

RHETORIC OF REMEMBRANCE IN JOB 29–30: A Reflection of Job’s Anthropomorphic Concept of God as a Means to Assuage Pain

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about a new era in history where humanity began to rethink their existence and immortality. The dramatic loss of lives and the social and economic disruptions definitely affected the way the world looks at life and death. The closure of several places of worship and work brought about unprecedented poverty physically and spiritually. The post-Covid world will never be the same again. People from different walks of life turned to social media such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and the likes as means to assuage their pains and combat anxiety and uncertainty as a result of the pandemic. Despite these survival strategies, studies show that several people are still on the brink of emotional and spiritual breakdown. This kind of struggle is also depicted in the Bible, especially in the book of Job.

The story of Job in the Bible is one of the most sought-after narratives because of its real depiction of human life and loss, and the protagonist’s ability and will to survive amidst pains and grief. This paper seeks to establish Job’s anthropomorphic understanding of God through his recollection of his past as primary means to alleviate his pain in times of sufferings. More often than not, one’s knowledge of God as experienced in the past, becomes a strong factor that propels one’s theological and practical responses to a present situation of pain and suffering rather than the temporary pleasures the world has to offer. Job’s remembrance of God’s past works in his life enables him to survive his predicaments and ordeals. This essay acknowledges the contribution of socio-scientific theories and psychological interventions in responding to psycho-social anxiety and threats but it will not be discussed here as I will only focus on the theological contribution and significance of Job’s life and experience to argue that one’s understanding of God is a primary factor and means to overcome pain.

The Literary Framework of Job 29–30

Job 29–30 is part of Job’s final discourses and complaints against God (Job 27: 1–31:40) with a hymn of wisdom interlude in Job 28; followed by a prose section (Job 32: 1–5) that introduces Elihu’s rebuke against Job and his three friends (Job 32: 6– 37: 24); and the “out of heavy windstorm” (הַסְעָרָה) [מִן־הַסְעָרָה] discourses

of God to Job and judgment to his friends (Job 38: 1–41: 34).¹ Job's final speech can be divided into two cycles signified by the introductory statement, מְשַׁלּוֹ שֵׁאת אִיּוֹב וַיִּסֵּר (Job continued to pronounce his judicial speech and said...) [Job 27: 1; 29: 1]). My translation of מְשַׁלּוֹ is an elaborated interpretation, but Norman C. Habel suggests that the term could refer to a formal address or testimony before a public assembly, which also supports my preferred translation.² The possibility of this interpretation and translation is possible since the term could have various meanings such as "formal speech," "proverb," "saying," or "parable."

The first cycle begins in chapter 27 wherein Job holds fast to his integrity followed by the enigmatic wisdom hymn in chapter 28. The second cycle is in chapters 29–31 that deals with Job's memory of the past, his present ordeal, and his claim for his character's credibility. The second cycle is the main concern of my essay, especially chapters 29–30. In chapter 29, Job's remembrance of his past is shrouded with metaphorical descriptions of and allusions to conventions and descriptions of human achievements and privileges that are not often shared to many. But in the chapter that follows, we see an intensely sorrowful human being who lost not only his possessions and power but his integrity in the eyes of his community. The recollection of the past in comparison with Job's present circumstance is an act of vexation expressed by a rhetorical claim and affirmation of ethos necessary for Job to overcome his present ordeal.

P. W. Skehan asserts that the contents and elements of chapters 29–31 already appeared in the previous discourses of the book especially in Job's introductory speech in chapter 3 and in the cycle of discourses between him and his friends in chapters 4–14.³ On the one hand, Wharton considers these chapters as a repetition and elaboration of chapters 1 and 2 as observed by the narrator, but this time it is coming from the point of view of Job himself.⁴ N. Habel disagrees with the traditional idea that chapter

¹Translations are my own rendering unless mentioned otherwise. Other versions are consulted if deemed necessary for a more appropriate and accurate translation.

²Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library Series; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985), 404. For a recent scholarly work on significant issues on the book of Job stemming from its literary structure to its historical and canonical placement and features, see Manfred Oeming and Konrad Schmid, *Job's Journey: Stations of Suffering* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015). For a comprehensive commentary based on an in-depth textual analysis, provenance, and historical reception of the book, see C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). For a thorough investigation on the notion and meaning of death, Dan Mathewson, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience* (Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 5; ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2006); For other themes and motif in the book of Job, Christopher Hays, "There Is Hope for a Tree: Job's Hope for the Afterlife in the Light of Egyptian Tree Imagery," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (January 2015): 42–68; F. Rachel Magdalene, "Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-forensic Reading of the Book of Job," *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (June 2006): 209–258; and Daniel J. Estes, "Job 28 in Its Literary Context," *JESOT* 2, no. 2 (2013): 151–164.

³Patrick W. Skehan, "Job's Final Plea (Job 29–31) and the Lord's Reply (Job 38–41)," *Biblica* 45, no. 1 (1964 1964): 51. His study focuses on the structure of the chapters and its relationship with God's discourses in the later chapters. He also observes the parallel tripartite structures of Job's concluding remarks with God's response. Thus, he concludes that chapters 29–31 are interpolated in order to serve the book's conclusion.

⁴James A. Wharton, *Job* (Westminster Commentary; Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1999), 118.

29–31 is a monologue but recognizes it as “a formal testimony” implied by the Hebrew word מִשְׁפָּל. In spite of these contradicting views, what we can see is a man struggling to survive against a quicksand. Instead of relying to the traditional wisdom and theological assertions of his three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job provokes God to act justly in reference to his own act of justice in administering people in the past. Job’s view of God in this sense is defined in reference to Job’s self-orientation and experience.

Job’s Rhetoric of Remembrance in Chapter 29–30

Job’s final defense is introduced by the phrase וַיִּסַּף אִיּוֹב שְׂאֵת מְשָׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר (“Job continued to pronounce his judicial speech and said...” Job 27: 1; 29: 1). The *hiphil* form of יִסַּף implies continuity although it may also mean a repetition of a certain action especially if it is followed by an infinitive (שְׂאֵת אִיּוֹב וַיִּסַּף).⁵ This structure is crucial in response to those who are arguing that there is a sudden gap between these chapters and chapter 28. In this kind of reading, chapters 29–31 serve as a bridge to chapter 28 and the discourse of God in chapters 38–41.⁶ Job’s recollection of the past in comparison with his present situation is a rhetorical device, a revolutionary appeal to an unjust adversary that serves as his means of survival. Job’s self-presentation as one who acts justly (Job 29: 12–17) is an antithesis to God’s silence and deliberate act to convict him as a serious offender (Job 30: 11; 19–23). In light of this reading, Job

⁵Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, “יִסַּף,” *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon on the Old Testament (HALOT)* Vol. 1, Rev. ed. M.E.J. Richardson, trans. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1994), 1418.

⁶For a literary analysis and function of the chapter in light of Job’s discourses and the entire book, see Daniel J. Estes, “Job in Its Literary Context,” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament*, 2, no. 2 (2013): 151–164. Another scholar, A. Pelham argues for the authenticity of this chapter as coming from Job’s mouth. She further explains that Job’s “multiplicity of paths” to wisdom language is also supported by God’s use of “paths language” but in a “non-metaphorical” sense compared with Job’s metaphorical tendencies [Abigail Pelham, “Metaphorical Paths and the End of Wisdom in the Book of Job,” *Word & World* 31, no. 4 (September 2011): 381–388]. The exclusion of chapter 28 in the chosen literary unit is due to its significant theme and motif that deserves another form of research. S. Mitchell intentionally omitted chapter 28 in his own translation of the book of Job [*Into the Whirlwind: A Translation of the Book of Job* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979)]. While L. Perdue and S. Balentine suggest that the sayings could be also be attributed to Elihu or Zophar, respectively; for Elihu (Job 28: 32–37), see Perdue, *The Sword and Stylus*, 150; For Zophar (Job 28:12–13; 20–22; 11:7–12), Balentine, Job, 416]. But other scholars such as R. L. Alden and A. Pelham attribute the speech to Job and recognize its significant function to the entire message of the book of Job [Robert L. Alden, *Job* (vol. 11 of *New American Commentary*; Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1993), 269; Pelham, “Metaphorical Paths,” 387]. James A. Wharton states that it is difficult to produce a consensus as to who is the speaker in the chapter, but asserts that the chapter “invites the present-day reader of Job to step back from everything that has been said so far and reflect on the ultimate limits that stand athwart the age-old human urgency to know, to understand, to find the way to authentic Wisdom” [*Job* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 1999), 114]. Amidst these differing views, the significance of Job 28 cannot be devalued for it presents, perhaps the most important theme in the entire book, wisdom and its hidden wonders and mysteries.

views God as an unjust master whose toleration of evil is trenchant and whose silence in his present suffering is irreconcilable.

In chapter 29, Job began his melancholic recollection by pointing out when God was watching over him (יְשׁוּבֵי יְשׁוּבֵי, Job 29: 2) and when God was his most intimate confidant (בְּסוֹד אֱלֹהִים, Job 29:4). He was recalling the prime of his years when he could savor the taste of God's goodness and intimacy, similar with the notion of early autumn harvest.⁷ He was also invoking the memory of the past when he could still enjoy the fruits of his own labor including the vivid reminiscences of his children and God's presence, which for him symbolized God's favor and blessings. The reminder of God's watchful eyes was a comfort and security for him in the past but in that prevailing condition he disdained it (Job 7: 8–12; 17–21; 10: 20). Job's knowledge of God was shortsighted that it was defined merely by the prosperity and the authority he once enjoyed. Nonetheless, by invoking this vivid memory, he was in a way trying to figure things out and understand his present circumstance.

After alluding to God's protection, providence, and prosperity, Job enumerated his moral and ethical accolades (29: 12–25) and authority in verses 6–11. In essence, Job views God in reference to himself, a characteristic he shares with most theists (including Christians). This notion bridges Job's rhetoric with God's response in the subsequent chapters. In verse 9, Job recounted when the שְׂרָיִם or the nobles of the city were silenced before his presence. This is expressed in the Hebrew idiom נָכַר יָשִׁימוּ לְפִיָּהֶם (lit. "they placed their hands upon their mouth"). The same expression is found in Job 21: 5 in referring to the action that Job is expecting from his friends. In verse 18, there is a sudden allusion to death. But this is not the death that is being echoed in chapter 3, wherein death means descending into *Sheol* where there is no hope. Part of the reckoning is the view that death is not a melancholic descent into the abyss of chaos and nothingness. In the past, Job looked at death as a fulfillment of life wherein he would die within the bounds of his household (nest, קֶן)⁸ a thing to behold after spending days of felicity.⁹

The recollection of Job acting as a patriarch who was concerned with the needs and protection of his household interplayed with his rhetoric of remembrance, which may imply God's seeming forgetfulness to care for Job as a father. In this case, Job's self-presentation as a responsible judge in his village was a protest against God and a call for Him to exercise justice in his case. God in Job's understanding promoted order and justice within life and society, which was a contradiction to a silent God he encountered in his ordeal. This anthropomorphic view and representation of God in

⁷The Hebrew root חָרַץ in Aramaic and Akkadian means "young" or "to be early", which may denote the notion of early harvest rather than "winter" as some translations rendered [Koehler and Baumgartner, "חָרַץ," *HALOT* 1:354].

⁸The term implies a secure dwelling as used in Exo. 25: 32; 37: 18. It may also refer to one's household as used in Deut. 32: 11 and Isa. 16:2 [John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 392]. This term is still the subject of many interpretations and debates today.

⁹Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 440. He asserts that Job's appeal to memory of the past is "a yearning to return to them" denoted by the phrase מִיָּמֵי תַנְנִי (Job 29: 2, "O that..."). He considers the phrase as an important element in Job's rhetoric. He further claims that the use of strong and hyperbolic imagery to describe his past life conveys the extent of God's intimacy with him.

light of Job's character and life could have been a blasphemous assertion to traditional faith and dogma, but this was a survival strategy that Job used against the tirades of his three friends and the seeming injustice and hiddenness of God at that moment of torment.

Rhetoric of Remembrance as an Appeal for Just Trial

Chapters 29–30 can only make full sense if read together as a whole. Job's afflictions can only be depicted vividly if seen in light of chapter 29. James A. Wharton clearly elaborates the importance of these chapters in relation to the brokenness that Job himself felt within him as portrayed in his discourses.¹⁰ A seeming tension between chapter 29 and 30 is building up regarding Job's character and moral integrity, but to remove the other would devalue the rhetorical situation that is being presented in Job's appeal. In chapter 30: 1–10, Job relegated himself to the abominable class of the society. C. Newsome considers this appeal of Job as deep agony caused by his unforeseen demise into the lowest rank of the society.¹¹ A graphic depiction of Job's tribulation was beyond imagination as he identified himself with people who were considered the "scum" of the society.¹² The identity of this group of people is still being disputed and Job's attitude towards them as part of his rhetoric is somewhat unlikely in comparison with chapter 29.¹³ Job's condition as demonstrated in the Bible is interpreted by these scholars is incogitable. Crenshaw vividly describes Job's intense and extreme tribulation:

Job's physical suffering paled in comparison with his mental agony over this unfathomable face of God, which no longer smiles upon him but now contorts angrily before him. It seems to Job that this God actively destroys all hope, wearing it away like the slow erosion of rocks brought about by flowing water. Job perceives an element of unfairness in the natural order of things which grants sure expectation that a tree will put forth new growth after it has been cut down, provided sufficient water reaches the stump, but denies similar hope to humans. Memory of previous relationship with God evokes an astonishing declaration: God will remember me when it is too late, and he will long for his faithful servant . . . An eclipse of God took place at the precise moment of Job's pressing need for answers. Faced with silence from his former dialogue partner, and confronted with empty words from human substitutes, the distraught father adopted extreme measures of provocation. The bold charges against God aimed at a single point: to evoke

¹⁰James A. Wharton, *Job* (Westminster Commentary; Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1999), 125.

¹¹Carol A. Newsome, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 193–194.

¹²Wharton, *Job*, 125.

¹³Matthewson, *Death and Survival*, 156. Matthewson considers these verses as symbolic of Job's notion of honor and shame wherein he finds ways to vindicate himself.

God's response at any cost. Confident that sinner dared not take a stand before God, Job aspired to personal vindication by overcoming divine silence.¹⁴

In the face of deep anguish and sorrow, Job was not only faced with daunting accusations of his friends. He was also besieged by a deafening silence from God. In chapter 29, Job re-imagined the once picturesque and felicitous relationship he had with God, but in chapter 30 none of that memory could be compared to the utter

darkness and brokenness of soul that Job experienced.¹⁵ The motif of friendship shattered by friction and faction because of Job's case and condition, leading to feelings of isolation both from his own household and the entire community, reverberates in the book of Job and other wisdom books (Job 6: 14–15; 12: 4; 19: 13–19; 29: 4; Psalm 55: 12–14; 20–21; Sirach 37: 1–6). This communal impasse is one of the most prominent themes in the book of Job to describe his relationship with God and even with his three friends.

In Job 30: 16–20, Job painfully articulates his indescribable anguish by describing how his situation changed from the one described in the previous chapter.¹⁶ In a similar line of thought, J. E. Hartley considers the chapters as “avowal of innocence” wherein Job was urging God to examine the integrity of his character.¹⁷ In chapter 29: 7–25, the regality and integrity of Job's own justice and righteousness which portrays the heavenly scene in the prologue, when God described Job before the “hasatan” is portrayed in intense theatrical rhetoric.¹⁸ These suggestions affirm Job's longing to be vindicated but I also would like to add that these chapters do not only reflect Job's moral and ethical integrity but herein also lies his hope and knowledge of who God is. Chapter 30 is an antithesis of chapter 29. The mode of the

¹⁴James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta, GA: JK Press, 1981), 109, 119.

¹⁵Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2013), 174–180. One of the prevailing themes in wisdom tradition is the notion of a friend becoming an enemy, which is now the best description of Job's situation.

¹⁶The phrase עָלַי תִּשָּׁפֵךְ נַפְשִׁי (‘‘my soul is poured out against me’’) in verse 16, painstakingly expressed Job's agony that went beyond his physical affliction and the losses that he experienced. The preposition עַל is commonly used rendered as ‘‘with, upon, to, towards, on account of, against’’ but in the context of this passage, the latter is the best translation used in a hostile sense [Koehler and Baumgartner, ‘‘עַל,’’ *HALOT* 1:826]. The description of Job's circumstance is one of pathos, wherein Job is arousing a sense of clemency from his audience. The hostile sense of the preposition עַל can be considered valid in view of the rhetorical situation of the text. Job's very own life is used as a bait to trap him into the abyss of injustice and equivocation. NRS, JPS and ESV translated the phrase as ‘‘And now my soul is poured out within me’’ that may indicate emotional and psychological pain. NIV and CJB both preferred the idea of a life that is fleeting--- ‘‘my life is ebbing away.’’ KJV rendered it as ‘‘And now my soul is poured out upon me.’’ Habel prefers ‘‘So now my life drains from me’’ [*The Book of Job*, 414]. The same sentiment is echoed in a Sumerian variation of Job motif whose main character is in anguish because he was forsaken and tormented by the silence of the god who begot him: ‘‘My god, you who are my father who begot me, [lift up] my face... how long will you leave me unguided?’’ [‘‘Man and His God,’’ translated by S. N. Kramer (*ANET*, 589–591). See also James B. Pritchard, ed, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 352–357.

¹⁷C. Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1981), 39

¹⁸J. E. Hartley, 400.

discourse from adulation of the past turned into a dirge of pain and anger. In this chapter, an interplay of memory of the past and his present ordeal is in juxtaposition as Job's response to his situation and a means to assuage his grief and despair. This survival approach of Job may be sacrilegious and unorthodox to many people, including Christians, but there is a high form of theology and practicality here that we need to see as readers and interpreters. Job's radical approach demonstrates the need for an Absolute Arbiter to judge and uphold his case.

In Job's arguments, there are seeming inconsistencies in his theological premises that can be explained in relation to his own experience. And as Bruce Zuckerman further asserts, "it is only in the Theophany, where God rejects Job's legal gambit, that the correspondences are restored to what they should be, with God once more in His proper place as the Master of the universe, beyond all questioning or comprehension by humanity."¹⁹ Job's later encounter with the Powerful Creator in chapters 38 to 41 would lead him to repent in humble adoration; but prior to that conversion experience, Job's longing for vindication and knowledge of God is highly-framed within the finiteness of his own experience. On the other hand, in spite of the terrible anguish, Job was willing to own his transgressions publicly, despite the temptation to conceal as implied in the continuation of appeal in Job 31: 29–37 that climaxed his desire to stand in trial before the assembly, particularly before the silent God.²⁰ Regardless of the judgment of his three companions and his own self-justification and righteousness, we can still see Job's willingness to be judged by God himself.

Rhetoric of Remembrance as an Expression of Job's Concept of God

There are notable anthropomorphic notions of God expressed in Job's rhetorical argumentation in chapters 29–30. In chapter 29, Job used metaphorical imagery of friendship and relationships. God was presented as אֹר (light) in verse 3 and סֹד (an intimate confidant) in verse 4. Alden acknowledges that the interpretation of the latter as an intimate friendship is not accepted by all, but he considers these imageries as symbolic of God's guidance and security.²¹ Newsom claims that Job's appeal seen in a social level is no more than "a literary device, a fictive innovation of the author" in order to counteract social ostracism similar with the ritual of re-integrating a suppliant into the community as in the case of Job.²² This is a possible interpretation based on social-scientific reading of the text that if followed without restraint may deny the theological meaning of the book of Job.

When Job remembers the glorious days of his life, the emphasis of relationship was explicit in his rhetoric. Newsom's interpretation of the social relevance of chapter

¹⁹Wharton, *Job*, 122.

²⁰Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint*, (New York, NY: WJKP, 199), 147.

²¹Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 195.

²²Robert L. Alden, *Job* (vol 11 of New America Commentary; Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1993), 280–281.

29–30 in Job’s context clarifies the importance of the relationship depicted in Job’s arguments. In fact, the languages that Job used in presenting his case was something that is intelligible to whomever he was directing the address or his formal appeal.²³ Job 29–30 can be divided into sections based on personal and communal relationships mentioned in his speech: (1) Job’s relationship with God, both as confidant and adversary (29: 2–6; 30: 19–23); (2) relationship with young men, the poor and the needy (29: 7–17); (3) relationship with the *צַעִיר* who are *כַּגְנֵב* (“they are banished out of the midst of the community; [men] shouted after them like a thief, 29: 21–30: 11). These metaphorical and rhetorical images of relationship imply Job’s notion of God as an adversary.

B. Zuckerman points out that Job perceives God as an “opponent-at-law rather than the source and authority of Law.”²⁴ Job’s demand for God to justify his righteousness and his allusion to God who sees everything, including the ways of the wicked is a significant Joban epistemology. Job and his friends had their own preconceived understanding of God and ideals of life. The arguments of Job’s friends were fundamentally true and correct, but they also could not undermine the arguments of Job, which were consistent with God as he remembers Him and of the suffering that he experienced as a direct attack of God. But his knowledge of God was yet to be redefined in the revelation and words of God in chapters 38–41. In God’s revelation of Himself and rhetorical questions, Job had no other response but to say *עַל־כֵּן אָמַצְט וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־עֵפֶר וְאָפֶר* (Job 42:6, “therefore, I spurn [my words] and repent in dust and ashes”).²⁵

All throughout the course of Job’s argument and his persistent appeal to speak to God amidst all the judgment of his friends and the people of whom he spoke about in his last testimony, Job’s sense of understanding of God is interspersed. Alden states that Job is the only speaker in the book who had the courage to address God with all the complaints and seeming words of blasphemy.²⁶ Job’s address was one of honesty and frankness that a person could only express to someone dear and close to him or her. Job’s remembrance of blessings and intimacy with God and his accusation of injustice against a silent God reflect his relationship and notion of God. This

²³Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 196–197. However, she recognizes that there are no evidences supporting the idea that Job’s testimony is a common practice. Newsom further indicates that the appeal of Job can be vindicated by the restoration of his fortunes in the epilogue (Job 42:10–17) and does not necessitate the theophany of God [*The Book of Job*, 197–198]. But the rhetoric in the text would contradict this interpretation especially Job’s allusion to the notion of presenting a case before an assembly in a city gate (*שַׁעַר*), wherein ANE legal proceedings, conversation and important news are presented [J. D. Douglas, and M. C. Tenney, *Zondervan Illustrated Dictionary*, s. v. “gate”]. This allusion implies Job’s desire to be vindicated and be tried before the judge and the witnesses. Thus, the dramatic disclosure of God is called for in this sense. M. Oeming lists two importance of God’s theophany in relation to the arguments that Job presents: (1) the extent of God’s acts supersedes that of the horizon the humanity can comprehend; (2) humanity is not the center of the universe [“The Encounter with God,” in *Job’s Journey*, 80–81].

²⁴Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 184.

²⁵Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 147.

²⁶LXX added *ἐμαυτόν* (myself); Targum has *עוֹרֵרִי* (wealth, riches). JPS added “my words” in its translation, while most translations relied on LXX by adding “myself”.

relationship and notion of God is profoundly described by Oeming in his interpretation of Job 42:7, which is God's commendation of Job at the epilogue section:

God does not praise a specific statement by Job (neither the patient sufferer of the beginning, the passionate rebel of the middle section, nor the individual who rebukes himself in the end). God does not justify a specific *teaching* about himself but rather the *direction of Job's speech*, his internal stance, his knowledge of the place to which and from which his thoughts proceed. God praises Job's speech as a speech to God. In contrast the friends are not scolded for what they have said, but for their attitude toward God. It is their distant stance toward God that incurs God's wrath: Job's friends are studious and earnest theologians. They use their full cognitive competence and produce impressive system of thought. Yet their full mistake lies in the foundation of their theology: "You have not spoken well to me, not toward me, not *in personal relation to me*. Instead [*sic*] you only spoke of me . . ." Job may speak against God and perhaps even make mistakes, but he speaks to God and thus receive God's praise.²⁷

In the midst of suffering and ordeal, Job can only see the injustice of God and hear His deafening silence, but his arguments and his appeals reflect one's intimacy and honesty before God. This intimacy was imbued by his memory of God, his past relationship with Him. The honesty of his accusation against God and to God reflected his knowledge of the living God and His power to justify and to recreate what had been broken by the schemes of our true adversary.

The appeal in chapter 30 ended with musical imagery depicting Job's loss of words to the pain that he was experiencing. He described his suffering to a פנור ("a psalm" or "a lyre") that is turned to אבל ("mourning"), which has the idea of mourning for death. This metaphor denotes Job's inexpressible grief and torment, but in all these, he remained steadfast to appeal to God that he may speak to him. Amidst his torment, Job did not know what the narrator and the readers of his story knew. It was not because of his sin that he suffered. It was a test of faith. It was because God himself boasted of Job's righteousness to the true adversary in the story of Job.

The skeptics may raise their eyebrows to the conclusion but the story of Job reflects a story of relationship that is divinely unfathomable but profound. Christians may either question or exalt Job's self-righteousness and self-justification, but we could not deny that there are significant and relevant theological truths imbued in his discourses. There are also some practical lessons to gain that could alleviate one's pain and suffering. God's existence as seen in Job is another ground to develop a paradigm of survival for today and for the uncertain days ahead of us.

²⁷Alden, *Job*, 293.

Conclusion and Reflections

Job's final appeal in chapter 29–30 exhibits the extent of his knowledge of God. The rhetorical persuasion and the imagery used in his speeches encapsulated the strong points that he tried to express. His remembrance of the past and knowledge of God as interspersed within his last appeal was a core motive behind his plea for justification that enabled him to steadfastly argue his case before his friends and before a silent God. The recollection of his celebrated past that was characterized by compassion, righteousness, and justice were not merely a self-presentation and aggrandizement of his moral purity and ethical integrity but an implicit and rooted affirmation of God and His character. Entrenched within Job's testimony and recollection was an implied yet conscious theological stance of his personal relationship with God. From his rhetorical usage of relational imagery to describe his early life, resonated an implied call for God to remember him as before and examine his present ordeal. Job's sheer pining to present his appeal to God and be examined by him, including his willingness to take responsibility if God would find him guilty, represented his honest and intimate connection with him.

From Job's experience we can see that the presence of people and friends, even theological knowledge and traditions, are not solely the means to survive catastrophic human struggles such as what we are experiencing in this post-pandemic era. It is clear that still the most valuable and solid ground and paradigm of survival in times of suffering and pains is one's personal encounter with the Sovereign Creator and God. One's former experience and understanding of God, no matter how limited and finite, could be one of the most firm and absolute supports that the people could stand on in this post-pandemic world. The inconceivable consequences of the pandemic to the world may require socioeconomic experts and psychological interventions but God's existence as seen in Job is another ground to develop a survival strategy for today and for the uncertain days ahead of us.

People from all walks of life are struggling daily to alleviate their pains and anxiety, but instead of surviving fully, several people are succumbing more and more to different forms of addictions and alienation. Hence, we can assert that all these methods of survival fall short of the desired outcome. As seen in the narrative of Job, a deeper sense and understanding of God's presence and how he deals with humanity and the entire created world matters. Our remembrance of God's previous works in our lives and the world, though often narrow and bound within our finiteness and experiences, is still the most solid ground for survival and meaning.

Lord in my quest to know you may I not forget you; in my desire to freely talk about you, may I not fail to talk to you. Out of a thousand words that I wrote about you, may I have spoken to you . . .

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