
990 By clinging to the principle of retribution, the friends actually “imprison the deity in a rigid system that human beings actually control by their conduct.” Cf. Crenshaw, “The Concept of God,” 13.
992 Job already described God as the one trampling the Sea and subduing Rahab’s helpers (9:8-9) and arguing that Sheol, Abaddon, Sea, Rahab, and the serpent are subjected to the power of the divine warrior (26:5-6, 12-13).
993 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 43. Also Smith, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism, 33 who observes that within the speeches of God, the portrayal of God is modelled neither on Baal or El, since God does not appear in western storm clouds of Baal or in dreams as El typically would. God is portrayed as appearing in the whirlwind of the arid desert storm, “associated mythologically, if anything, with Mot, the god of death.” Yet God does not bring death, but rather restores life.
(42:8) who have not spoken rightly about Him. In this way God is depicted as acting in a way comprehensible to humans, and perhaps even more significant, God is presented as accessible in and responsive to the cult. So the predominant view of God as elevated and elusive is qualified to some extent. What is possible to say about God is not limited to human expectation or experience. Thus, the process of theological scrutinising draws the confession from Job’s lips “but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5). Within the Israelite religion God and world belong together and therefore any inquiry concerning God is also an inquiry into the world. For this reason it can also be judged that Job has come to see the world through different eyes.

3.6.2.3 The Rhetoric of God in Job 3

In Job 3 the Deity is mentioned twice by name (Job 3:4, 23), and in both cases by means of ðwla. The contexts in which these references to God occur are overtly negative. Job does not want God to regard his day of birth or his night of conception from above (v4), and God is accredited with hiding his way and hedging him in (v23). In both cases God is brought in direct relation with Job’s origin and his life course. These two references to God latch unto the prose prologue (Job 1-2), where God entices Satan to “consider” His servant Job (1:8), and where Satan accuses God of putting a hedge around Job (1:10), keeping him safe, and that this would explain his piety. In 3:20 we have an indirect reference to the Deity, inferring that God is considered the sole source of light and life. Here also the positive images of light and life occur within a very negative context. Job fails to understand why God grants life to those who are not in a position to enjoy it. In all of these instances, God appears as the subject of an action in the first strophe of a stanza. The picture that emerges of the Deity in Job’s opening self-speech is rather complex. God is accredited with bestowing life, but also with bestowing life to the bitter soul, and even being the cause of such bitterness. While Job is longing for death’s relief in chapter 3, God is not associated with death. After all, Job wants to hide in Sheol, betting on God’s absence. While Sheol is depicted as part and parcel of divine creation, it is nowhere said that God created death. The God of Job 3 is not merely the source of light and life, but

994 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 44. In the editorial epilogue of Qohelet (12:9-14), the role and function of the cult is presented in a similar fashion. In Job this view is limited to the prose prologue and epilogue, where God responds favourably to ritual and sacrifice.
995 In the epilogue God does not return to the realm of heaven to re-engage in a debate with the Satan as in the prologue. Rather, as Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 393 argues “Yahweh’s rightful place is not in the speculations of heaven, but in the realities of the earth.”
996 Job interprets this as indicative of an inconsistency in the character of God, threatening his worldview with collapse. Cf. Crenshaw, “The Concept of God,” 11.
998 This accusation that ðwla has “hedged in” (ûks) reflects an awareness of the challenge and response taking place between God and the Satan.
999 For the Satan as Accuser, cf. Zech 3:1-2, where the Satan opposes Joshua the high priest. Also Ps 109:6 and 1 Chr 21:1, where the Satan “stood up” against Israel.
1000 Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 160.
1001 But God is closely related to the event of death, as reflected in Job’s whish that God will bring his life to an end (cf. Job 6:8-9).
also the one who can bring an end to life (cf. Job 1:21, with YHWH as the one that gives and take, here also related to life).  

3.6.2.4 Creation as a Theological Theme in Job 3

For Job universal creation is so closely linked to his own creation “that God’s randomness and injustice toward him is simply one more instance of God’s randomness and injustice toward the world.” This Joban view is advanced by his experience of suffering, and as a result, anthropocentric is a term applicable to the creation theology of Job 3. In this way it differs from the otherwise theocentric orientation of the creation theology operative in the book of Job. For this reason Job’s curse and lament apply in the first instance to his own creation. It is this positioning of Job in the centre of creation that forms the background for the divine response from the whirlwind in Job 38-41 (cf. §3.6.2.2.3).

It remains significant that the language of creation was chosen as a theological vehicle for verbalising Job’s acute experience of agony. While familiar creation imagery is employed in Job 3, neither creation nor creator are presented as objects of praise. Rather, Job’s experience of suffering has transformed a perceived beneficial created order into meaningless chaos. Creation has lost its beauty, meaning and beneficence. It is perceived as unfortunate, devoid of peace and justice, and as such unfair. It brings only desire and dread. Creation has become subject to divine volatility, containing no guarantees. For this reason scholars often refer to the creation imagery employed in Job 3 as a reversal of creation. I.e., the creation imagery or sequence of creation as encountered in Gen 1:1-2:4a is reversed in Job 3, predominantly in the curse section, bringing it in closer proximity to the imagery encountered in Jer 20:14-18.

Job’s suffering has become the determining principle for his consideration of creation and creator, i.e. for his theology of creation. In spite of this, God remains the theological constant. Creation might be experienced as bad, but it is still God’s creation. God is brought into proximity with Job’s pre-created state of being, as seen from his cursing of the night of his conception, recognising God’s involvement

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1003 Clifford, Creation Accounts, 185.

1004 One can note the potential cosmic dimension of his curse. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 185 refers to the relatedness of Job’s creation and that of the universe, resulting in a perception that “God’s randomness and injustice toward him is simply one more instance of God’s randomness and injustice toward the world.”

1005 Thus it is far removed from the doxological creation theology of Ps 104.

1006 Contra Qoh 11:7.

1007 The tenets of proverbial wisdom, supporting the causality principle, no longer provide a foundation for making sense of the world. Cf. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 196.

1008 Reventlow, “Leben und Tod im Alten Testament,” 11. He employs the term vorgeburtliche Sorge. See also Job 10:8, 10-12. This theological thinking concerning a vorgeburtliche Sorge is brought into question in the creation theology of Qohelet (cf. 11:5).
in his creation from the onset. This adds to the bitterness of his experience of suffering, resulting in a preference of death over life.

3.6.2.4.1 The Creation Theology of Job 3 in view of Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Job wishes for the undoing of his creation. This undoing is reflective of the process of creation as it is described in Gen 1:1-2:4a. But to state that Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation presents a reversal of creation as described in Gen 1 is claiming too much. The primary picture of creation (both the process and result) that emerges from the Priestly creation text of Gen 1:1-2:4a is that it is ordered and beneficial. It enjoys divine approval and humanity enjoys a privileged position, being created in the image of . It is particularly the notion of creation as ordered and beneficial, i.e. as good, which is challenged in Job 3. The divinely created order that constitutes the conditions for life is no longer recognisable to Job. As such creation is no longer comprehensible or trustworthy. In Gen 1:1-2:4a divine rest ( ) presents the climax of the creation account, which indicates its completeness. In Job 3 death presents the expected climax of Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation.

The author of Job 3 did have the creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a in mind. In Gen 1:1-2:4a we read that the earth was empty and void ( ) and darkness ( ) was upon the face of the deep ( ). But the spirit of God ( ) moved upon the face of the “waters” ( ). In this way the powers of death, here darkness and water, have already been “breathed upon” by the , even before the creation of light (v 3), and the separation of light and darkness (v 4). Still, that which is representative of death is not said to have been created (contra Isa 45:7), while allusions thereto indicate that it is not denied. In the P creation account it is rather

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1009 For Terrien, Elusive Presence, 370-371, Job is contemplating the creator at work, particularly at a time when the history of Israel became meaningless. Within a situation utter meaninglessness, Job turns to creation and creator in search of meaning.

1010 Janzen, “The Place of Job,” 528 regards Gen 1, Ps 8 (Jonah 7:17-18; 25), Gen 2-3, the traditions of the exodus and of Sinai, Second Isaiah as the main traditions on which the text of Job 3 works it transformations. He shares the argument of Cross that Gen 1 in particular is reflected within Job 3.

1011 Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 321-322 argues that the only real parallel between these two texts, presenting a reversal, concerns the imperatives and .

1012 The P creation account does not merely communicate something about the way in which creation took place, but also about the One responsible for creation. Cf. E. Noort, “The Creation of Light in Genesis 1:1-5: Remarks on the Function of Light and Darkness in the Opening Verses of the Hebrew Bible,” in: G.H. van Kooten (ed.), The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-Interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics (TBN 8; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 20. This is important, given the polemical context in which the P creation account was composed.

1013 Cline, Job, 81 challenges the argument of Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 151-167, namely that Job 3:3-13 represents a reversal of the world-ordering events of Gen 1. He proposes that Job’s concern in 3:3-13 is not with the created order as established in Gen 1 as a whole, but only with those elements that brought about his own existence. Thus it is directed against the two events that made his life possible, namely conception and birth, and directed against the day and the night when those events occurred. Cf. Ps 19:2-4 (HB 2-4) where day and night are personified as living entities. Job 3:3 might contain a similar notion.

1014 Janzen, Job, 70.

1015 Noort, “The Creation of Light,” 16 points to the being taken over from Ezekiel, and that it is given a very different place in the P account of creation.
limited by $\mu$h\i$. By means of his curse, Job wants (his) creation to return to such a dark and chaotic state. For this reason the divine command in Gen 1:3, “let there be light” ($r\w a\ y\hy$), is countered by Job’s wish, “let there be darkness” ($\uu\w j$ $\hy\hy$). He wants the light of his life to be extinguished. But Job’s curse does not have the same effect as the divine fiat of Gen 1:3.

In Gen 1:4 the works of divine creation are judged as good ($\bw f$, also 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and finally 1:31 $\damb\w f$ as conclusion of the divine evaluation). In Job 3 creation is not qualified by this adjective, since creation’s ugly side has been revealed to Job. That creation is good implies that it is ordered, and this ordering of creation by means of divine separation ($\l y\bh$) is central to the text of Gen 1:1-2:4a. In this way Gen 1:5 recounts the separation of day ($\mu\w y$) and night ($\uu\w j$). Job in turn curses both his day of birth and night of conception (3:3). This results from Job’s experience of creation’s de-ordering. The ordering of creation by means of divine separation continues in Gen 1:6-10, while Job sees the structure of his existence crumbling. Therefore he desires to be dissolved by chaos.

While Gen 1:11 recounts the divine command for the earth ($\w A\r a$) to bring forth life (vegetation, cf. 1:24 for animal life), Job does not judge the world as a place worthy of bringing forth life. The divine ordering of creation by means of division – this time of lights - continues in Gen 1:14, while Job calls for the extinguishing of all light and lights (3:4-10). In Gen 1:20 the waters ($\mu\w y$) no longer presented as a threat, since it has been ordered) are commanded to bring forth life. Job would rather that the waters cover all of creation. The creation ($\w a\rb$) of the $\mu\w y\it$ in Gen 1:21 is a further instance of how everything, even earlier representatives of chaos, has its ordered place within creation. On his part, Job would rather be swallowed by the great fish (cf. 3:8, the rousing of $\w t\y\bh$).

All living creatures are said to be created after its kind in Gen 1:25, stressing the ordered nature of creation. For Job, such a class division is derogatory, since God does not seem to distinguish between the miserable and the happy. The distinctly Priestly concept of Gen 1:26-27, that humanity is created in the image ($\mu\w l\w x$) of God, is put to question in Job 3. In view of the description of Job’s physical condition (Job 2:7-8, 12; 7:5), he would not consider himself in any way as a reflection of the divine. Gen 1:28 recounts the divine blessing and command to be fruitful – to multiply – to look after, and to subdue the earth. This divine imperative is painful to the ears of Job, since he kept to this command, but to no avail. He lost his sons (1:19), and his possessions (1:14-17), and his good stewardship (31:16-21, 24, 31-32) brought him no profit. God’s care for creation continues with the designation of food for humans (1:29) and animals (1:30). Among the ashes Job lost his appetite, expecting to soon become food for the maggots (21:26).

After the completion of his works of creation (Gen 2:1), God rests ($t\bw v$) on the seventh day (Gen 2:2), and He bestows his blessing ($\w u\rb$) on everything He has made (2:3). After seven days and nights of silence and mourning (Job 2:13), Job finally
breaks the silence and curses (לע) his creation (Job 3:1). He seeks rest (יו) and quiet (שׁו), but all he could find is trouble (טיה).

These literary relations are based more on thematic than pure linguistic grounds, but a relation is noticeable nonetheless. What God created in Gen 1:1-2:4a, Job wants to undo by means of his curse. Not in any overtly systematic way, since he merely wants order to return to chaos - bringing an end to his already miserable existence. While the texts of Job 3 and Gen 1:1-2:4a employ related language of creation, it is employed for very different purposes. Gen 1:1-2:4a stress the ordered, beneficial and good nature of creation, while Job 3 regards creation to be devoid of any kind of order, beneficence or goodness.

3.6.2.4.2 The Creation Theology of Job 3 and 38

While the prose prologue (Job 1-2) presents the background for Job’s opening self-speech, Job 3 presents the background for the first of the divine speeches in Job 38.1018 It offers no direct answer to the questions raised in the poetic dialogues,1019 but it does have the important function of removing Job from the centre of creation, forcing or at least inviting him to consider creation from a different perspective, namely that of the creator (38:4).1020 While Job’s world is falling apart as a result of his experience of suffering, it does not imply that creation as such becomes meaningless.1021 This dislocation of Job is assisted due to the absence of any reference to humanity within the divine speeches as a whole, and contributes to debunk Job’s anthropocentric view of creation.

God’s encounter with Job in the whirlwind (תְּאֹרֶם) is significant.1022 In response to the laments and challenges of Job, God does not choose the court of law (contra Job’s longing for it, cf. 13:3; 23:3-7), but rather the arena of creation.1023 It presents a very fitting response to Job’s opening self-speech, in which (his) creation is the object of his curse (3:3-10).1024 In contrast to Job’s hatred of (his) life in Job 3, Job 38 affirms the “splendor and vastness of life.”1025 In this way Job’s affirmation of death in

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1021 In a sense, “The poetics of suffering in chapter 3 seeks to contract the whole world to a point of extinction, and it generates a chain of images of enclosure and restriction. The poetics of providential vision in the speech from the storm conjures up horizon after expanding horizon, each populated with a new form of life” Cf. Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 103-4.

1022 In Job 9:17 Job fears that God will crush him with a storm (תְּאֹרֶם). Cf. Prov 10:25.

1023 The lawsuit (בְּר) theme is not entirely absent from God’s opening speech. So e.g. Job is accused of darkening counsel (38:2), by words without knowledge. In 42:7 (ET) the Diety states that Job has spoken rightly of him.

1024 According to Fokkelman, *Major Poems* I, 177 the thrust of the poem consist of “the titanic struggle between the power of the death wish and the power which invites Job to come to terms with reality.”

chapter 3 is turned into an affirmation of life in the images and language of God’s opening response.\textsuperscript{1026} Indeed, each act of creation is celebrated for its own sake, testifying to the omnipotence of the creator.\textsuperscript{1027}

In Job 38:3 YHWH addresses Job as \textit{rbg} latching unto Job 3:3 (“a man is born”). The \textit{rbg} is invited to listen, and challenged to respond if he can. Job is indeed flabbergasted by the divine magnificence. YHWH “established” (\textit{dsy}) the earth (38:4). He further “placed” (\textit{µyc}) and “measured” (\textit{hfn}) 38:5; he “fastened” ([\textit{bf}, litt “to sink down”) the foundations and “laid” (\textit{hry}) the cornerstone (\textit{htnp -ba}) of the earth (38:6).\textsuperscript{1028} YHWH leaves no doubt that His creation is secure, as also indicated by the “exaltation” (\textit{÷nr}) of the “morning stars” (\textit{rqb ybkwk}) and the “shout” ([\textit{wr}, Hi) of all the “sons of God” (\textit{µyhla ynbAlk}; 38:7).\textsuperscript{1029}

A subsequent elaboration follows, since YHWH shuts up (ûws) the sea (\textit{µy}) and brought the life threatening waters under control (38:8-11).\textsuperscript{1030} Depending on the interpretation of \textit{µy} / \textit{µwy} in Job 3:8, Job’s wish for oblivion is here countered by YHWH’s declaration that the sea and waters are secure within the boundaries that He has set.\textsuperscript{1031}

YHWH “commands” (\textit{hwx}, Pi) the morning (\textit{rqfb}) and is responsible for each new sunrise (\textit{rjv}), i.e. for each new day (38:12). Thus, Job’s wish for the undoing of “his day” (3:3-10) is entirely ineffectual.\textsuperscript{1032} The divine speech goes a different direction in 38:13, where YHWH is said to “shake” (\textit{r[n}) the wicked (\textit{ltv}) from the earth as one would shake dirt from a cloth. Also, “light” (\textit{rwa}) is withheld from the wicked (38:15). In this way the accusation that the Deity makes no distinction is countered.

In Job 38:16 the divine speech goes in another direction. Job’s attention is now turned to the “springs” (ûbn) of the sea and the “deep” (\textit{µwht}), and in 38:17 the “gates of death” (\textit{twmAyr[v}) come into focus, as well as the “doors of the shadow of death” (\textit{twmlx yr[v}). It is this “shadow of death” (\textit{twhx}) that Job wanted to cover his existence (3:5). God’s questions to Job are rhetorical, but also point out that these regions, hidden to human perception, are part of divine creation and as such accessible to the creator.\textsuperscript{1033} Thus, Job’s gamble of betting on Sheol as a place of rest and the absence of God will not pay off. The “breadth of the earth” (ÅraAybjrAd) is subjected

\textsuperscript{1026} Alter, \textit{Biblical Poetry}, 99-100. The imagery of physical generation and birth in God’s first speech indicates that Job 38 was purposefully articulated as a reversal of Job 3.

\textsuperscript{1027} Clifford, \textit{Creation Accounts}, 197. He further argues that Job “presents a deliberate counterargument that human society is not the centre of creation and that the wonders of the world are an invitation to hymn the creator.”

\textsuperscript{1028} A symbolic equivalence of cosmos and temple, creation and temple building (seven days of creation in Gen 1-11 and the seven years of Solomon’s temple building in 1 Kgs 6:37-38), are expressed in the questions God directs to Job in 38:4-7. Cf. Blenkinsopp, \textit{Sage, Prophet, Priest}, 113.

\textsuperscript{1029} Alter, \textit{Biblical Poetry}, 98 regards 38:7, depicting the completion of creation, as a counter image of Job 3:9.

\textsuperscript{1030} In 12:15 the Deity is also the one responsible for the flood. He withholds the waters and sends (\textit{ltv}) them out, to the effect that they overturn the earth.


\textsuperscript{1033} Death is not perceived as an independent power in Job, but is “allowed” within creation as a natural, though at times lamented, part of human existence.
to the creator’s omnipotence (38:18). In 38:19-21 r̂ and Ṝ are brought in close proximity. The way and abode of both are unknown and inaccessible to Job despite his great number of days, though both have their proper place within creation.

In Job 38:22-29 the divine speech turns to the height of the heavens, where the mystery of rain and other meteorological phenomena are listed and ascribed to the creator, as sole progenitor. Job 38:30 belongs with vv 22-29, but refers to the frozen surface of the “face of the deep” (µwht ynp), i.e. the waters. The focus swiftly shifts back to the heavenly realm in 38:31, where even the constellations make an appearance (Pleiades, ḥmjk and Orion, ḥsk in 38:31 and Mazzaroth, twzm and Arcturus, ṭf in 38:32). Ultimately the ordinances of heaven remain unknown to Job (38:33). As such he cannot lift up his voice, i.e. order the clouds to cover (ḥsk) him with water (38:34). He has no authority over or insight into what happens in the realm of heaven (38:35-38), which is considered as the abode of the divine (cf. §4.6.2.4).

The content of Job 38:38-41 is of a different nature, but the theme is quite similar, namely the creator’s providence and omnipotence contrasted with Job’s limited understanding and inability. He “fills” (al m Pi) the appetite of the young lions, responding even to the cry of the young and exposed ravens. Thus, that the cosmogony in the first speech of God is described in terms of procreation and not in terms of some Canaanite cosmogonic myth is significant. Due to the employment of this specific imagery, the reader is invited “to imagine in this fashion creation not as the laying low of a foe but as the damming up and channeling of powers nevertheless allowed to remain active” (cf. Job 38:-11). Thus, when read against the background of Job’s soliloquy, Job 38 serves to counter Job’s experience of creation.

3.6.2.5 Creator and Creation in Job 3

Job and the friends accredit God as the one responsible for all creation and life. The connection between divine creation and divine wisdom is also an important theme (cf. Job 12:12-13). But the “attitude” of the creator toward creation (particularly individual creation) remains ambiguous. In this way Job can give a very vivid description of his being created by the deity (10:8-10), but in the same breath accuse his creator as the one who despises the work of His hands (10:3), who hedges in and darkens the way; as the one who loosens his cord (30:1), and that he is troubled by the divine presence (23:15). Indeed, he wishes that the Deity would depart from him in order that he may die (7:19). The divine response from the whirlwind prompts the question concerning the nature of the relationship between the Deity and Job. We

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1034 For Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 98 light and darkness in Job 38 exist “in a delicate and powerful dialectic beyond the knowledge of humanity and that the balance between light and darkness is part of the unfathomable beauty of creation.”


1036 Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death in Qoheleth,” 205. He states that after Job realised the futility of death, he “perceived the revelatory potential of creation.”

1037 Job contrast’s his critical view of wisdom with the traditional view of the friends, stating in 12:2 that “wisdom will die with you.”

have already pointed to the difference between this divine-human relationship as it is envisioned in Job 3 (negative) and Job 29:2-6 (positive).  

This relationship as envisioned in the voice from the whirlwind departs from the relationship as envisioned in the Priestly or Jahwistic account of creation, but also from traditions as encountered in Ps 8 (echoed in Job 7:17-19) or at times in Deutero-Isaiah. Other than the divine-human relation envisioned in the divine speeches, this relationship as it is envisioned in Job 3 does however stand in closer proximity to such creation traditions. Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation presupposes an intimate divine-human relationship (cf. 10:8-10; also 31:15, where the Deity is said to have fashioned all life in the womb). In view of his suffering, this presupposition has become problematic. In this way Job 3 (also Ps 39) offers a basis for reflection on human existence in relation to God.

While the omnipotence and magnificence of the creator is celebrated in the book of Job, it also brings with it the question concerning the creator’s responsibility and commitment toward His (suffering) creation. This question was already brought into focus by the Satan’s challenge to God in the prologue (Job 1-2). According to the Satan, Job’s commitment to God is preconditioned (cf. 1:9). When he has been deprived of all divine privilege and his life is threatened, he will turn against God (cf. 1:11; 2:4). The testing of Job has some horrific consequences, including the death of his sons (1:19), which in effect lends it greater social significance. But is ordered to preserve Job’s life (2:6), which remains the exclusive possession of the creator (27:3, 8). In all this testing of Job, the Accuser is not at leave to act outside the divine stipulations. Thus, while Job is given into the hand of the Accuser (2:6), his life remains secure within the parameters of the divine will. While the divine-human relationship is not discarded, the human

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1039 J.E. Hartley, “From Lament to Oath: A Study of Progression in the Speeches of Job,” in: W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), The Book of Job (BETL 114; Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 90. In Job 3:2 Job asks why light is given to the man whose way is hid, while in Job 29:3 he recalls a time when he walked through darkness by means of God’s light.

1040 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 46. Elihu’s reasoning in Job 33:4, stating “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life,” stands in close proximity to Gen 2:7, as part of the I creation account (Gen 2:4b-3:24).

1041 This motif is well reflected in Isa 40:26-28, “Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out there host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because He is great in strength, mighty in power not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from YHWH, and my right is disregarded by my God?’ Have you not known? Have you not heard? YHWH is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable.”

1042 Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 301. It is within the framework of a brief, personal life that meaning must be sought.


1044 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 45.

1045 In the prose epilogue (42:10-17) this theme reoccurs. Here Job’s fortunes, including his social relations, are restored to an even grander status than before. Job becomes “reintegrated into the fabric of the community.” Cf. Burkes, God, Self and Death, 47.

1046 A dualism between the physical person of Job and his is absent, but the question does arise concerning the lamenter’s “state of deadness.” The notion here is that as long as the creator keeps the in tact, the lamenter remains in a state of being alive.

1047 The need for such divine stipulations is unclear and leaves a question mark behind Satan’s ability.

1048 In contrast to Job’s accusation (16:12-14) and wish (9:18), the Deity does not wish for Job’s death (cf. 1:12; 2:6).
dependence on the divine is stressed. Indeed, the life (vpn) of every living thing and the spirit (j w) of all mankind is in the hand of the divine (12:10). This does not deter Job from exclaiming, “for I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (30:32).

In contrast to the elevated status ascribed to the Deity in the book of Job, all major players in the Joban plot (Satan, Job, the friends) seem to share the same low estimation of human worth (4:17-21, 5:14-16). Human life, in terms of Job’s judgment, is short and troubled, and even trees are regarded as better off since being “cut off” brings the possibility of new growth, while the same potential is not inherent to human nature (cf. 14:1-14). The positive elements of the divine-human relation are filtered out in the curse and lament of Job (3). He does not want God (hwl) to regard his day, and accuses God of hedging in his way. As such, his trust in the divine-human relation is broken, since the basic tenets that form the basis of this relation have been severely shaken. Job’s relation with the Deity is indeed balanced between the two poles of hope and utter despair.

3.6.3 Death as a Theological Theme in Job 3

Here we will consider the function of death as a theological theme in Job 3. First the theme of death in the wider context of the book of Job will be considered. This will include an inquiry into the nature of the wisdom operative in the book of Job and its impact on the theological evaluation of death. Death, as indeed creation, is a central theme in Job 3. The precise nature of this theme requires further consideration. What is so remarkable is the nature and tone of Job’s opening soliloquy. It is dark and bitter, resonating Job’s experience of creation, and indeed his creator. At this moment death (as event and location) begins to take centre stage. His hope now rests

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1049 Here divine activity is identified with the event of death, which makes it more than just the natural end of human life. Cf. 30:22, “You lift me up to the wind: you cause me to ride upon it, and dissolve my substance.” The deity’s active involvement in Job’s demise is again stated, and Job is contrasted with God, who “rides upon the wings of the wind” (cf. 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:10; 104:3).
1050 God actually finds great reason for joy in his servant Job, the quintessential “wise man” (cf. 1:8).
1051 Cf. Job 25:6 where “maggot” (h l c) and “worm” (hmr) are adjectives with which Bildad describes mortal humanity (here contrasted with the µyhla ynb). In the “night vision” of 4:17-21, humans are envisioned as no more than “dwellers of dust.”
1052 The speeches of Zophar (7:16; 9:25; 21:13) describe life as fleeting and lbh. Also Job 7:9, “As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go down to Sheol do not come up.” Further Job 4:19-21; 8:9; 9:25-26; 14:1-14; 34:14-15; 34:20. It appears as if any link with the dead is excluded in Job, particularly in view of 4:7-10, 19-22.
1053 Satan sees it differently, stating that “…all that a man has will he give for his life.” (2:4). This statement is contradicted in Job’s opening self-speech, hating life and longing for death.
1054 Qoh 12:5 also echoes the contrast between nature’s potential regeneration and the cessation of human life. Also Job 4:19-20, 7:6, 8:9, 9:25-26, 34:20.
1055 Job’s struggle with his creator transgresses the admonition in Isa 45:9 stating, “Woe to him that striveth with his Maker…” (rxy).
1056 In 13:24 Job considers the deity as hiding his face and holding him as His enemy.
1057 The sequence of curse and then lament in Job 3 does not imply that the curse of life is displaced by the question of the lament. The longing for death and the quest for meaning are interwoven in Job 3. Cf. Janzen, Job, 68.
1058 Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 152. The consistently maintained tone of anger, despair, and bitterness, but also the well-maintained theme of the death wish, sets Job 3 apart.
with death and in the realm of the dead, though only for a moment. Death might offer him some rest, but no vindication or divine declaration of innocence. This raises the question concerning the precise nature of Job’s longing for death and his positive evaluation of the dead and Sheol, which as already stated, is conditional.

3.6.3.1 Death as a Theological Theme in the Book of Job

The theme of death is present in the prose prologue (1:15-19; 2:9), remains a theme throughout the dialogues, and brings the book of Job to a close, stating that Job died old and full of days (42:17). As such he died a “good death,” despite his longing for a quick and consequently bad death in Job 3. The first occurrence of death results from the Satan’s challenge (1:9). God refrains from hedging (1:10) Job in, including those immediately related to Job, and offers the Satan a free hand, barring the person of Job (1:12), and subsequently the vpn of Job (2:6). In this process innocent victims fall fowl to a heavenly duel. But Job retains his life (vpn) and integrity (hmr), refusing to “curse” God (1:22, 2:10) as his wife prompted him (2:9, ûrb) and the Satan suggested that he might do (1:11, ûrb). Job conforms to the customary practice of mourning (1:20; cf. also 16:15-16a), as do the friends (2:12bf, weeping, renting their mantles, sprinkling dust upon their heads) when they come to mourn (dwn) with Job in order to comfort (µjn) him (2:11). Initially they fail to recognise him due to his severe physical condition (2:12a), but eventually sit with Job for seven days and seven nights (2:13a), mourning without speaking a word (cf. Jer 22:10 for ritual actions normally performed over the dead).

After this proper period for mourning, Job breaks the silence and attempts to unleash all “hell” upon his own creation (3:1), which has become too much to bear (see the discussion in §3.6.3.2). Job wishes for an “unnatural” and bad death, but death itself is not ascribed any negative or unnatural connotations (e.g. Ps 49:14, “death will feed on them”). For Job death is humankind’s natural and inevitable end, since their days are numbered (cf. 7:16; 14:5; also 21:23 for a “good” death and 21:25 for a “bad” death. The latter seems to be Job’s fate, “And another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eats with pleasure”). While natural, his descriptions of death are not always positive, e.g. that all lie down alike in the dust and are eaten by worms

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1060 This motivates his relentless cry for justification (cf. 16:18). Cf. Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 312.
1063 Job is already experiencing death in life, with which the actions of the friends correspond. Cf. Whybray, Job, 36. The notion of “death in life” is not unfamiliar in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 88).
1064 X.H.T. Pham, Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 29. The silence narrated in Job 2:13b is recognised by some scholars (e.g. Lohfink) as part of the mourning ritual, with loud weeping and accompanying actions followed by a period of silence.
1065 Cf. Job 10:18-19, “Wherefore (hmr) did you bring me out of the womb? If I had given up the ghost and no eye had seen me. I should have been as if I had not been. I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.”

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This view is also shared by Zophar and Elihu (34:15), for whom all flesh shall perish together and humankind shall return to dust. In the speeches of Bildad we encounter a different picture, namely that (premature) death is the fate of the wicked (18:17-19, 21). The best that one can hope for is a “good death” (5:24-26). The negative connotation of death is also reflected in Zophar’s vision of the underworld, as a place of dust (20:11). The perception of death as the natural end of all created life is shared by the friends in the dialogues. They do however differ concerning the cause of death.

In the speeches of Elihu the notion is reflected that God will bring back (בָּשַׁר) the soul (נֶפֶשׁ) from the pit (זֵעַת); to be enlightened with the “light of the living” (33:30, with a similar theme in v 28). But the restoration of justice and of Job’s present condition is what is here at issue, rather than resurrection from the dead. Death and destruction are also present in the hymn to wisdom (28:3, 22).

In the divine speeches death and the realm of the dead are still themes of theological significance. The “gates of death” (תְוַֽעַֽֽשׁ הַשָּׁמְשִׁים) and the “doors of the shadow of death” (תְוַ֣אִֽשׁ הַשָּׁמְשִׁים, 38:17), through which Job whishes to pass, are presented as beyond the scope of his comprehension (38:18). They fall within the range of divine omnipotence, and are presented as a natural part of divine creation (e.g. 28:14).

Death is further related to YHWH in the sense that he “hunts” (דָּרֶנּוּ) and provides food for the hungry animals (38:39-41). As such, YHWH is responsible for “killing” (as a means of providing) in the animal realm. This is presented as an inherent part of creation, not as standing in opposition to the divine will. In the prose epilogue Job, after the Deity restored his good fortune, dies a good death (42:17; cf. 29:18, dying in his nest and multiplying days).

Job’s attitude toward death goes through several stages, reflecting both fear and fascination. In the first stage (Job 3:1-10 and 11-19) Job moves from hatred of life to love of death. In the second stage (Job 6:8-13) Job moves from his earlier wish for death as escape to a desire to remain faithful to a God of love, thus a longing for

1066 This corresponds with Proverbial wisdom’s view on death (e.g. Prov 24:20). Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 311 suggests that this difference between a future and no future in Israelite wisdom has also been formulated as a difference between life and death (Prov 9; compare Prov 12:28; 14:32; 15:24 as examples of the notion that hope in YHWH is not merely limited to life Diesseits).

1067 Bildad also refers to the “firstborn of Death” (תֵֽוַֽעַֽֽשׁ רֵעַת, 18:13) and the “king of terrors” (תֵֽוַֽעַֽֽשׁ בָּשַׁר, 18:14), and that Sheol snatches away those who have sinned, thus ascribing to death a personified or mythological character.


1069 So also µד in 38:16.

1070 Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 236. In Job 26:6a it is stated that “Sheol is naked before God.” Also Prov 15:11 and 139:8, 11-12. Terrien attributes this to the fact that in wisdom theology, creation is not the result of a victory over a so-called primal or pre-existing ocean.


1072 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 56 indicates that this language is similar to that describing the death of the patriarchs in e.g. Gen 25:7-10, describing the death of Abraham.


1074 Idem, 46.
death as “prevention.” In the third stage (Job 7:1-21) Job’s attitude toward death is motivated by fear, rather than fascination of death. As a result Job complains about the brevity of his existence (10:18-20), forgetting his initial longing for death to come quickly. As a result of Job’s own complex attitude toward death, complemented by the diversity of attitudes of the friends, which are all further refined by the voice from the whirlwind and brought to conclusion by the epilist, the book of Job lacks any uniform view of death, the dead or the realm of death. Yet these diverse views in general do not depart radically from the broader Israelite tradition. Job 3 offers an exception.

3.6.3.1.1 Curse and Death in Job 3 and Jeremiah 20:14-18

The “death wish” motif is not unique to the HB, but also does not occur frequently in the HB. The closest HB parallel for the text of Job 3, in terms of structure and content, is Jer 20:14-18. The literary contexts of these two texts differ, and an exact literary correspondence does not exist. Job 3 is more elaborate. Nevertheless, the undoing of a personal creation is at issue in both texts. In both curses the words of cursing are not uttered to a listener, but rather to a specific object, namely a personal creation. A number of affinities are identifiable between Jer 20:14-18 and Job 3. This includes the cursing of the day (µwy) of birth (Job 3:3a; 4f // Jer 20:14, rra); the cursing of the messenger who brings the news of his birth (Job 3:3b; 6-9 // Jer 20:15f, rva); the establishment of or motivation for the curse (Job 3:10, yk // Jer 20:17, rva); and the lament over being born (Job 3:11-16, hml // Jer 20:18, hml). Indeed, the four motifs of the cursing encountered in Jer 20:14a, 15, 17 and 18 are the

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1075 Idem, 55.
1076 Idem, 60.
1077 Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 27 criticises such a developmental approach of Terrien, particularly regarding Job 10, which Moore considers as a similar to Job 3.
1079 Here we can compare Job’s description of Sheol in 10:21-22, “Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness,” which is in line with the traditional view of Sheol.
1080 Cf. the Damu Lament (Old Babylonian text, ca. 1700 BCE), annually recited in the cult of Tammuz; or Homer’s Iliad, as seen in the speech of Hector’s wife after his death, directed to the women of Troy; or the declaration of Andromache in Euripides’ The Daughters of Troy.
1081 Newsom, The Book of Job, 93. The curse of the day (Jer 20:14//Job 3:2a, 4-5), the curse of the messenger who brought news of the birth (Jer 20:15-16//Job 3:3b, 6-9), the reason for the curse (Jer 20:17//Job 3:10) and the concluding lament (Jer 20:28//Job 3:11-23). Also Gillingham, The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, 154-155.
1082 The curse of Jer 20:14-18 is set within the context of a prophecy of Jeremiah, after he has been set free from the stocks in which he was placed by Pashur (Jer 20:2).
1083 Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 318-327. Other scholars such as Duhm, Baumgartner and Rudolph argue for the dependence of Jer 20:14-18 on Job 3. J.R. Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20 (NY: Double Day, 1999), 869 rightly points out that there is simply no way of knowing and that dependence can go either way.
1084 Cf. Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20, 874 for a discussion of Jer 20:14-18, where never being born is preferable to hard times and sorrows. At death or near death, Jeremiah’s thoughts return to his birth. Lundbom dates the text to ca. 605-604 BCE, when the tension between Jehoiakim and Jeremiah would have reached its climax.
1085 Cf. Gen 25:22; 27:24; Exod 16:3; Num 23:10; Judg 16:30; 2 Sam 19:1; 1 Kgs 19:4; Jona 4:8, which also contains a cursing of the day of birth.
substance of the inclusion formed by Job 3:3 and 10. But an important difference exists between the curses of these two texts, namely that, while the curses of Jeremiah 20:14-18 are linked to historical precedents, the curses of Job 3 operate with a “cosmological prototype.” The curses in Jeremiah 20:14-18 constitute a prayer in extremis or a lament of last resort. That is, a last resort for attracting God’s attention that would ultimately lead to deliverance. The pragmatic intent of Job’s curse is comparable. It did draw the attention of the Deity and in the end led to Job’s restoration. The curse in Jer 20:14-18 is related to the theme of death since it is directed to the creation of an individual, but it lacks the elaboration on the theme of death as encountered in Job 3.

3.6.3.1.2 The Wisdom of Job and the Theme of Death

The question inevitably arises concerning the relation between the book of Job and the wisdom tradition of the HB and that of its Umwelt. Job’s animosity toward life is fueled by his experience of misfortune and suffering which, in terms of traditional Proverbal wisdom’s paradigm of retribution (Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang), supported by the description of Job in the prologue (1:8), is unjust. This provides a background for evaluating Job’s attitude toward creation, but also toward death, the dead and Sheol. Against this background the intensity of the imagery employed in Job 3 becomes clearer.

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1086 Habel, Job, 103.
1087 Habel, Job, 103. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 151-167 argues that many ancient and tribal rituals, including incantations, are grounded in a cosmogonic myth.
1088 B. Zuckerman, Job the Silent: A study in Historical Counterpoint (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125-126. According to this interpretation the curse of one’s day of birth signifies a distress of such a magnitude that a direct address, as is the case in a prayer of supplication, is impossible.
1089 Newsom, Job, 93. Job’s curse “has the shape of performative speech,” i.e. it wants to achieve something. And achieve it does, but not what Job was longing for.
1090 This should not lead to an interpretation of the language of Job 3 as “a tacit appeal for rescue.” Cf. Newsom, Job, 93. Job’s curse rather constitutes ein solcher in Worte gefaßter Schmerzensshrei. Cf. Westermann, Der Aufbau, 53.
1093 For Clines, Job, lxi the books of Job and Ecclesiastes “introduce that needed element of sophistication and realism into the philosophy of Wisdom, calling into question as they do so the universal validity of the tenets of Proverbs.” Central to Qohelet is the question of what happens to wisdom at the event of death, i.e. what is the value or profit of wisdom. The book of Job challenges the ideology of Proverbs from a different point, focusing on the validity of the principle of retribution.
1094 Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, 163 regards the subject matter of the book of Job as the “acute crisis in the life of a single righteous man,” reflecting the laments in the Psalms.
Job’s experience of turmoil and cosmic chaos prompts him to employ the language of traditional wisdom, i.e. the language of “order” (ma’at / ḫḏkẖ), to challenge the basic constructs of sapiential thinking. In this sense the book of Job dialogues with, challenges and eventually reaffirms, from an informed perspective, the basic tenets of the traditional wisdom. But the scrutinising of Proverbial wisdom’s tenets in Job (questioned by Job but affirmed by the friends) does lead to different presentations concerning the theme of creation and death. In part this is the case because wisdom’s (ẖmrj) ability to provide guarantees (including long life, prosperity and posterity) becomes questionable. Wisdom as such has gone astray and is nowhere to be found (Job 28), neither in the land of the living nor the dead, but only in the divine sphere (28:23), which is inaccessible to humans. In this regard the argument in Prov 9:10, namely that “The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding,” seems rather absurd since the holy remains out of reach. For this reason the profit (l[y Hi] of “fearing” the Almighty becomes questionable (21:15).

The book of Job is present wisdom in crisis, or traditional wisdom becoming critical of its own postulates. It exposes the consequences of a clash between immediate experience and the traditional understanding of the world as divinely ordered. One of the consequences of this clash is the loss of coherence, or the loss of wisdom as a monolithic body of opinion, belief, or procedure,” but rather allows for a variety of viewpoints and a diversity of trends. Cf. Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 231-232

1096 Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 231. In his evaluation of Job’s character as presented in the book of Job he observes “By borrowing the sapiential form of speech par excellence, and by applying it to himself, he presents his own being as the living exhibit of chaos in the universe.”
1097 Through the process of question and scrutinising the basic tenets of Proverbial wisdom, it is no longer considered to be “a monolithic body of opinion, belief, or procedure,” but rather allows for a variety of viewpoints and a diversity of trends. Cf. Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 231-232
1098 Hartley, “From Lament to Oath,” 91-92 argues that Job makes use of so-called “hypothetical thinking” in his lamenting. As a result his initial attitude towards death in Job 3 changes completely. A change of tongue is noticeable in Job’s reasoning about death, but this should not downplay the intensity and raw nature of his outcry in Job 3. Here Boorer, “A Matter of Life and Death,” 187 suggests a distinction between dualistic way of thinking for the book of Proverbs and a non-dualistic reality of the book of Job.
1099 For Clines, Job, xxxix-xlvi, the narrator, as well as the different characters in Job responds in a different way to this tenet of the wisdom tradition. In evaluating the language of Job 3, the reader should keep in mind that Job is viewing the created world from the perspective of his present experience, which impacts on his understanding of reality, i.e. his Wirklichkeitsverständnis. Amidst his present experience Job complains that God has hidden the ḫrd “way” and has made it inaccessible. Cf. Brown, Character in Crisis, 62. The right “way” ḫrd is central to the wisdom, but God has made wisdom inaccessible and as a result, correct character impossible.
1100 In 11:6 Zophar argues that wisdom is “double sided.” For Burke, God, Self and Death, 42 and P.S. Fiddes, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Job 28 as a Riddle for Ancient and Modern Readers,” in J. Barton and D.J. Rainer (eds.), After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996), 179 Job 28 does not imply that wisdom is to be found in some secret place known only to God but, rather that wisdom is not to be found somewhere, “because it is the comprehending of everything.” But Job 28 does illustrate the mysterious nature of wisdom, and relates it to the fear of YHWH (28:28).
1101 Job 27:13 brings into focus the portion (ḏ j) of the wicked with God.
1102 Goldingay, Theological Diversity and Authority, 208. He argues that the book of Job moves outside the boundaries of the wisdom tradition in an order to address the problems raised in the book.
1103 R.L. Rubenstein, “Job and Auschwitz,” in T. Linsefelt (ed.), Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 233-4 argues that the perception in Jewish and Christian traditions that the status quo results from the divine will and that it could be different if the deity wishes to change the situation, underlies the worldview of the Bible in both traditions. Thus,
of a coherent worldview, and as such it could be argued that the book of Job calls for a “radical reordering of reality.” Job’s self-curse sets this (literary) process of reordering in motion. It continues in the dialogues, which present creation as “ethically neutral” and as such not responsive to the actions of humanity or the intervention of the Deity. This presents a departure from the worldview of traditional wisdom, but forms the basis of Job’s theological understanding of creation (and death). As such, divine justice in creation becomes problematic and responses varied. Is there a moral order, random order or simply no order in creation? In response to this question an “ethics of maintenance” may be proposed for comprehending divine justice in creation. Instead of constituting an ontological power inherent to creation, it is more an active process involving the creator and humanity, wrestling with chaos in order to establish and sustain the structures of life. Job remains skeptical. This motivates his assault on, rather than blessing of his creation in chapter 3.

The tension between the prose prologue and epilogue (traditional wisdom, though the Satan offers a critical voice) and the poetic dialogues (critical wisdom, though the friends propagate traditional wisdom) in the book of Job is not resolved. The divine speeches also fail to resolve this tension, though they contribute in

hope for salvation follows from the biblical belief in creation as an act of divine will. This is closely related to the notion of divine justice. But these tenets of biblical faith are scrutinised in the book of Job.

Forstman Pettys, “Let there be Darkness,” 89. She describes the language employed in Job 3 arguing that “Job pushes against tradition, translating the ordering of creation into the disorder or his experience.”

Job 21:7 offers a description of life turned upside down in terms of traditional wisdom thinking. This is also seen in Job’s contrast of the deity’s attitude toward his “tabernacle” (19:12, 29:4) versus that of the wicked (12:6).


M. Tsevat, “The Meaning of the book of Job.” HUCA 37 (1966): 73-106, at 98 denies any notion of divine justice in creation, not seeing justice (q'd) as part of the “plan” (hxm 38:2; hzm 2:2) of creation. This view is contrasted by M.V. Fox, “Job the Pious.” ZAW 117 (2005): 352-3 who stresses the divine care, providence, but also the questioning of a lack of moral order.


K.J. Dell, The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature (BZAW 197; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991). She argues for a revaluation of the book of Job as sceptical literature, suggesting that a reading of Job as sceptical literature suits the form and content of the book as a whole better.

Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 131.

Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 90. Also H.H. Schmid, Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), 178. Job searched for a sapiential solution concerning the origin of the suffering righteous. Arguing from a Weltordnung perspective, Job evaluates the givens of his present situation within the light of his earlier convictions. For the friends however “Weisheit ist nicht mehr Inventar, sondern überzeitliches Wirklichkeitsbild.”

Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment, 74. Job’s closing words indicate that the collapse of his worldview did not leave him “in limbo.” It is more a case of an argument that has gone full circle, falling back on traditional thinking when there is no other way out. In this regard Qohelet seems to be more robust (if the double corrective remark of the epilogist is left aside).
establishing an informed view of wisdom and creation. Within the parameters of such an informed view, death also achieves different shades of grey. It is wisdom rooted in personal experience that revolts against the scholastic dogma of traditional Proverbial wisdom. And this revolt against scholastic dogma creates room for theological ingenuity, also concerning the theme of death. Death, freed from the confines of the Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang, achieves a liberating function. Its effect is final, but at least, in terms of Job 3, it is peaceful.

3.6.3.2 Death as an Absolute End

The answer to the rhetorical question in Job 14:14a, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” is more ambiguous than a simple “no.” The book of Job reflects very little of any notion or expectation of some form of afterlife or vindication after death. In the LXX translation of Job, such instances have been identified, but in the MT the notion of future life is absent. In this regard Job argues, “So man lies down and does not rise, till the heavens are no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep” (14:12). Job expresses the vague hope for deliverance from Sheol by the Deity after His wrath has passed (14:13). This scant hope is refuted in view of his preceding claim concerning the endurance of death (14:10-12; so also the reference in 14:14 to the “days of my appointed time”), and that the fate of the dead are sealed once they have entered the grave. In effect, all hope on deliverance from the grave is dashed (cf. 17:13-16). Here we encounter a negative view of Sheol, contra Job 3). The deity’s interest is with the living and not with the dead, and subsequently He will not stretch out His hand to the grave (30:24). In death, all suffer the same fate.

Job 19:25-27 are often considered as indicative of some form of vindication after death, but these verses remain notoriously difficult to interpret. In particular the reference to the “redeemer / avenger” (אָגוּל as well as the time (רְמַא, “after”) when this envisioned act of vindication will take place. The mentioning of the redeemer who will stand on the dust (רְפָעֵל, contra 17:15-16, where רְפָעֵל is also used), is equally unclear. However, Job’s mentioning of seeing God in his flesh (litt. “from my flesh” יְרָכָם 19:26) indicates that this vindication cannot take place at some future time or event. For Spronk the parallel with 17:16 (“They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust,” in this context the question of his hope

1115 J.T. Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions.” JSJ 36 (2005): 266 argues that the notion of life after death (e.g. 14:13) was considered in the book of Job only to be rejected. Quite differently, Habel proposes a real hope for vindication in 14:13, even if it applies only to the situation of Job, without universal implications. In view of the wider context of Job 14, this argument of Habel is problematic.
1116 D.H. Gard, “The Concept of the Future Life According to the Greek Translator of the Book of Job.” JBL 73 (1954): 137-143. He identifies Job 5:11; 14:14 and 42:17 in the LXX as instances where afterlife is stated as a fact; Job 3:21-22; 4:20 and 7:9-10 as implied instances and Job 3:13-14; 6:10; 14:22 and 40:13 as instances where conditions in the afterlife are being described. Also Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 16-17.
1117 This view is expressed most clearly in Job 7; 14; 16:22; 17, and 30.
1118 In Job 16:19 Job refers to his heavenly witness (דָּבָר).
is brought into focus) indicates that Job is speaking of a time after his death (cf. Ps 17:15). But what 19:26 indicates is that Job did not give up hope on being justified. Given that the notion of an afterlife is absent in the book of Job, such justification could only have taken place during his lifetime. After the event of death it will be too late. In this way Job’s longing for death does not discard his longing for vindication, as is indicated in his declaration of innocence in Job 31. Indeed, the “curse” within Job 29-31 has as its purpose the achievement of a declaration of innocence from God, which was not attained by the dialogues of the friends.

Job longs for death, also for the absence of God in Sheol. The question remains whether the moment of death really presents the end of the divine-human relationship. Will Job not hear the voice of his Taskmaster, and will he be free from his Master (3:18-19)? An affirmative reply is tenable, since Job later laments the fact that he will not be found in death and that no vindication is possible once he has entered through the gates of Sheol and sleeps in dust (7:21). But here an ambiguity remains, since death in Job’s reasoning presents both a limit and a boundary, i.e. as the absolute end of life, but also marking the transition to another form of existence, which became preferable to Job.

If the book of Job indeed contains no notion of life after death or divine vindication at some future point, why does the book have such glimpses? In response to this difficult question it has been suggested that it is reflective of the intellectual climate in which the book of Job was composed or that it became a pertinent question within this intellectual climate. But within a context in which the question of life after death or future vindication (of the righteous) becomes pressing, the book of Job holds fast to the idea of death as the limit of human existence. Whatever vindication Job is hoping for, it has to be sought within the parameters of creation, during his lifetime.

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1119 Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 313.
1120 Job’s hope rests on his conviction of his innocence, and since Sheol “consumes” (lzg) those that have sinned (24:19), some scant hope remains that he will be vindicated before death.
1121 For Kessler, Die Ägyptenbilder der Hebräischen Bibel, 130 this text is similar to what is encountered in the Egyptian book of the dead. In this regard he shares the argument of Kunz that the author of Job 31 makes use of motives and representations (31:6, “Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity”) that corresponds with the Egyptian conception of the Totengericht. Cf. A. Kunz, “Der Mensch auf der Waage. Die Vorstellung vom Gerichtshandeln Gottes im ägyptischen Totenbuch (Tb 125) und bei Hiob (Ijob 31).” BZ NF 45 (2001): 235. Job 7:21 sheds a different light on the expectation or lack of justice after death.
1122 C. Westermann, What does the Old Testament Say about God? (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 50-51 argues that since Job clings to God even in rebellion, death can no longer be regarded as the end of God’s blessing. This argument should be seen in the context of his remark that the most urgent theological problem after the Exile concerns the question of the blessing of God instead of his saving.
1124 Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death,” 267-68. This is a suggestive argument, since the apparent rejection of post-mortem existence implies that it does not form the basis of theodicy within the book of Job, as is the case in the later wisdom writings of Sirach and Wisdom.
1126 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 81. Job’s deliverance can also be considered as a “bringing back to life.” Cf. Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 283.
3.6.3.3 Reconsidering the Theme of Death in Job 3

The book of Job in general does not present a major deviation from traditional Israelite views of death, the dead and Sheol. In contrast the text of Job 3 does present a deviation.\(^{1127}\) This is particularly evident in his longing to be joined with the dead in Sheol, since it is envisioned as a place of quiet (זִיקָר) and rest (שִׂנָּה; 3:13). In Sheol the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest (שמאות 3:17). The prisoners rest (חָנָן), not hearing the voice of the taskmaster (3:18). Small and great are together in Sheol, and there the servant is free (יָעַל) from his master (3:19). Job longs for the quiet and rest of his vision of Sheol. He longs to be free from his Master, and to be reintegrated into Sheol’s society where class distinctions become obsolete. His existing social relations bring him only זָג (3:26). Thus, he is yearning for a place without injustice. Job experiences his suffering as unjust, and while all changes for divine vindication is lost once he enters the land of the dead, it is preferable to the land of the living. Death will dispossess him of his זָנ and will reduce him to a shadow, but in Job 3 this is not a concern.\(^{1128}\) Neither death nor the realm of death is feared. Sheol is not a place to be rescued from, but longed for (cf. 10:18-19). It is the intermediary state of dying but not yet dead that becomes too much for Job.\(^ {1129}\) The transition to actual death would bring a welcome reprieve from suffering in life.

3.6.4 Conclusion

In the book of Job, the possibility of a retribution or reward after death is not accepted.\(^ {1130}\) God is portrayed as having power over death and the realm of death, but any clear notion concerning resurrection and afterlife, or God’s involvement with the dead lacks. Death is the natural, unavoidable end of all, but the prolongation of life by means of living according to the tenets of traditional wisdom is valued above the presumed tranquility brought about by death.\(^ {1131}\) In this regard Job’s reasoning portrays an inconsistency, while the friends are relentless in their argumentation, championing traditional wisdom. Ironically, in the epilogue God affirms the validity of Job’s argumentation and rebukes the friends for theirs (cf. Job 42:7), while it is actually their line of argumentation that draws the book to a close in the epilogue. The tension in the book of Job is not resolved.

Job’s experience of suffering,\(^ {1132}\) as a result of the divine will, turns his world upside down and initiates a vigorous debate. The tone for this debate is set in Job 3 by means of his curse and lament. The pious and accepting Job of the prologue has to make

\(^{1127}\) Murphy, “Death and Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature,” 105-106. Also Boorer, “A Matter of Life and Death,” 187-204.

\(^{1128}\) According to J. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture Vol III-IV (London: Milford, 1940), 478 such fear of death and Sheol is basic to Israelite religion.

\(^{1129}\) For Job life assumes the form of a curse, due to the collapse of the principle of retribution. Cf. Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death,” 213. As such “length of days” does not serve as indication of divine favour, but rather as a prolongation of human misery.

\(^{1130}\) Burkes, God, Self and Death, 57.

\(^{1131}\) Job desires death, but does not succumb to the temptation to curse God. It is rather the decision to continue living that becomes the ultimate challenge for Job. Cf. H. Fisch, Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 37-38.

\(^{1132}\) Retribution is not at issue in Job 3, focusing rather on his personal experience. Cf. Clines, Job, 104.
room for the critical and questioning Job of the dialogues. Job throws down the gauntlet by challenging one of the most basic tenets of traditional wisdom, namely the value and beauty of life and creation. Instead, he longs for death’s embrace, and attributes a series of positive qualities to the realm of the dead, which has become preferable to the realm of the living. While this represents a qualified preference (§ 3.6) it does not detract from its acuteness. It is indeed Job, the epitome of a wise person (cf. Job 1:8), who “embraces death and embodies chaos.” It is however also this Job that (re-)gains life and is re-integrated into the realm of the living, i.e. re-integrated into creation with all its dimensions.

Job’s embrace of death in chapter 3 counters the dualistic worldview of Proverbs 1-9 (as pinnacle of traditional wisdom) in which life and death are mutually exclusive opposites. Life should be sought by means of avoiding death, or that which is associated with death. But in terms of the informed view of creation that the book of Job offers, life (order) and death (chaos) are integrated realities of the same divine creation. The creation theology of the book of Job does not de-polarise life and death, but brings about a change of perspective regarding this relation.

Job 3 has an important function in the context of the book of Job, and its significance within the wider Israelite religious tradition should not be overlooked. For, it is not merely life as the highest gift that is cursed in this text, but indeed the whole of Israel’s spiritual heritage is brought into the debate. A debate in which tenets of faith are challenged, sometimes pushed to the boundaries, and eventually cast in a new theological mould. The result however is a book with a polyphone character, and an assimilation of these contesting voices is neither possible nor wishful. The contrast of voices should rather be considered as inherent to the process of theological sense-making which Job has to go through - bringing him to new and informed, or at least different, theological insight. In this respect the significance of Job 3 for the process of theological sense-making in contexts of suffering should not be overlooked. Radical lament is affirmed as a legitimate response to the reality of suffering, even to the extent that one longs for the release of death. Job is not rejected on the basis of his raw rhetoric. Rather, God responds by recognising the legitimacy of his reasoning (42:7-9), and restores his fortunes (42:10f).

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1134 For Job a dead lion is better than a living dog. Contra Qoh 9:4.

1135 Job’s powerful language remains subservient to his total impotence. Cf. Fokkelman, *Major Poems I*, 177. His desire is acute, but ineffectual.


1141 G. West and B. Zengele, “Reading Job ‘Positively’ in the Context of HIV / AIDS in South Africa,” in: E.J. Van Wolde (ed.), *Job’s God* (London: SCM, 2004), 121-122 considers Job 3 in the process of theological sense-making within a South African context of HIV/ AIDS. They try to demonstrate how Job 3, read from a HIV positive perspective, can become a liberating text. Such a ‘positive’ reading of Job 3 “now occupies that vast space between diagnosis and death, providing resources to live positively.” In the framework of such a contextual hermeneutic, epistemological privilege is given to the experiences of marginalised groups.
To some extent the book of Job offers a rehabilitation of tradition, settling for the more traditional answers to the questions that were raised. The book of Job provides a glimpse of the intellectual and theological activity of the Second Temple period. This results in the various angles from which the questions regarding creation, death, God and the relation between God and creation are approached.\footnote{Burkes, \textit{God, Self and Death}, 59. Qohelet “represents perhaps the farthest trajectory possible in the tradition for the ideas raised in the book of Job without the adoption of a belief in human immortality.”} In spite of their dogmatic differences Job and his friends agree on the melancholy theme that “Death is the great leveler” and that all (the fortunate and misfortunate) “shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them” (cf. Job 21:26).\footnote{Terrien, “Wisdom in the Psalter,” 66.} By lamenting his birth and wishing away his own creation by invoking a curse, the imposing death wish in Job 3 serves as an outcry within a creation devoid of order, beauty and in which the ways of the creator are no longer intelligible. As such Job 3 has an important rhetorical and theological function in the book of Job as a whole. The sharp tone of its language ensures that his voice is heard (by the creator) amongst numerous competing voices. Ultimately, Job’s continuous longing for vindication within the realm of divine creation, and by implication life, overshadows the grandeur of his wish for death. In this way Job’s embrace of death did, in the end, lead to the restoration of his life.

After the epilogist brings the book of Job to a close, the reader is left with a feeling of unease. While care should be taken in attempts to trace a linear development in wisdom thinking and theology, the book of Job does constitute a significant moment. Indeed, the HB wisdom tradition never returned to its earlier optimism after the book of Job. It continued the search for order underlying human existence that gives it meaning, but this search was much more open to ambiguity and contradiction that faces all people, particularly when facing a crisis.\footnote{Hanson, “Israelite Religion in the Early Postexilic Period,” 505-506.} Ecclesiastes is an example of this ongoing transformation in wisdom writing and it is to this book that we will now turn.