Job

1

Summary: *The book opens with a prose prologue introducing Job as a man of extraordinary piety and wealth in the land of Uz. The scene then shifts to the heavenly council, where the Adversary (ha-satan) challenges whether Job's devotion to God is genuine or merely transactional. God permits the Adversary to strip Job of everything — livestock, servants, and children — in a single catastrophic day. Job tears his robe, shaves his head, and worships.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The prologue operates on two levels that never intersect within the story itself. The reader sees the heavenly council scene — the wager, the challenge, the permission granted — but Job never does. He will spend the next forty chapters searching for an explanation that the reader already possesses, and when God finally answers him from the whirlwind, God never mentions the Adversary's challenge. This dramatic irony is the engine of the entire book: the reader knows something the sufferer does not, and the sufferer's ignorance is the very thing being tested. The Adversary's question — 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' (ha-chinnam yare Iyov Elohim) — is arguably the most important theological question in the Hebrew Bible. It asks whether disinterested righteousness exists, whether a human being can love God without benefit. Everything that follows depends on the answer.*

Translation Friction: *The figure called ha-satan in this chapter is not the Satan of later Christian theology. The Hebrew uses the definite article — ha-satan, 'the Adversary' — indicating a role or function within the heavenly court, not a proper name. This figure is a member of the bene ha-elohim ('sons of God'), the divine council, and operates with God's explicit permission. He is more prosecuting attorney than cosmic evil. Translating ha-satan as 'Satan' imports centuries of later theological development into a text that knows nothing of it. We render it 'the Adversary' to preserve the original function. The land of Uz is deliberately vague — possibly Edom or northern Arabia — placing Job outside Israel's covenant boundaries. He is not an Israelite, which makes the book's theology universal rather than covenantal.*

Connections: *The heavenly council scene echoes 1 Kings 22:19-23, where God's throne room is depicted with spirits presenting themselves before the LORD. The phrase bene ha-elohim ('sons of God') appears in Genesis 6:2 and Psalm 82:1, always referring to members of the divine assembly. Job's response in verse 21 — 'The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away' — will be tested and complicated by the poetic dialogues that follow; by chapter 3, Job will curse the day he was born. The prose frame (chapters 1-2 and 42) may preserve an older folktale about a patient sufferer, into which the poet inserted the vast poetic dialogue (chapters 3-41) that questions everything the prologue seems to affirm.*

1There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and
turned away from evil. 2Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3His livestock numbered seven thousand sheep,
three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred female donkeys, and he had a very large household. This
man was the greatest of all the people of the east. 4His sons would go and hold a feast in each one's house on his appointed
day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5When the days of feasting had completed
their cycle, Job would send for them and consecrate them. He would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings for
each of them, for Job said, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job did every
time. 6Now there came a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and the Adversary also
came among them. 7The LORD said to the Adversary, "Where have you come from?" The Adversary answered the LORD,
"From roaming through the earth and walking back and forth across it." 8The LORD said to the Adversary, "Have you
considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth — a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns
away from evil." 9The Adversary answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" 10Have You not put a hedge around
him, around his household, and around everything he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his
livestock have spread across the land. 11But stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has — he will surely curse You to
Your face. 12The LORD said to the Adversary, "Very well — everything he has is in your hand. Only do not lay a hand on the
man himself." Then the Adversary went out from the presence of the LORD. 13One day, when his sons and daughters were
eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and
the donkeys were grazing beside them, 15when the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They struck down the servants
with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." 16While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The
fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell
you." 17While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on
the camels and carried them off. They struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell
you." 18While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their
oldest brother's house, 19when a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house. It
collapsed on the young people, and they are dead. I alone have escaped to tell you." 20Then Job stood up, tore his robe,
shaved his head, fell to the ground, and worshiped. 21He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will
return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." 22In all of this, Job did not
sin or assign blame to God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The land of Uz (erets Uts) is geographically ambiguous — Lamentations 4:21 associates Uz with Edom, while Genesis 10:23 links it to Aram. The deliberate vagueness places Job outside the land of Israel and outside the Mosaic covenant, making his story a universal exploration of suffering rather than an Israelite-specific one.

1. The fourfold description (tam, yashar, yere Elohim, sar me-ra) will be quoted verbatim by God to the Adversary in verse 8, confirming that this is not merely the narrator's assessment but God's own evaluation of Job.

2. Seven sons and three daughters total ten children — the number of completeness. The numbers are literary as well as literal: seven is the number of divine fullness and three is the number of completeness. Together they signal that Job's family, like his character, is whole and abundant. This perfect number will be restored exactly in 42:13.

3. The inventory follows the same pattern of completeness as the children: seven thousand, three thousand, five hundred, five hundred — round, full numbers. The phrase gadol mi-kol bene qedem ('greatest of all the sons of the east') establishes Job as the wealthiest and most prominent figure in the entire eastern region. Bene qedem ('sons of the east') refers to the peoples east of Israel — Arameans, Edomites, and Arabian tribes. Job's greatness is measured in the currency of the ancient pastoral world: livestock and household servants.

4. The phrase beit ish yomo ('the house of each man on his day') suggests a rotating cycle of feasting — each brother hosted in turn. The inclusion of the three sisters in the feasting is notable: in a patriarchal context, the deliberate mention that the sisters were invited signals family harmony and completeness. The picture is one of prosperous, unified family life — which makes its destruction in verses 18-19 all the more devastating.

5. The euphemistic use of barak ('to bless') for 'to curse' (qalal) is one of the most well-known scribal substitutions in the Hebrew Bible. It appears here and in 1:11, 2:5, and 2:9. We render it as 'cursed' in translation because the context makes the meaning clear: Job is not worried that his children blessed God — he fears they may have blasphemed in their hearts. The euphemism exists to protect the reader from the juxtaposition of 'curse' and

'God.'

5. The phrase kol hayyamim ('all the days') means this was not occasional but habitual — Job's intercessory practice was continuous. He did not merely believe in righteousness; he practiced it ritually and preventatively on behalf of others.

6. The phrase bene ha-elohim ('sons of God') refers to divine beings in the heavenly assembly. The same expression appears in Genesis 6:2 and Psalm 29:1. In the Job context, these are members of God's royal court — they report, they serve, they receive orders.

6. ha-satan with the definite article indicates a role: 'the adversary, the accuser, the challenger.' In later Jewish and Christian theology, Satan becomes a proper name for a cosmic antagonist. In Job, he is a functionary — the prosecuting attorney in God's court. He cannot act without permission, and his challenge serves God's purpose.

7. God's question me-ayin tavo ('from where have you come?') is not a request for information — God is omniscient in this narrative. It is a courtly opening, the sovereign inviting a report from a subordinate. The Adversary's answer — mi-shut ba-arets u-mehithallekh bah ('from roaming in the earth and from walking about in it') — uses two verbs of restless motion: shut ('to rove, to roam') and hithalekh ('to walk about, to go back and forth'). The picture is of a patrol agent who has surveyed the earth and now returns to report. The language echoes Zechariah 1:10-11, where angelic horsemen patrol the earth and report to the LORD.

8. The title avdi ('my servant') is a term of high honor in the Hebrew Bible — it is applied to Moses (Numbers 12:7), David (2 Samuel 7:5), and the Servant of the LORD in Isaiah. By calling Job 'my servant,' God claims him and vouches for him.

8. The fact that God raises Job's name first has troubled interpreters for centuries. It means that Job's suffering, in one sense, begins with God's pride in him. The Adversary did not come looking for Job — God offered him.

9. The word chinnam ('for nothing, without cause') appears again in 2:3, where God will say the Adversary incited Him against Job chinnam ('without cause'). The same word frames both the Adversary's challenge and God's eventual acknowledgment — creating a devastating irony: God admits that Job suffered 'for nothing' in the same language the Adversary used to question whether Job worships 'for nothing.'

10. The Adversary describes God's protection with the verb sakta ('You have hedged, fenced') — the image is of a thorn hedge or protective fence surrounding Job from every direction (mi-saviv, 'all around'). The irony is that this protective hedge is exactly what Job will later complain about in a twisted form: in 3:23, Job says God has hedged him in (yasekh) so that he cannot escape suffering. The same verb, opposite meanings — protection becomes imprisonment.

10. The verb parats ('has burst out, spread') describes Job's livestock expanding across the land like a flood breaking its banks. The Adversary's description of Job's prosperity is accurate: God has blessed everything. The accusation is not that Job is ungrateful but that his gratitude is rational self-interest.

11. The Adversary challenges God to act personally: shelach na yadekha ('stretch out Your hand') — divine agency, not delegated destruction. The verb ga ('touch, strike') uses the same root (naga) that describes plagues and afflictions throughout the Hebrew Bible. The euphemistic yevarekekha ('he will bless You') again substitutes barak for the implied qalal ('curse'). The phrase al panekha ('to Your face') is the boldest element: the Adversary claims Job will blaspheme directly, openly, not in secret thought but in frontal defiance. This is the opposite of the hidden heart-sin Job feared in his children (v. 5).

12. The phrase beyadekha ('in your hand') transfers operational authority. The Adversary cannot exceed the boundary God sets, but within that boundary he has full discretion. This establishes a principle that governs the entire book: suffering operates within divine permission, not outside it.

12. The Adversary's departure from God's presence is narrated with the same formula used for courtiers leaving a king's throne room. He is a subordinate executing authorized action, not a rebel seizing independent power.

13. The scene returns to earth with vayyehi hayyom ('and the day came') — the same formula that opened the heavenly council scene in verse 6. The reader knows what Job does not: this ordinary day of family feasting is the day the Adversary has been authorized to act. The detail that they are in the eldest brother's house (beit acheihem habbekhor) anchors the catastrophe in a specific, domestic moment. They are celebrating when destruction arrives.

14. The first of four messengers arrives. The word mal'akh ('messenger') is the same word used for angels, though here it refers to a human survivor. The scene described is ordinary agricultural life — oxen plowing, donkeys grazing — peaceful normalcy that is about to be shattered. The narrative technique of beginning with the mundane before the catastrophe intensifies the shock.

15. The Sabeans (Sheva) were raiders from the Arabian Peninsula — a historical people known for both trade and raiding. The phrase vatippol Sheva ('Sheba fell upon them') uses the verb nafal ('to fall') in its military sense: a sudden, overwhelming assault. The formula va-immaltah raq ani levaddi lehagid lakh ('and I escaped, only I alone, to tell you') will be repeated by each messenger — it becomes a refrain of catastrophe, each survivor arriving with the same formulaic announcement of ruin.

16. The phrase od zeh medabber vezeh ba ('while this one was still speaking, that one came') creates a relentless rhythm — disaster arrives faster than it can be reported. The 'fire of God' (esh Elohim) is lightning, but the narrator's phrase is theologically charged: it is God's fire, falling from God's heaven, destroying God's servant's property — with God's permission. The verb vatokhleim ('and it consumed them') uses the verb akhal ('to eat, devour') — the fire ate the sheep and servants. The messenger formula repeats identically.

17. The Chaldeans (Kasdim) were a Mesopotamian people, later associated with Babylon. Their military tactic — sheloshah rashim ('three heads/divisions') — describes a coordinated three-pronged assault, surrounding the herd from multiple directions. The verb vayyifshetu ('they raided, stripped') implies violent plundering. The alternation between human attackers (Sabeans, Chaldeans) and divine agency (fire from heaven) creates a pattern: some disasters come from human enemies, some from nature, but all operate under the same permission.

18. The fourth messenger begins with the same formula, but now the subject shifts from livestock and servants to banekha u-venotekha ('your sons and your daughters'). The repetition of the feasting scene from verse 13 — eating and drinking wine in the oldest brother's house — creates a terrible echo: the reader already knows this scene was set up as the backdrop for disaster. The pause before the next verse is the narrative holding its breath.

19. The ruach gedolah ('great wind') comes me-ever hamidbar ('from across the wilderness') — from the desert, from the direction of chaos and emptiness. It strikes be-arba pinnot habayit ('the four corners of the house') — all four simultaneously, meaning total structural collapse, not gradual damage. The verb vayyippol ('it fell') echoes the verb used for the Sabeans' attack in verse 15 (vatippol): human raiders and cosmic wind use the same verb of falling upon their victims.

19. The messenger says vayyamutu ('and they died') — the starkest possible statement. No qualification, no exception. And then the survivor formula one final time: I alone escaped to tell you. The word ne'arim ('young people') is often translated 'young men' but can include all the children — the sons and daughters of verse 18.

20. The me'il ('robe') is the outer garment of a wealthy or noble person — the same word used for Samuel's robe (1 Samuel 2:19) and the priestly garment. Tearing it signifies that the life it represented is torn apart. Shaving the head (vayyagoz et rosho) is a mourning practice attested throughout the ancient Near East. Both actions are physical expressions of internal devastation.

20. The verb vayyishtachu ('he worshiped') is the Hishtaphel of shachah, meaning to prostrate oneself, to bow to the ground. It is the most embodied form of worship in Hebrew — not a word or a thought but a body pressed against the earth before God.

21. The phrase arom ashuv shammah ('naked I will return there') has generated centuries of interpretation. 'There' (shammah) most likely refers to the earth — humans come from dust and return to dust (Genesis 3:19). But the grammatical antecedent is 'my mother's womb' (beten immi), creating the image of death as a return to the womb of the earth, the ground from which Adam was formed.

21. The structure YHWH natan va-YHWH laqach is deliberately parallel: the divine name occupies the same position in both clauses, making God the agent of both abundance and loss. This is not resignation — it is theological assertion. Job claims that both realities belong to God.

22. The word tiflah is rare and debated. It may derive from tafel ('tasteless, unseasoned') — meaning Job did not attribute anything 'tasteless' or 'worthless' to God. Others connect it to a root meaning 'to spit out' or 'to reject.' The Septuagint translates it as 'folly' (aphrona). We chose 'assign blame' because the context suggests Job refrained from charging God with wrongdoing — which is exactly what the friends will later accuse him of doing, and what God in chapter 38 will address directly.

2

Summary: *The heavenly council convenes again. God reaffirms Job's integrity and accuses the Adversary of inciting Him against Job 'for nothing.' The Adversary escalates: skin for skin — a man will give up anything to save his own body. God permits the Adversary to afflict Job's flesh but preserve his life. Job is struck with painful sores from head to foot. His wife tells him to curse God and die. Job refuses. Three friends — Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar — arrive, and their grief at his transformation is so great that they sit with him in silence for seven days.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The seven days of silence at the end of this chapter are among the most powerful moments in the Hebrew Bible. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar see Job from a distance and do not recognize him. They weep, tear their robes, throw dust on their heads, and sit on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights without speaking a word — ki ra'u ki gadal hakke'ev me'od ('for they saw that his suffering was very great'). Seven days is the duration of mourning for the dead. The friends are sitting shiva for a man who is still alive. Their silence is the last moment of pure compassion in the book; when they finally open their mouths in chapter 4, they will begin the long, grinding argument that causes Job almost as much pain as his sores. The friends are at their best when they say nothing.*

Translation Friction: *The Adversary's phrase or mashal ('skin for skin') in verse 4 is one of the most debated idioms in the Hebrew Bible. It may be a proverb meaning 'a man will trade one thing for another of equal value' — that is, Job surrendered his children and possessions (someone else's skin) but will not endure harm to his own body. Or it may mean 'skin in exchange for skin' — everything Job lost was external, but true devotion is only tested when the body itself is at stake. No consensus exists, and we render it literally and explain the range in the notes. Job's wife's instruction in verse 9 — barekh Elohim va-mut ('bless God and die') — uses*

the same euphemism for 'curse' that appears throughout the prologue. Her words have been interpreted as cruelty, despair, compassion (she wants his suffering to end), or pragmatic realism. We render them plainly and let the reader decide.

Connections: *The second heavenly council scene parallels the first (1:6-12) with deliberate escalation: same setting, same question, same challenge, higher stakes. God's statement that Job still holds fast to his integrity 'though you incited Me against him to destroy him for nothing' (chinnam) uses the same word the Adversary used in 1:9 — 'Does Job fear God for nothing (chinnam)?' The Adversary challenged whether Job worships without cause; God admits He afflicted Job without cause. The seven-day silence of the friends (v. 13) follows the mourning protocol of Genesis 50:10 and will be echoed in Ezekiel 3:15. The number seven connects to the creation narrative — seven days of sitting in dust mirrors seven days of making the world, an anti-creation that Job will articulate fully in chapter 3.*

1Again there came a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and the Adversary also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2The LORD said to the Adversary, "Where have you come from?" The Adversary answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and walking back and forth across it." 3The LORD said to the Adversary, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth — a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still holds fast to his integrity, even though you incited Me against him to destroy him for nothing." 4The Adversary answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! Everything a man has he will give for his own life. 5But stretch out Your hand and strike his bone and his flesh — he will surely curse You to Your face." 6The LORD said to the Adversary, "Very well — he is in your hand. Only preserve his life." 7The Adversary went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with painful sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8He took a broken piece of pottery to scrape himself with, and he sat among the ashes. 9His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die." 10He said to her, "You are speaking as one of the senseless women would speak. Should we accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all of this, Job did not sin with his lips. 11When Job's three friends heard about all this disaster that had come upon him, each of them set out from his own place — Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They arranged to meet together to go and grieve with him and comfort him. 12When they looked up from a distance, they did not recognize him. They raised their voices and wept. Each of them tore his robe, and they threw dust into the air over their heads. 13They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The scene repeats 1:6 almost verbatim, but with one addition: lehityatsev al YHWH ('to present himself before the LORD') is stated twice, emphasizing that the Adversary's presence is deliberate and purposeful. He has returned with a report — and a new challenge. The repetition of the council scene creates a structural bracket: first test (1:6-12), first result (1:13-22), second test (2:1-6), second result (2:7-10).
2. The exchange repeats 1:7 exactly — the same courtly opening, the same answer about patrolling the earth. The repetition is formulaic and deliberate: the heavenly court operates by protocol. But the reader now brings knowledge from chapter 1 to this exchange — the Adversary has been roaming the earth and has witnessed Job's response to catastrophe.
3. The phrase levall'o ('to swallow him up, to destroy him') uses the Piel infinitive of bala ('to swallow'), which means 'to consume, to destroy utterly.' God describes what happened to Job's world as swallowing — total consumption. The fact that God uses this language about His own action is remarkable.
3. God's admission that He was 'incited' (vattesiteni) against Job raises one of the book's deepest theological problems: does God acknowledge that He was manipulated? Or is this a sovereign God taking responsibility for a decision He made freely? The text does not resolve this tension.
4. The phrase or be'ad or ('skin for skin') is an ancient proverb whose exact meaning is lost. The most common interpretation: a person will sacrifice anything external — property, even family — to protect their own body. The Adversary argues that Job's first test was not severe enough because it only destroyed what was outside Job's skin. The word nefesh ('life, self, being') in the second clause raises the stakes to existential level: a man will give everything be'ad nafsho ('for his own life/self').
4. The Adversary's logic is transactional: humans are ultimately self-interested. Job gave up possessions and children and still worshiped — but those losses, however devastating, were external. The real test is pain. Will Job still worship when his own flesh is the battleground?

5. The Adversary repeats his challenge from 1:11 with one critical change: instead of 'all that he has,' the target is now atsmov u-vesaro ('his bone and his flesh'). Bone and flesh together represent the whole physical body — from the deepest interior (bone) to the visible surface (flesh). The challenge is to penetrate Job's own body, to make his suffering inescapable and personal. The euphemistic yevarekekha ('he will bless/curse You') and al panekha ('to Your face') repeat from 1:11.

6. God grants the escalation with a new boundary: hinno veyadekha ('he is in your hand') — not merely his possessions, but Job himself is now under the Adversary's power. The restriction akh et nafsho shemor ('only his life preserve') sets the floor: the Adversary may inflict any suffering short of death. The word nefesh ('life, self') is the same word the Adversary used in verse 4 — the Adversary said a man will give everything for his nefesh; God says the Adversary must protect Job's nefesh. The Adversary can torment everything up to the boundary of existence itself.

7. The shechin ra ('painful/evil sore') is the same word used for the sixth plague of Egypt (Exodus 9:9-11) and the disease threatened in Deuteronomy 28:35 as a covenant curse. The phrase mikaf raglo ve-ad qodqodo ('from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head') is a merism — a figure of speech expressing totality by naming two extremes. Job's entire body is covered. There is no part of him that is not in agony. The disease is not identified precisely — proposals range from smallpox to elephantiasis to severe dermatitis — but the text cares about the suffering, not the diagnosis.

8. The ash heap (efer) may refer to the communal refuse pile outside a village — a place associated with mourning, defilement, and social exclusion. In some ancient Near Eastern cultures, sitting in ashes was both a mourning practice and a sign of complete humiliation. The detail that Job takes a potsherd to scrape himself suggests the sores are oozing or crusting and that no one is caring for him — he must tend his own wounds with a piece of garbage.

9. Job's wife is unnamed in the Hebrew text and appears only in this single verse. The Septuagint expands her speech considerably, giving her a long lament about her own suffering. The Hebrew is spare: two sentences. Her question ('are you still holding fast to your integrity?') could be read as incredulity, mockery, anguish, or genuine concern that his faithfulness is only prolonging his pain.

9. The imperative va-mut ('and die') is the harshest element. It may mean 'let yourself die' (stop fighting to live) or it may anticipate divine punishment for blasphemy — curse God and God will strike you dead, ending your agony. Either reading makes her an agent of the very outcome the Adversary desired.

10. The phrase bisfatav ('with his lips') has generated enormous debate. Some read it as a simple restatement — Job did not sin in his speech. Others see it as a deliberate limitation: Job did not sin with his lips, but his inner life may already be moving toward the anguish that will erupt in chapter 3. The Hebrew is precise, and precision in Hebrew often signals intentional restriction.

10. The noun nevalot is related to naval ('fool') — the word used for Nabal in 1 Samuel 25. It describes not intellectual deficiency but moral and spiritual bankruptcy, a refusal to acknowledge God's reality. Job's rebuke places his wife's words in that category: speech that fails to account for divine sovereignty.

11. The three friends are identified by their homelands: Eliphaz the Temanite (Teman is associated with Edom, known for wisdom — see Jeremiah 49:7), Bildad the Shuhite (Shuah is linked to Abraham's son through Keturah in Genesis 25:2), and Zophar the Naamathite (location uncertain, possibly in northwest Arabia). Like Job, all three are non-Israelites — the entire dialogue takes place outside the covenant community.

11. The verb vayyivva'adu ('they arranged together') implies coordinated planning, not a chance meeting. The purpose is twofold: lanud lo ('to grieve with him' — the verb nud means to shake the head in sympathy, to express grief by physical gesture) and lenacha'mo ('to comfort him' — the verb nacham means to console, to give rest from pain). Their intention is good. The tragedy of the book is that their comfort will fail.

12. The phrase hashamamah ('toward the heavens') attached to the dust-throwing is significant — the dust goes up before it comes down, directed toward God's domain. Whether this is lament, accusation, or simply the physical gesture of grief, the direction heavenward adds theological weight.

12. The failure to recognize Job echoes Isaiah 52:14, where the Servant of the LORD is so disfigured that 'his appearance was marred beyond human semblance.' Job's transformation from the greatest man in the east to an unrecognizable figure on an ash heap is the most dramatic reversal in the Hebrew Bible.

13. The verb gadal ('great, large') applied to pain (ke'ev) means the suffering has become enormous, overwhelming, beyond what language can address. The friends' silence is the appropriate response — the rabbis later taught that a comforter should not speak until the mourner speaks first (Babylonian Talmud, Mo'ed Qatan 28b). Job will speak first in chapter 3, breaking the silence with a curse on the day he was born, and his speech will open the floodgates for the entire dialogue.

13. The seven-day silence creates a bridge between the prose prologue (chapters 1-2) and the poetic dialogue (chapters 3-41). It is the stillness before the storm of speech.

3

Summary: *Job breaks the seven-day silence — not with a prayer, not with a question, but with a curse on the day of his birth. In one of the most powerful poems in the Hebrew Bible, Job systematically reverses creation: he calls for darkness to swallow the day he was born, for the night of his conception to be erased from the calendar, for light to become void. He then asks why he was born at all, since death would have brought the rest that life has denied him. The poem moves from cursing the past to longing for non-existence to questioning the purpose of suffering.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Job 3 is a systematic anti-Genesis. Where Genesis 1 moves from darkness to light, chaos to order, void to fullness, Job reverses every movement. He calls for darkness (choshekh) to reclaim the day (yom), for light (or) to be extinguished, for the dawn to never arrive. The verbs of creation are inverted: where God said 'Let there be light,' Job says 'Let that day be darkness.' Where God saw that light was good, Job calls for a day that God does not seek from above. The poem does not merely express despair — it unmakes the world at the linguistic level. Job is not arguing that creation was a mistake; he is saying that his existence within creation is unbearable, and the only relief he can imagine is uncreation. This is not atheism — it is the protest of a man who believes God made everything and wants God to unmake one thing: the day he was born.*

Translation Friction: *The transition from the patient, worshipful Job of chapters 1-2 to the cursing Job of chapter 3 is one of the sharpest turns in all of Scripture. In 1:21, Job blessed the name of the LORD; in 3:1, he curses his day. Some scholars see this as evidence that the prose prologue and the poetic dialogue come from different sources — the patient Job of the folktale versus the anguished Job of the poet. Others see it as psychologically realistic: the seven-day silence was the threshold between endurance and collapse. The verb qillel ('to curse') in verse 1 is the antonym of barak ('to bless') — Job does not curse God directly (the Adversary's prediction remains unfulfilled), but he curses the day God made, which is as close to cursing creation as a person can come without naming the Creator.*

Connections: *Job 3 is in direct literary dialogue with Genesis 1. The vocabulary — yom ('day'), lailah ('night'), or ('light'), choshekh ('darkness'), yiqqa ('let it be called') — mirrors the creation account and inverts it. Jeremiah 20:14-18 contains a remarkably similar curse on the day of birth, and many scholars believe one passage influenced the other. The longing for Sheol as a place of rest (vv. 13-19) anticipates Ecclesiastes' reflections on death as cessation of toil. Job's question in verse 23 — 'Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?' — uses the same verb (sakakh, 'to hedge') that the Adversary used in 1:10, but now the hedge is a prison, not a protection.*

1 After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 Job spoke and said:

3 Let the day perish on which I was born,
and the night that said, 'A man-child is conceived.'

4 Let that day be darkness.
Let God above not seek it out.
Let no light shine upon it.

5 Let darkness and deep shadow claim it.
Let a cloud settle over it.
Let the blackness of day terrify it.

6 That night — let thick darkness seize it.
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year.
Let it not enter the count of the months.

7 Let that night be barren.
Let no cry of joy come into it.

8 Let those who curse days curse it —
those skilled in rousing Leviathan.

9 Let the stars of its twilight go dark.
Let it wait for light, but find none.
Let it never see the eyelids of the dawn.

10 Because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb
and hide suffering from my eyes.

11 Why did I not die at birth,
perish as I came from the womb?

12 Why were there knees to receive me,
or breasts for me to nurse?

13 For then I would be lying down in quiet,
I would be asleep — then I would have rest.

14 With kings and counselors of the earth
who built ruins for themselves —

15 or alongside princes who possessed gold,
who filled their houses with silver.

16 Or like a stillborn child, hidden away, I would not exist —
like infants who never saw the light.

17 There the wicked cease their raging,
and there the weary find rest.

18 There prisoners are at ease together;
they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.

19 Small and great are there alike,
and the slave is free from his master.

20 Why is light given to one who suffers,
and life to those bitter in spirit?

21 They long for death, but it does not come;
they dig for it more than for hidden treasure.

22 They rejoice to the point of exultation;
they are glad when they find the grave.

23 Why give light to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?

24For my groaning comes before my food,
and my cries pour out like water.

25For the thing I dreaded has come upon me;
what I feared has overtaken me.

26I have no ease, no quiet, no rest —
only turmoil comes.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse is prose — it is the narrator's introduction to the poem that follows. The poetry begins in verse 3. The narrator uses the verb qillel without judgment: there is no editorial verdict here as there was in 1:22 and 2:10. The narrator simply reports what Job does. The absence of any 'Job did not sin' statement is conspicuous.

2. The formula vayyaan Iyov vayyomar ('Job answered and said') is the standard introduction for speech in the dialogue sections of the book. The verb anah ('answered') does not necessarily imply a response to someone else's words — it can simply mean 'spoke up, raised one's voice.' Job is answering the silence, answering his own suffering, answering the unanswerable.

3. The verb yovad (Qal jussive of avad, 'to perish') is a wish for total destruction — the day should cease to exist, not merely be forgotten. The personification of the night as speaking (amar) gives the night agency in the act of creation, which Job now wants revoked. The parallelism between day/birth and night/conception is the poem's structural spine: what follows will alternate between cursing the day and cursing the night.

4. The verb darash ('to seek, to inquire') applied to God seeking a day suggests that God's attention sustains creation — if God stops seeking a day, it ceases to exist in any meaningful sense. The word neharah is a poetic synonym for light, possibly with connotations of streaming or flooding light. Job wants that stream cut off.

5. The verb yig'aluhu ('let them redeem/claim it') from ga'al is striking — the same root used for the kinsman-redeemer (go'el). Job wants darkness to redeem the day, to claim it as its own, to take possession of it. The word tsalmaveth (traditionally 'shadow of death') may be a compound of tsel ('shadow') and maveth ('death'), or it may derive from tsalmut ('deep darkness'). Either way, it describes the densest, most impenetrable darkness imaginable.

5. The phrase kimrirei yom ('like the bitternesses of day' or 'like day-darkeners') is textually uncertain. It may refer to eclipses, storms, or demonic forces that darken the day. The verb yeva'atuhu ('let them terrify it') personifies the day as something that can experience terror — Job wants the day itself to know fear.

6. Job now turns from the day of birth to the night of conception. The word ofel ('thick darkness, gloom') is the deepest form of darkness — darker than choshekh. The verb yiqqachehu ('let it seize it') personifies darkness as a predator taking the night captive. The phrase al yichad bimei shanah ('let it not rejoice among the days of the year') uses the verb chadah ('to rejoice') — the night should be excluded from the calendar's celebration of time. It should not be counted (al yavo bemispar yerachim, 'let it not come into the number of months'). Job wants this night stricken from the record of time itself.

7. The word galmud ('barren, desolate, solitary') describes a night stripped of all fruitfulness. Given that this is the night of conception, the word barren is deliberately ironic — Job wants the night that produced him to be incapable of producing anything. The word renanah ('cry of joy, shout of gladness') refers to the celebratory cry that would greet a birth announcement. Job wants silence where there was joy.

8. The orerey yom ('cursers of the day') are sorcerers or enchanters who possess the power to curse specific days — to make them unlucky or to blot them from existence. The reference to Leviathan (livyatan) is extraordinary: Leviathan is the primordial sea monster of chaos, the embodiment of cosmic disorder (see Psalm 74:14, Isaiah 27:1). Those who can rouse Leviathan are practitioners of anti-creation magic — they can awaken the forces that existed before God imposed order. Job summons these cosmic anarchists to curse the night of his conception. He is calling on the powers of chaos to unmake one moment in time.

9. Job curses the stars of the night's twilight — nishpo ('its twilight, its dusk') — calling for them to be extinguished. Then the night is personified as waiting for dawn: yeqav le-or va-ayin ('let it hope for light, but there be none'). The night should wait endlessly for a morning that never comes. The final image — al yir'eh be-af'appei shachar ('let it not see the eyelids of the dawn') — is one of the most beautiful in Hebrew poetry. The dawn has eyelids: the first rays of light are imagined as eyes opening. Job wants those eyes to stay shut. He wants permanent night, permanent pre-creation darkness, an eternal state before light existed.

9. The metaphor af'appei shachar ('eyelids of the dawn') personifies morning as a face whose eyes open to bring light. This image was famous enough to be borrowed by later poets and will be echoed in Job 41:10 [41:18 in English], where Leviathan's eyes are described with the same word.

10. Job gives the reason for his curse: ki lo sagar daltei vitni ('because it did not close the doors of my womb/belly'). The 'doors of the womb' (daltei veten) are an image of birth as passage through a gate — and Job wishes that gate had remained shut. The verb sagar ('to close, to shut') is the same verb used in 1:10 for God's protective hedge and in 1:5-6 for God closing Hannah's womb in 1 Samuel. If the womb had stayed closed, Job would

never have been born, and amal ('toil, suffering, misery') would have been hidden from his eyes. The word amal is one of Job's key terms for the human condition: not mere pain but laborious, grinding suffering that defines existence.

11. The poem shifts from cursing the past to questioning why existence continued. The word lammah ('why?') will become Job's signature word throughout the dialogues. He asks why death did not take him immediately — merechem amut ('from the womb I should have died'). The verb eg'va ('I should have expired') from gava means to breathe one's last, to expire — a quiet, final cessation. Job is not asking for violent death but for the simplest possible non-existence: he should have stopped breathing the moment he started.

12. The knees (birkayim) that received the newborn refer to the ancient practice of placing a newborn on the father's or mother's knees as an act of acceptance and legitimation (Genesis 50:23). The breasts (shadayim) that nursed him sustained his life. Job wishes both had been denied — that no one had received him at birth and no one had fed him. Every human kindness that kept him alive now feels like a cruelty because it extended an existence that has become unbearable.

13. The poem pivots to a vision of death as rest. Three verbs describe the peace Job imagines: shakhavti ('I would lie down'), eshqot ('I would be quiet'), yashantti ('I would sleep'). Then the conclusion: az yanuach li ('then there would be rest for me'). The verb nuach ('to rest') is the same root from which Noah's name derives and the same verb used for God's rest on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2). Death, for Job, is the sabbath he has been denied in life.

14. If Job had died at birth, he would now lie with kings and counselors — the great ones of the earth who built choravot ('ruins, desolate places'). The word choravot is ambiguous: it could mean they built monuments that are now ruins, or they built (restored) places that were already in ruins, or — most hauntingly — all human building ends in ruins. Death is the great equalizer: the builder and the stillborn lie in the same ground.

15. The parallelism continues: princes (sarim) with gold and silver — the wealthiest humans imaginable — now lie in the same stillness as the stillborn child. Their treasure (zahav, 'gold'; kesef, 'silver') could not purchase exemption from death. Job, who was himself 'the greatest of all the people of the east' (1:3), recognizes that his former wealth and the wealth of kings all end in the same silent ground.

16. The nefel tamun ('hidden miscarriage/stillborn') is a child that never reached life outside the womb — buried immediately, never seen, never named. Job envies this: lo ehyeh ('I would not be'). The phrase lo ra'u or ('they did not see light') returns to the poem's central image: or ('light') as the marker of existence. Those who never see light never enter the world of suffering. Light, which in Genesis is the first good gift, is here the gateway to pain.

17. The word sham ('there') refers to Sheol, the realm of the dead. In death, the resha'im ('wicked') stop their rogez ('raging, turmoil, agitation') — they can no longer cause harm. And the yegi'ei khoach ('those exhausted in strength') find rest (yanuchu, from nuach). The verse presents death as pure cessation: no more violence from the wicked, no more exhaustion for the spent. Job does not describe an afterlife — he describes an end, a stopping, a silence.

18. The asirim ('prisoners, those bound') find sha'anan ('ease, tranquility') in death. The qol noges ('voice of the taskmaster/oppressor') — the voice that drove them to forced labor — falls silent. The word noges is the same word used for the Egyptian taskmasters in Exodus 3:7 and 5:6. Death is liberation from every form of bondage. The social hierarchies of the living world dissolve.

19. The merism qaton ve-gadol ('small and great') encompasses all of humanity — the insignificant and the powerful are the same in death. The final line — ve-eved chofshi me-adonav ('and the slave is free from his master') — is one of the most poignant in the poem. The word chofshi ('free, released') is the legal term for emancipation. Death is the manumission document that every slave eventually receives. The verse completes Job's vision of Sheol as the great equalizer: there are no classes, no hierarchies, no oppression, no masters — only rest.

20. The poem shifts from longing for personal non-existence to a universal question: lammah yitten le-amel or ('why does He give light to the sufferer?'). The subject 'He' is unnamed — it can only be God. Light (or) here means existence itself, the gift of being alive. Job asks why God gives the gift of existence to those for whom existence is torment. The parallel phrase chayyim le-marei nafesh ('life to the bitter of soul') deepens the question: why does God sustain the lives of those whose innermost selves (nefesh) are saturated with bitterness?

21. The image is startling: those who suffer hamechakkim lammavet ('wait eagerly for death') and dig for it (vayyachperuhu) as though it were matmonim ('hidden treasure, buried wealth'). The verb chaphar ('to dig') and the noun matmon ('treasure, something hidden in the ground') create the image of someone excavating the earth desperately searching for the most precious thing imaginable — and that thing is death. Where treasure-seekers dig for gold, Job and those like him dig for the end of consciousness.

22. The hassemechim elei gil ('those rejoicing unto exultation') describes the most intense form of human happiness — and its object is the grave (qaver). The verb yasisu ('they are glad') reinforces the paradox: the discovery of death produces joy. This is not suicidal despair in the modern clinical sense — it is a theological protest. Job is describing people for whom life has become so unbearable that death is the only relief God has left them, and they greet it with the joy that should accompany a wedding or a harvest.

23. This verse contains one of the book's most bitter ironies. The verb vayyasekh ('He has hedged') uses a form of sakakh ('to hedge, to fence in') — the same root the Adversary used in 1:10 when he complained that God had put a protective hedge (sakta) around Job. There, the hedge was protection; here, it is imprisonment. God's fence, which once kept harm out, now keeps Job trapped inside his suffering. The word nistorah ('hidden') means Job cannot see his own path — he is lost, and the God who hid his way is the same God who hedged him in. Protection has become confinement. Providence has become a cage.

24. Job's anchati ('my sighing, my groaning') comes lifnei lachmi ('before my bread') — before he can eat, grief overtakes him. This echoes the description of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:7, who wept and could not eat. The parallel line — vayyittekhu khammayim sha'agotai ('my roarings pour out like water') — uses the powerful word sha'agah ('roaring'), typically used for lions (Amos 3:8). Job's grief is not quiet weeping but the roar of an animal in agony, and it flows like water — unceasingly, uncontrollably.

25. The cognate accusative pachad pachad'ti ('a dread I have dreaded') intensifies the fear — this is not casual worry but the deepest terror Job could imagine. The verb ye'etayeni ('it has come upon me') and yavo li ('it has come to me') describe the feared thing arriving, materializing, becoming real. This verse retroactively reveals that Job's pre-disaster piety (offering sacrifices for his children's possible sins in 1:5) was driven partly by fear. His worst nightmare has happened. The irony is that his fear of God (yirat Elohim, 1:1) coexisted with a fear that God might not protect him — and the second fear has been confirmed.

26. The poem ends with three negated verbs: lo shalavti ('I have no ease'), lo shaqat'ti ('I have no quiet'), lo nach'ti ('I have no rest'). These three words — shalvah, sheqet, nuach — are precisely the three states Job longed for in death (verse 13: lie down, be quiet, rest). What the dead possess, the living Job is denied. And then the final word: vayyavo rogez ('and turmoil comes'). The word rogez ('agitation, turmoil, rage') is the same word used in verse 17 for what the wicked cease doing in Sheol. The wicked find peace in death; Job finds only rogez in life. The poem ends not with resolution but with ongoing disturbance — the silence is broken, the lament is launched, and the dialogue that will consume the next thirty-five chapters has begun.

4

Summary: *Eliphaz the Temanite, the eldest and most measured of the three friends, breaks the silence. He begins with a careful appeal to Job's own past: Job has comforted many others — can he not endure what he has taught? Eliphaz then articulates the doctrine of retribution: the innocent do not perish; the wicked are destroyed by God's breath. He climaxes with a terrifying account of a night vision in which a spirit passed before his face and whispered a question that haunts the rest of the book: 'Can a mortal be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Eliphaz's night vision (vv. 12-21) is one of the most uncanny passages in the Hebrew Bible. A spirit (ruach) glides past his face, his hair stands on end, a form (temunah) hovers before his eyes but he cannot make out its appearance, and then a voice speaks from the silence. The vision belongs to a category of experience that the Hebrew Bible rarely describes with this level of sensory detail — the reader feels the dread, the stillness, the skin prickling. The question the voice asks — 'Can a mortal be righteous before God?' — seems unanswerable. But the question contains an assumption: that human beings are fundamentally impure, that suffering is therefore always deserved, and that no one should expect better from God. This assumption will drive the entire dialogue. Eliphaz believes he has received a revelation; Job will eventually argue that Eliphaz has received a theology masquerading as revelation.*

Translation Friction: *Eliphaz's theology is not wrong in the way that obvious falsehood is wrong — it is wrong in the way that a half-truth is wrong. His observation that the wicked are destroyed (vv. 8-11) is a genuine part of biblical wisdom (Proverbs 10:25, Psalm 1:6). His night vision's question — can a mortal be righteous before God? — is theologically sound in the abstract (Psalm 143:2). The problem is application: Eliphaz uses general principles to interpret a specific case, and the specific case (Job) is the exception that demolishes the rule. The reader knows from chapters 1-2 that Job is not suffering for sin. Eliphaz does not know this. His speech is therefore a masterpiece of misapplied wisdom — every individual statement is defensible, but the whole argument is catastrophically wrong.*

Connections: *Eliphaz's retribution theology draws from the same well as Proverbs and Deuteronomy: obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings curse (Deuteronomy 28). His night vision echoes the prophetic call narratives (Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1) but with a crucial difference: the prophets receive a commission, Eliphaz receives a question. The images of lions destroyed (vv. 10-11) recall Psalm 34:10 and Nahum 2:11-12. The question 'Can a mortal be righteous before God?' will be answered implicitly by the entire book: not by human achievement, but by God's choice to engage with Job at the end (chapters 38-41). Eliphaz's theology is the starting position that the book will spend thirty-seven chapters dismantling.*

1 Then responded:

2 If one ventures a word with you, will you be wearied?
But who can hold back from speaking?

3 You have instructed many;
you have strengthened weak hands.

4 Your words have steadied those who stumbled;
you have strengthened buckling knees.

5 But now it has come upon you, and you falter;
it touches you, and you are shaken.

6 Is not your fear of God your confidence?
Is not the integrity of your ways your hope?

7 Consider now — what innocent person has ever perished?
Where have the upright been destroyed?

8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap it.

9 By the breath of God they perish;
by the blast of His anger they are consumed.

10 The lion roars, the fierce lion growls,
but the teeth of the young lions are broken.

11 The old lion perishes for lack of prey,
and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.

12 Now a word was brought to me in secret;
my ear caught a whisper of it.

13 In troubled thoughts from visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on people,

14 Dread came upon me, and trembling,
and all my bones shook with fear.

15 A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my body stood on end.

16 It stopped — I could not make out its appearance.
A form stood before my eyes.
Silence — then a voice I heard:

17 Can a mortal be righteous before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?

18 If He puts no trust in His servants,
and charges His angels with error —

19How much less those who dwell in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust —
crushed more easily than a moth!

20Between morning and evening they are shattered;
with no one noticing, they perish forever.

21Is not their tent cord pulled up within them?
They die — and not in wisdom.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Eliphaz speaks first because he is the eldest and most senior of the three friends. Teman, his homeland, was proverbially associated with wisdom (Jeremiah 49:7, Obadiah 8-9). His speaking first establishes a pattern: the friends speak in order of seniority (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar), each round becoming more aggressive as Job refuses to accept their theology.

2. Eliphaz begins with courteous hesitation: hanissah davar elekha til'eh ('if a word is attempted toward you, will you grow weary?'). The verb nissah ('to attempt, to test, to venture') suggests that Eliphaz knows his words may not be welcome. But then he asserts necessity: atsor bemillin mi yukhal ('to restrain oneself in words, who is able?'). He cannot remain silent. The tension between his caution and his compulsion mirrors the larger problem: the friends have good intentions but cannot resist the urge to explain.

3. Eliphaz appeals to Job's own track record as a counselor: yissarta rabbim ('you have instructed/corrected many') and yadayim rafot techazzeq ('weak hands you have strengthened'). The verb yissar ('to instruct, to discipline, to correct') implies that Job has been the one who counseled others through suffering. The image of strengthening weak hands (yadayim rafot) is used in Isaiah 35:3 for the encouragement of the discouraged. Eliphaz's point is sharp: you were the teacher — can you not now receive what you taught?

4. The parallelism continues: koshel yeqimun millekha ('the stumbling one your words would raise up') and birkkayim kor'ot te'amets ('bending knees you would make firm'). Eliphaz is painting Job's former life as a healer of the afflicted — the very role Job would have played for someone in his current condition. The verb te'amets ('you would make firm, strengthen') from amats is the word God uses to encourage Joshua (Joshua 1:6-7). Job strengthened others the way God strengthens leaders.

5. The pivot: ki attah tavo elekha vattele ('but now it comes to you and you grow weary'). The word attah ('now') marks the shift from Job's past strength to his present collapse. The verb tiga ('it touches') is the same root (naga) the Adversary used in 1:11 — 'touch everything he has.' Eliphaz does not know about the heavenly council, but he uses the Adversary's own verb. The verb tivvahel ('you are shaken, dismayed') describes the terrified confusion of someone whose world has become incomprehensible. Eliphaz's observation is accurate — the implicit accusation is that Job should practice what he preached.

6. Eliphaz asks a rhetorical question built on two of Job's defining qualities from 1:1: yir'atekha ('your fear [of God]') should be your kislah ('confidence, assurance'), and tom derakhekha ('the completeness/integrity of your ways') should be your tiqvah ('hope'). The word tom ('integrity, completeness') is the same root as tam ('blameless') from 1:1. Eliphaz is telling Job that his own righteousness should sustain him — an argument that sounds encouraging but actually undermines itself: if righteousness guarantees safety, then suffering implies a lack of righteousness.

7. This is the core of Eliphaz's retribution theology: mi hu naqi avad ('who is he, the innocent one, who has perished?'). The implied answer is 'no one.' The righteous (yesharim, 'upright ones') are never cut off (nikhchadu, 'destroyed, exterminated'). This is a defensible generalization drawn from the wisdom tradition — but the reader knows it is false in Job's specific case. Job is naqi and yashar, and he is perishing. Eliphaz's question, meant to comfort, actually accuses: if the innocent do not perish, and you are perishing, then...

8. Eliphaz appeals to personal observation: ka'asher ra'iti ('as I have seen'). His claim is empirical, not merely theoretical. The agricultural metaphor — choreshei aven ('those who plow iniquity') and zor'ei amal ('those who sow trouble/misery') — describes sin as a deliberate cultivation. You plow the field, you sow the seed, you harvest the crop. The verb yiqtseruhu ('they reap it') means they harvest exactly what they planted. This is the Deuteronomic principle in agricultural dress: sin produces suffering as surely as seeds produce grain.

9. The nishmat Eloah ('breath of God') that destroys the wicked is the same word (neshamah) used for the breath of life God blew into Adam (Genesis 2:7). The breath that creates can also destroy. The ruach appo ('wind/spirit of His nostrils/anger') makes God's anger physical — it is a hot blast from His face. The verbs yov'du ('they perish') and yikhlu ('they are consumed, finished') describe total destruction. Eliphaz's God is a God of strict justice: the breath that gives life takes it back when the recipient is wicked.

10. Eliphaz uses an extended lion metaphor (vv. 10-11) with five different Hebrew words for lion: aryeh ('lion'), shachal ('fierce lion'), kefir ('young lion'), layish ('old lion,' v. 11), and lavi ('lioness,' v. 11). The point: even the most powerful predators are destroyed when God acts against them. The broken teeth (shinnei kefirim nitt'u) represent power rendered useless. The metaphor implicitly compares the wicked to lions — fierce but ultimately helpless before God.

11. The layish ('old lion') dies not in combat but mibli teref ('for lack of prey') — it starves. The mighty predator becomes helpless. The benei lavi ('cubs of the lioness') are yitpparadu ('scattered, dispersed') — the family unit disintegrates. The lion imagery presents an entire dynasty brought to nothing: the patriarch starves, the mother cannot protect, the children scatter. Eliphaz intends this as a portrait of the wicked, but the reader cannot help hearing an echo of Job's own destroyed family.

12. The night vision begins. The verb yegunav ('was stolen, smuggled') from ganav ('to steal') describes the word coming to Eliphaz covertly, illicitly almost — as though this knowledge was smuggled out of the divine realm. The phrase shemets menhu ('a whisper of it') suggests that even what he received was only a fragment, a trace. The word shemets appears only here and in 26:14, both times meaning 'a tiny portion, a whisper.' Eliphaz claims to have overheard something from beyond — but only a fragment.

13. The word se'ippim ('troubled thoughts, disquieting reflections') describes the agitated mental state between waking and sleeping — not dreams exactly, but disturbed consciousness. The chezionot lailah ('visions of the night') are nocturnal revelations. The tardemah ('deep sleep') that falls on people is the same word used for the deep sleep God cast on Adam (Genesis 2:21) and on Abraham (Genesis 15:12). It is a divinely induced state of altered consciousness — not ordinary sleep but a threshold between the human and divine worlds.

14. The physical experience of the vision: pachad qera'ani ('dread met me, called on me') and re'adah ('trembling'). The verb hifchid ('caused to fear, made to shake') applied to rov atsmotai ('the multitude of my bones') means his entire skeleton was vibrating with terror. This is not metaphor — Eliphaz is describing the somatic experience of encountering the numinous. His bones shook. The encounter with the divine produces not comfort but dread.

15. The ruach ('spirit, wind, breath') passes al panai ('over my face') — Eliphaz feels it but cannot grasp it. The verb yachalof ('it glided past, it passed by') suggests smooth, silent movement — the spirit does not stop for Eliphaz but moves past him. The response is primal: tesammeir sa'arat besari ('the hair of my flesh bristled'). The verb sammar ('to bristle, to stand on end') describes the involuntary physical reaction to the uncanny — goosebumps, the hair standing up, the body recognizing something the mind cannot process.

16. The spirit stops (ya'amod) but its appearance (mar'ehu) cannot be discerned (lo akkir, 'I could not recognize/identify'). A temunah ('form, likeness, shape') stands before Eliphaz's eyes — the same word used in Deuteronomy 4:12 for what Israel did not see at Sinai ('you heard a voice but saw no form'). Then demamah ('silence, stillness') — the same word as in the 'still small voice' (qol demamah daqqah) of 1 Kings 19:12. And from the silence, a voice. The sequence — presence, unknowability, form without features, silence, voice — is the phenomenology of revelation stripped to its barest elements.

17. The voice's question is the theological pivot of Eliphaz's entire speech. The word enosh ('mortal, frail human') emphasizes human weakness and mortality. The verb yitsddaq ('be righteous, be justified') from the root ts-d-q asks whether any human can stand in a right relationship with God on their own merit. The parallel — im me-osehu yithar gaver ('or can a strong man be pure before his Maker?') — uses gever ('strong man, warrior') and the verb taher ('to be clean, pure'). The preposition min in me-Eloah and me-osehu can mean 'before' (in comparison with) or 'more than.' If 'more than,' the question is absurd — of course no human is more righteous than God. If 'before,' the question is devastating — can any human be righteous when standing before God? The second reading is the one that matters.

18. The argument moves from greater to lesser: if God does not trust even His own servants (avadav, meaning angels or celestial beings) and finds tohalah ('error, folly, unreliability') in His messengers (mal'akhav), how much less can He trust human beings? The word tohalah is rare, possibly meaning 'error' or 'lack of steadiness.' The point is radical: even the heavenly court is not fully reliable in God's eyes. If angels fall short, mortals have no chance.

19. The phrase shokhne batei chomer ('those dwelling in houses of clay') is a metaphor for the human body — flesh is clay (chomer), and its foundation (yesod) is dust (afar), echoing Genesis 2:7. The verb yedakkeum ('they are crushed') describes humans being destroyed lifnei ash ('before a moth' or 'more easily than a moth'). The moth (ash) is among the most fragile of creatures — and humans are crushed even more easily. The verse reduces human existence to its material reality: we are clay houses built on dust, and we collapse more readily than an insect.

20. The phrase mibboqer la-erev ('from morning to evening') means within a single day — human life can be destroyed in the span of hours. The verb yukattu ('they are beaten, shattered') from katat describes being pounded to pieces. The phrase mibli mesim ('without one placing [attention]') means no one notices, no one takes account. The verb yov'du ('they perish') is the same verb Job used in 3:3 for his wish that the day of his birth would perish. Lanetsach ('forever') is the most chilling word: they perish permanently, with no one to remember them.

21. The final image is of a tent whose cord (yeter, 'tent cord, bowstring, excess') is pulled up (nissa, 'pulled out, torn away') — the structure collapses because the cord that held it taut has been removed. The human body is a tent; death is the removal of its supporting cord. The final phrase ve-lo bechokmah ('and not in wisdom') is ambiguous: they die without having attained wisdom, or they die and no one is wise enough to understand why. Either reading is bleak. Eliphaz's night vision reduces humanity to fragile clay tents that collapse without warning and without meaning.

5

Summary: *Eliphaz continues his first speech, moving from his night vision to practical counsel. He warns that resentment kills the foolish, describes how God overturns the schemes of the cunning, and then shifts to a remarkable hymn of praise: God sets the lowly on high, rescues the needy, and performs wonders without number. Eliphaz closes with what he considers his strongest argument — that suffering is divine discipline, and that the person who accepts God's correction will be restored to prosperity, safety, and abundant descendants. He tells Job to accept this teaching as tested wisdom.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The most remarkable feature of this chapter is how beautiful Eliphaz's theology sounds and how wrong it is in Job's case. His hymn to God's power (vv. 9-16) is genuinely magnificent — it could stand alongside any psalm of praise. His description of divine discipline (vv. 17-26) articulates a theology of suffering that has comforted millions. The problem is not that Eliphaz is saying foolish things — he is saying wise things to the wrong situation. He is prescribing medicine for a disease Job does not have. His final promise — 'you will come to the grave in full vigor, like a sheaf gathered in its season' (v. 26) — is precisely what God will eventually restore to Job in chapter 42, but not for the reasons Eliphaz thinks. Eliphaz is right about the destination and wrong about the road. This is what makes him more dangerous than a simple fool: his wisdom is real but his application is lethal.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between chapter 5 and the Psalms is complex. Verses 9-16 echo hymnic praise found in Psalms 107, 113, and 146-147. Verse 17 — 'Happy is the one whom God corrects' — is nearly identical to Psalm 94:12 and Proverbs 3:11-12 (later quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6). Eliphaz is quoting what we would call Scripture to Job. This creates a hermeneutical crisis: is the Bible wrong when Eliphaz quotes it? No — but truth misapplied to the wrong context becomes falsehood. The doctrine of divine discipline is biblical; the assumption that all suffering is discipline is not. Eliphaz cannot distinguish between suffering that corrects and suffering that tests, because he does not have access to the heavenly council scene.*

Connections: *Eliphaz's hymn to God's power (vv. 9-16) draws on the same theological tradition as Isaiah 40-55, where God lifts the lowly and overturns the plans of the wise. His statement about divine discipline (v. 17) will be echoed by the author of Hebrews (12:5-6) and by James (5:11), who commends Job's endurance. The list of deliverances in verses 19-22 — famine, war, scourge, destruction, wild beasts — reads like a condensed version of the covenant blessings in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Eliphaz is applying the Deuteronomic covenant to a non-Israelite situation, and the book of Job will demonstrate that the equation does not hold universally. Paul's citation of verse 13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19 ('He catches the wise in their own craftiness') shows that Eliphaz's theology, while misapplied to Job, contains genuine truth when properly directed.*

1 Call out, if you will — who will answer you?
To which of the holy ones will you turn?

2 For vexation kills the fool,
and jealousy slays the simple.

3 I myself have seen the fool taking root,
but suddenly I cursed his dwelling —

4 His children are far from safety;
they are crushed at the gate with no one to rescue them.

5 The hungry devour his harvest,
taking it even from among thorns;
the thirsty pant after his wealth.

6For misery does not spring from the dust,
nor does trouble sprout from the ground.

7But a human being is born for trouble,
as surely as sparks fly upward.

8But as for me, I would seek God;
I would lay my case before God —

9He does great things beyond searching out,
wonders beyond counting —

10He gives rain on the face of the earth
and sends water on the open fields.

11He sets the lowly on high,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

12He frustrates the schemes of the cunning,
so that their hands achieve no success.

13He catches the wise in their own craftiness,
and the counsel of the twisted is swept away.

14By day they run into darkness,
and at noon they grope as in the night.

15He saves the needy from the sword of their mouth,
and from the hand of the powerful.

16So the poor have hope,
and injustice shuts its mouth.

17How blessed is the person whom God corrects;
do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.

18For He wounds, but He bandages;
He strikes, but His hands heal.

19In six troubles He will rescue you;
in seven, no harm will touch you.

20In famine He will redeem you from death,
and in war from the power of the sword.

21From the lash of the tongue you will be hidden;
you will not fear destruction when it comes.

22At destruction and hunger you will laugh;
do not fear the beasts of the earth.

23For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field,
and the beasts of the field will be at peace with you.

24You will know that your tent is secure;
you will inspect your fold and find nothing missing.

25You will know that your offspring will be many,
your descendants like the grass of the earth.

26You will come to the grave in full vigor,
like a sheaf of grain gathered in its season.

27See — we have examined this, and it is so.
Hear it, and know it for yourself.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Eliphaz challenges Job to find an intercessor: qera na ('call out, please') — but who will answer (hayesh onekha, 'is there one answering you')? The qedoshim ('holy ones') are likely the members of the heavenly court, the divine council. Eliphaz implies that no celestial being will take Job's side against God. The irony is devastating for the reader: Job will eventually appeal directly to God and bypass every intermediary, and God will answer him — but not until chapter 38.

2. Eliphaz warns that ka'as ('vexation, anger, resentment') kills the evil ('fool') and qin'ah ('jealousy, zeal, envy') kills the poteh ('simple, gullible one'). The evil in wisdom literature is not merely unintelligent but morally deficient — a person who rejects the fear of God. Eliphaz is implicitly warning Job: do not become the fool who is destroyed by his own resentment against God. The advice is pragmatic — anger at God will only make things worse — but it also trivializes Job's grief by categorizing it as foolishness.

3. Eliphaz again appeals to personal observation: ani ra'iti ('I myself have seen'). The evil mashrish ('taking root') appeared to be flourishing — the agricultural metaphor describes apparent prosperity. But then pit'om ('suddenly') — the fool's dwelling (naveh, 'habitation, pasture') was cursed. The verb eqqov ('I cursed') is unexpected: did Eliphaz pronounce a curse, or did he recognize that the dwelling was already under a curse? The ambiguity is deliberate. Either way, the fool's security was an illusion.

4. The fool's children (banav) are far from yesha ('safety, salvation, deliverance') and are crushed (yiddakk'u) bassha'ar ('at the gate') — the city gate being the place of legal proceedings and public judgment. With no deliverer (ein matstsil), they are defenseless. The mention of children being destroyed is staggeringly insensitive given that Job's ten children have just died, though Eliphaz frames this as the fate of the fool's children, not the righteous man's. The text does not tell us whether Eliphaz realizes the parallel.

5. The fool's accumulated wealth is consumed by others: the ra'ev ('hungry') eats his harvest, taking it even from within the thorn-hedge (mi-tsinnim) that was meant to protect it. The verb sha'af ('to pant, to gasp') describes the tsamim ('thirsty ones') eagerly consuming his wealth (cheilam). The protective barriers the fool erected are useless — hunger and thirst (representing desperate people or perhaps divine agents of redistribution) penetrate every defense.

6. Eliphaz's point: aven ('misery, iniquity') does not come from the afar ('dust') and amal ('trouble, toil') does not sprout (lo yitsmach) from the adamah ('ground'). Suffering is not random, not a natural event like a plant growing from soil. It has a cause — and the implied cause is human sin. This is the retribution doctrine in its purest form: trouble does not just happen; it is produced by something. The verse denies the possibility of meaningless suffering, which is exactly what Job is experiencing.

7. This famous verse — adam le-amal yullad ('a human is born for trouble') — seems to contradict verse 6. There, Eliphaz said trouble does not spring from the ground; here, he says humans are born to trouble. The resolution: trouble does not arise randomly from nature but is inherent in the human condition. The phrase u-vnei reshef yagbihu uf ('and the sons of flame fly upward') compares trouble's inevitability to the physical law that sparks rise. The bene reshef ('sons of Resheph' or 'sons of flame') could be sparks, flames, or even mythological fire-beings. The image: just as fire naturally ascends, human beings naturally encounter trouble.

8. Eliphaz models what he thinks Job should do: ulam ani edrosh el El ('but I, I would seek God'). The verb darash ('to seek, to inquire, to consult') implies going to God for answers and for help. The phrase asim divrati ('I would place my word/case') uses language of legal petition — presenting a case before a judge. The irony is that Job will eventually do exactly this (laying his case before God), but God's answer will vindicate Job, not Eliphaz's theology.

9. The hymn to God's power begins. The phrase oseh gedolot ve-ein cheqer ('doing great things and there is no searching out') declares God's acts to be beyond human comprehension. The nifla'ot ('wonders, marvelous deeds') are ad ein mispar ('until there is no number') — infinite in quantity. This language echoes Psalm 145:3 and will be echoed by Job himself in 9:10, where he quotes Eliphaz's words verbatim but with a radically different meaning: for Job, God's unsearchable power is a source of terror, not praise.

10. The hymn specifies God's power in concrete terms: rain (matar) on the earth and water (mayim) on the chutsot ('fields, open places, streets outside'). Rain in the ancient Near East was the fundamental sign of divine favor — without it, everything died. Eliphaz's theology begins with a truth no one disputes: God sends the rain. The question the book raises is whether this generous God also sends suffering, and if so, why.

11. The social reversal: shefalim ('the lowly, the humble') are placed le-marom ('on high'). The qodrim ('those in dark clothing, those who mourn') are lifted to yesha ('safety, deliverance, salvation'). This echoes Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:7-8) and anticipates Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:52). Eliphaz's theology of divine reversal is not wrong — it is one of the deepest themes in Scripture. His error is assuming it operates mechanically: the lowly are always lifted, the suffering always rescued, in this life, on this timetable.

12. The verb mefer ('frustrates, breaks, annuls') applied to the machshevot ('plans, schemes, devices') of the arumim ('crafty, shrewd') describes God dismantling human cleverness. The arumim are not merely intelligent but manipulative — the word arum describes the serpent in Genesis 3:1. Their hands cannot accomplish tushiyyah ('success, sound wisdom, lasting achievement'). God undoes the work of those who rely on their own cunning rather than on divine wisdom.

13. This verse is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:19 — loked chakhamim be-ormam ('He catches the wise in their own craftiness'). The verb loked ('catches, seizes, traps') makes God a hunter who uses the wise man's own cleverness (ormah, 'craftiness, shrewdness') as the trap. Their plans become their snare. The niftallim ('twisted, perverse, crooked') find their counsel (atsah) swept away (nimharah, 'hurried along, carried headlong') — their carefully laid plans collapse in a rush. God does not need to introduce new obstacles; He simply lets the cunning trap themselves.

14. The reversal of day and night: yomam yefagshu choshekh ('in the daytime they encounter darkness'). The cunning who thought they could see clearly are blinded in broad daylight. The verb yemasheshu ('they grope, feel about') describes the blind reaching out with their hands, unable to navigate. In the tsohorayim ('noon, the brightest point of the day'), they stumble like people in total darkness. This inversion of light and darkness echoes Deuteronomy 28:29 (a covenant curse) and contrasts with Job 3, where Job cursed the day's light — here Eliphaz describes the wicked losing light as punishment.

15. God saves (vayyosha, from yasha, 'to deliver, to save') the evyon ('needy, poor, destitute') from the cherev mippihem ('sword from their mouth') — the weapon of the powerful is their speech, their legal arguments, their verbal accusations. The parallel miyyad chazaq ('from the hand of the strong') adds physical power to verbal power. God rescues those who have no defense against either words or force.

16. The hymn concludes: the dal ('poor, weak, thin') has tiqvah ('hope, expectation') because God acts on their behalf. And olathah ('injustice, wickedness') qaftsah piha ('shuts its mouth') — injustice is personified as a speaker whose mouth is closed. Where Job wanted his birth-day silenced (chapter 3), Eliphaz says God silences injustice. The image is of a courtroom where the false accuser is finally made to be quiet.

17. This is Eliphaz's central counsel: hinneh ashrei enosh yokichennu Eloah ('blessed is the mortal whom God reproves'). The word ashrei ('blessed, happy, fortunate') is the same word that opens Psalm 1 and the Beatitudes. The verb yokichennu ('reproves him, corrects him, argues with him') from yakach implies judicial correction — God identifies what is wrong and demands change. The musar Shaddai ('discipline of the Almighty') is the same concept found in Proverbs 3:11-12, later quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6. Eliphaz is offering Job what he considers the highest wisdom: suffering is discipline, and discipline is a sign of God's attention, not His abandonment. The problem is that Job's suffering is not discipline — it is a test whose nature Job cannot know.

18. Eliphaz presents God as both wounder and healer: yakh'iv ('He causes pain') and yechbash ('He binds up, bandages'). The verb yimchats ('He strikes, wounds') is paired with yadav tirpeinah ('His hands heal'). The same God, the same hands — destruction and restoration come from the same source. This theology echoes Deuteronomy 32:39 ('I wound and I heal') and Hosea 6:1 ('He has torn, and He will heal us'). The principle is sound; the application to Job is not, because Job's suffering is not a wound meant to heal but a test meant to demonstrate.

19. The numerical ladder x / x+1 ('six / seven') is a common wisdom device (Proverbs 6:16, 30:15, 18, 21, 29; Amos 1:3). It means 'in every possible trouble' — the number is not literal but comprehensive. The verb yatssilekha ('He will rescue you') and the promise lo yigga bekha ra ('no evil will touch you') constitute Eliphaz's core assurance: God will protect the disciplined person from all harm. The verb naga ('to touch, to strike') is once again the word the Adversary used in 1:11 — Eliphaz unknowingly promises that the very thing the Adversary was authorized to do will not happen to the righteous.

20. The specific deliverances begin: be-ra'av padekha mimmaveth ('in famine He has redeemed you from death'). The verb padah ('to redeem, to ransom') is the language of liberation — the same verb used for the exodus. In war (milchamah), God delivers from the sword (cherev). Eliphaz is listing the classic threats of the ancient world — famine and warfare — and claiming that God's disciplined servant is immune to both.

21. The shot lashon ('scourge/lash of the tongue') describes slander, verbal attack, and social destruction through speech. The verb techabei ('you will be hidden, sheltered') promises divine protection from the most painful social weapon. The second line — ve-lo tira mishshod ki yavo ('you will not fear destruction when it comes') — assures fearlessness in the face of shod ('devastation, violence, ruin'). For Job, who has already experienced both physical and social destruction, these promises must sound hollow at best.

22. The verb tischaq ('you will laugh') elevates the promise from mere safety to joyful confidence — the disciplined person will find destruction (shod) and famine (kafan) laughable, not threatening. The chayyat ha-arets ('beasts of the earth, wild animals') were a real threat in the ancient world, representing the untamed forces of nature. Eliphaz promises immunity from every category of danger: speech, war, famine, and wild animals.

23. The image of a covenant (berit) with the stones of the field is one of the most evocative in the chapter. The avnei hassadeh ('stones of the field') that normally make farming impossible will cooperate with the disciplined person. The chayyat hassadeh ('beasts of the field') will be hushlmah lakh ('at peace with you'). The verb from shalam ('to be whole, complete, at peace') describes perfect harmony between the human and the natural world.

This is an Eden-like vision — creation itself enters into covenant with the righteous. The theology is beautiful; the timing is cruel.

24. The word shalom ('peace, wholeness, completeness') applied to the ohel ('tent') means the home is intact, safe, undisturbed. The verb paqad'ta ('you will inspect, visit, attend to') and navekha ('your dwelling, your fold') describe a shepherd checking on his flock and finding everything in order. The phrase ve-lo techeta ('and you will not miss, you will not fail') can mean 'you will not sin' or 'you will find nothing missing' — the verb chata in its basic sense means 'to miss the mark.' We chose the latter reading because it fits the pastoral context: nothing in your life will be lacking.

24. Register departure: shalom rendered as 'secure' rather than default 'peace' because the context describes the safety of one's tent/home — the 'wholeness/intact' sense of shalom applied to physical security.

25. Eliphaz promises abundant descendants: rav zar'ekha ('your seed will be many') and tse'etsa'ekha ke-esev ha-arets ('your offspring like the grass/vegetation of the earth'). The language echoes the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 13:16, 15:5) — numerous descendants as a sign of divine blessing. For Job, whose ten children have just died, this promise of future offspring is either a source of hope (as 42:13 will fulfill) or an agonizing reminder of what he has lost. Eliphaz seems unaware of the knife-edge he walks.

26. The final promise: tavo vekhelach elei qaver ('you will come in your full strength to the grave'). The word kelach ('ripeness, full vigor, full age') describes a long life completed in strength, not wasted by disease or cut short by violence. The simile ka-alot gadish be-itto ('like a sheaf going up in its time') compares a good death to a grain sheaf harvested at exactly the right moment — not too early, not too late. The image is of a life completed, not merely ended. This is the highest blessing the wisdom tradition can offer: a full life crowned by a timely, peaceful death. Remarkably, this is essentially what God does give Job in 42:16-17 — but not because Job accepted Eliphaz's theology.

27. Eliphaz concludes with an appeal to tested wisdom: hinneh zot chaqarnuha ken hi ('behold, this we have investigated — so it is'). The verb chaqar ('to investigate, to search out, to examine') claims empirical verification — this is not speculation but researched conclusion. The plural chaqarnuha ('we have investigated it') suggests a tradition of sages, not just Eliphaz's personal opinion. His final command: shema'ennah ve-attah da lakh ('hear it, and you — know it for yourself'). The imperative da ('know') is both an invitation and a challenge: internalize this truth. Eliphaz has delivered his best wisdom with complete sincerity. The tragedy is that his best is not good enough for what Job is going through.

6

Summary: *Job responds to Eliphaz's first speech with raw, unfiltered anguish. He wishes his grief could be weighed on scales — it would outweigh the sand of the seas. He insists that his outcry is proportional to his suffering, not the reckless speech Eliphaz implied. Job describes God's arrows embedded in him and his spirit drinking their poison. He compares his friends to seasonal streams (wadis) that overflow in winter but vanish in summer heat precisely when travelers need them most. He challenges his friends: has he asked them for money or rescue? All he wants is an honest answer. He pleads with them to look at him — would he lie to their faces? The chapter reveals that Job's deepest wound is not his physical suffering but the failure of his friends to offer genuine compassion.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The wadi metaphor (verses 15-20) is one of the most vivid images in the entire book. Caravans from Tema and Sheba travel through the desert counting on water at known wadi crossings, only to arrive and find dry gravel. They detour toward the wadi in hope and perish. Job applies this directly to his friends: they are seasonal streams, abundant when conditions are easy, gone when the heat comes. The metaphor operates on multiple levels — it indicts fair-weather friendship, it describes the experience of theological betrayal (the theology that was supposed to comfort now fails), and it foreshadows the broader argument of the book that simple retribution theology evaporates under pressure. Job's description of God's arrows (verse 4) draws from warrior imagery — God is not a passive judge but an active combatant who has targeted Job personally.*

Translation Friction: *Job's language about God in this chapter borders on accusation — God is the one shooting arrows, God is the one arraying terrors against him. This sits in deliberate tension with Job's earlier refusal to curse God (chapters 1-2). The text holds both realities: Job will not abandon God, but he will not pretend God is not the source of his suffering. The food metaphors in verses 6-7 are notoriously difficult to translate — the exact foods Job describes are uncertain, and the point may be that bland, tasteless food is revolting, just as Eliphaz's bland theology is revolting to someone in agony. Job's wish for death (verses 8-10) is not suicidal despair in the modern clinical sense but a legal plea for release from unbearable suffering.*

Connections: *Job's desire to have his grief weighed on scales connects to the ancient Near Eastern concept of divine judgment as weighing (Egyptian Ma'at, Daniel 5:27 'weighed in the balances'). The wadi imagery connects to Jeremiah 15:18 where the prophet accuses God of being like a deceptive stream. Job's complaint that his friends have failed him anticipates Psalm 55:12-14 where the psalmist laments betrayal by a close companion. The arrow imagery appears again in Lamentations 3:12-13 where the sufferer describes God as an archer who has made*

him the target.

1 Then Job answered and said:

2 If only my anguish could be fully weighed,
and my disaster placed on the scales alongside it —

3 it would outweigh the sand of the seas.
That is why my words come out wild.

4 For the arrows of the Almighty are stuck in me;
my spirit drinks their venom.
The terrors of God are lined up against me.

5 Does the wild donkey bray when it has grass?
Does an ox bellow over its feed?

6 Can tasteless food be eaten without salt?
Is there any flavor in the slime of a mallow plant?

7 My whole being refuses to touch them;
they are like food that makes me sick.

8 If only my request would come!
If only God would grant what I hope for!

9 That God would be willing to crush me,
that he would release his hand and cut me off!

10 Then I would still have this comfort —
I would leap for joy in unrelenting pain —
that I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

11 What strength do I have left that I should keep waiting?
What is my future, that I should hold on?

12 Is my strength the strength of stone?
Is my flesh made of bronze?

13 Is there no help left within me?
Has all resourcefulness been driven from me?

14 A person who withholds faithful love from a friend
abandons the fear of the Almighty.

15 My brothers have betrayed me like a wadi,
like seasonal streams that overflow and vanish.

16 Dark with ice,
swollen where snow melts into them —

17but when the heat comes, they shrink away;
in the scorching sun they disappear from their place.

18Caravans turn aside toward them,
go up into the wasteland, and perish.

19The caravans of Tema look for water;
the traveling merchants of Sheba set their hope on them.

20They are put to shame because they trusted;
they arrive at the wadi and stand there, humiliated.

21That is what you have become to me now:
you see something terrifying, and you recoil.

22Did I ever say, 'Give me something'?
Or, 'Pay a bribe for me out of your wealth'?

23Or, 'Rescue me from an enemy's grip'?
Or, 'Ransom me from the hand of tyrants'?

24Teach me, and I will be silent.
Show me where I have gone wrong.

25How painful honest words can be!
But what does your rebuke actually prove?

26Do you think you can rebuke mere words?
The speech of a desperate man is just wind to you.

27You would even cast lots over an orphan
and haggle over your own friend.

28Now, please — turn and look at me.
Would I lie to your face?

29Turn back — do not let injustice stand.
Turn back! My righteousness is still at stake in this.

30Is there injustice on my tongue?
Can my palate not taste what is wrong?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard dialogue formula va-ya'an ('and he answered') introduces Job's response to Eliphaz's first speech (chapters 4-5). The verb 'answered' in Hebrew does not require a prior question — it simply means 'responded' or 'took up speech.'

2. The verb shaqol ('to weigh') is doubled for emphasis — 'truly, thoroughly weighed.' Job wants an objective measurement of his suffering. The mo'znayim ('balances, scales') evoke the ancient image of justice as precise measurement. Job's argument is mathematical: if you could quantify my pain, you would understand my words.

3. The verb la'u is debated — it may mean 'swallowed up' (choked, unable to speak) or 'rash, wild' (spoken without restraint). In context, Job seems to be defending his earlier outcry: his words sound extreme because his suffering is extreme. The sand of the seas is a standard biblical image for what cannot be counted or measured (Genesis 22:17, 32:12).

4. Shaddai ('the Almighty') is the divine name most associated with overwhelming power. The imagery of poisoned arrows was known in the ancient Near East — arrows were sometimes dipped in toxic substances. The verb ya'arkhuni ('they array themselves against me') is military terminology for troops lining up in battle order. Job feels surrounded by divine hostility on every side.

5. Job argues from nature: animals cry out only when they lack something. His outcry is not irrational; it is the natural response of a creature in genuine need. The pere' ('wild donkey') was a symbol of untamed freedom in the ancient Near East. Even this free creature is silent when satisfied. Job's logic is: if I am crying out, something is genuinely wrong.

6. The exact identity of the foods is debated. Tafel means 'tasteless, unseasoned.' The second food, rir challamut, is traditionally rendered 'white of an egg' but more likely refers to the mucilaginous sap of a mallow or purslane plant — a bland, slimy substance. Job's point: Eliphaz's words are like unseasoned, tasteless food — technically present but offering nothing nourishing.

7. The metaphor continues: what Eliphaz offers as comfort is repulsive to Job. The phrase divei lachmi ('sickness of my bread') suggests food that induces nausea. Job's appetite — both physical and spiritual — rejects what his friends are serving.

8. The formula mi yitten ('who will give?' = 'if only!') expresses intense longing. Job's 'request' (she'elatah) is about to be revealed in the next verses: he wants God to end his life. The word tiqvah ('hope, expectation') carries painful irony — Job's only hope is for death.

9. The verb dakha ('crush') describes total physical destruction. 'Release his hand' means to let his hand swing freely — to stop restraining the blow. Job wants God to finish what he has started. The verb batsa' ('cut off') can mean to sever or to break off, like snapping a thread.

10. Despite wanting death, Job clings to one consolation: he has not concealed or denied (kichad) the words of God. The verb salad is rare and likely means 'to leap, to exult.' The paradox is striking — Job's comfort in death would be the knowledge that he remained honest about God's own words even while suffering. The title Qadosh ('the Holy One') emphasizes God's utter distinctness.

11. Job asks two rhetorical questions exposing the absurdity of patience. He has no strength reserves to draw on, and his 'end' (qits — outcome, future) offers nothing worth enduring for. The verb ya'chel ('to wait, hope') is the same word used for patient endurance before God.

12. Job insists he is human, not mineral. Stone and bronze do not feel pain. Eliphaz's counsel assumes Job can simply endure, but Job's flesh is not bronze — it breaks, it bleeds, it feels every arrow described in verse 4.

13. Tushiyyah ('resourcefulness, effective wisdom, sound judgment') is a wisdom-literature term describing the ability to navigate problems successfully. Job admits that his inner resources are exhausted — the very capacity that should help him cope has been expelled.

14. This verse is syntactically difficult and has been translated in many ways. The mas ('one who is melting, dissolving, despairing') describes the sufferer. The core argument is clear: withholding chesed from a suffering friend is a violation of the fear of Shaddai. Job elevates friendship loyalty to a theological obligation.

15. The wadi metaphor begins here and continues through verse 20. A nachal is a streambed that runs with water during the rainy season but dries up completely in summer heat. The verb bagdu ('they have betrayed, dealt treacherously') is strong covenant-breaking language — the same verb used for marital unfaithfulness in Malachi 2:14-16.

16. The wadi in winter is dark, turbid, rushing with snowmelt and ice — overflowing with apparent abundance. This is the friend in easy times: full, visible, impressive.

17. The verb zarav ('to scorch, dry up') describes the evaporation process. The parallel verb nidakhu ('they are extinguished') treats the wadis like flames that go out. The 'place' (maqom) they vanish from is exactly where travelers expected to find water — the wadi is defined by its location, and the location is now empty.

18. The subject shifts to the travelers who depend on the wadis. The 'paths of their way' describes caravan routes that detour toward known water sources. The tohu ('wasteland, void, chaos') is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 for the formless void — the travelers enter nothingness. They perish not from attack but from misplaced trust.

19. Tema and Sheba were major trading peoples of Arabia. Tema was located in northwest Arabia along major caravan routes; Sheba was in southern Arabia (modern Yemen). These are experienced desert travelers who know where water should be — and even they are deceived by the empty wadis.

20. The verb bosh ('to be ashamed, put to shame') describes the devastating experience of arriving at a place you trusted and finding it empty. The parallel verb chafar ('to be ashamed, confounded') intensifies the humiliation. This is Job's portrait of what his friends have done to him — he came to them expecting sustenance and found nothing.

21. Job applies the wadi metaphor directly: 'you have become lo' — 'nothing' or 'to it' (the empty wadi). The friends see Job's chattat ('terror, dismay, devastating condition') and respond with fear rather than compassion. Their theology cannot process what they are seeing, so they pull away.

22. Job's rhetorical questions are devastating in their simplicity. He has not asked for money, rescue, or favors. The shochad ('bribe, gift') suggests he has not even asked them to intervene with authorities on his behalf. All he wanted was their presence and honesty.

23. The verb padah ('to ransom, redeem') involves paying a price to free someone from bondage or danger. Job has asked for none of this — his expectations of friendship are far simpler than financial rescue.

24. Job's offer is genuine and challenging: if his friends can identify a specific sin, he will accept it silently. The verb shagah ('to go astray, err') implies unintentional wandering rather than deliberate rebellion. Job is open to correction but demands specifics, not generalizations.

25. The verb marats ('to be sharp, painful, forceful') acknowledges that truthful words do hurt — Job is not asking to be spared honest criticism. His complaint is that his friends' rebukes prove nothing. The verb yakach ('to argue, rebuke, prove in court') is legal language — Job wants evidence, not lectures.

26. Job accuses his friends of treating his anguished words as the target rather than engaging with his actual situation. They correct his language rather than addressing his pain. The no'ash ('desperate, despairing') person's words are dismissed as ruach ('wind, breath') — insubstantial, not worth taking seriously.

27. The verb naphal with 'al can mean 'to cast lots over' (as in dividing spoil) or 'to fall upon.' The verb karah ('to dig') suggests digging a pit or a trap. Job accuses his friends of treating the vulnerable (the orphan) as objects and their own friend as prey. The escalation is deliberate — if they would do this to a stranger, no wonder they treat Job this way.

28. Job's plea is deeply personal: look at me. The physical act of facing another person in the ancient Near East carried the weight of honest encounter. Job insists that a face-to-face meeting would reveal his sincerity — lying while looking someone in the eye was considered especially shameful.

29. Job pleads with his friends to reverse course. The avlah ('injustice, wrongdoing') is their premature verdict against him. His tsidqi ('my righteousness') is what hangs in the balance — if his friends persist in their accusation, his integrity before God and community is destroyed.

30. Job closes the chapter by returning to the food metaphor from verses 6-7. His 'palate' (chek) is the organ of taste and discernment. Just as he could detect tasteless food earlier, he can detect moral wrong. He asks: do you really think I cannot tell the difference between justice and injustice, between truth and falsehood? Job claims the competence to evaluate his own moral condition.

7

Summary: *Job continues his response but pivots from addressing his friends to addressing God directly. He compares human life to compulsory military service and hired labor — days of drudgery with no escape. His nights bring no rest, only tossing until dawn. He describes his flesh clothed in worms and crusted dirt, his days passing faster than a weaver's shuttle, his life as mere breath. Then, in a dramatic shift, Job turns upward and speaks to God: why have you made me your target? Why do you watch me so closely? What have I done to you, O Watcher of Humanity? Even if I have sinned, how does that harm you? Why not simply pardon my transgression? Soon I will lie in the dust, and when you come looking for me, I will be gone.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most audacious theological moves in the Hebrew Bible. Job takes Psalm 8 — the celebrated hymn asking 'What is man that you are mindful of him?' — and inverts it into a complaint. In Psalm 8, divine attention is a gift: God is gloriously attentive to tiny humanity. In Job 7:17-18, divine attention is suffocating surveillance: 'What are human beings that you make so much of them, that you fix your attention on them, that you examine them every morning and test them every moment?' The psalm's wonder becomes Job's horror. The same God who lovingly attends to humanity in Psalm 8 is, in Job's experience, an unwelcome observer who will not look away long enough for Job to swallow his own spit. This inversion is not blasphemy — it is theology under pressure, asking whether God's attention is always a blessing.*

Translation Friction: *Job's language in verses 12-20 personifies God as an obsessive watcher who treats a single human being as a cosmic threat — 'Am I the sea or the sea dragon that you set a guard over me?' The sea and the tannin (sea monster) were symbols of primordial chaos that God had to subdue at creation. Job asks with bitter irony: do I really require that level of divine security? The closing verses (20-21) are especially daring — Job essentially tells God: even if I sinned, what is that to you? You are so vast that a single human's transgression should be negligible. Why not just forgive me and move on? The argument treats forgiveness as the rational, efficient response — a pragmatic appeal to a God who seems to be expending unnecessary energy on Job's destruction.*

Connections: *The inversion of Psalm 8 in verses 17-18 is the most important literary connection. The 'weaver's shuttle' image (verse 6) connects to the textile metaphors for life found in Isaiah 38:12 where Hezekiah describes God cutting his life from the loom. Job's description of life as hevel ('breath, vapor') anticipates Ecclesiastes, where the same word becomes the governing metaphor for human existence. The sea monster imagery (verse 12) connects to the fuller treatment in Job 26 and 41 (Leviathan). Job's plea 'let me alone' (verse 16) finds an echo in Psalm 39:13 where the psalmist makes the same request.*

1 Is not human life hard service on earth?
Are not our days like the days of a hired laborer?

2 Like a slave who longs for the shade,
like a laborer waiting for his wages —

3 so I have been allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery have been counted out for me.

4 When I lie down I think, 'When will I get up?'
But the night drags on,
and I toss and turn until dawn.

5 My flesh is clothed with maggots and crusts of dirt;
my skin cracks open and oozes.

6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle;
they come to an end without hope.

7 Remember that my life is just a breath;
my eyes will never see good again.

8 The eye that sees me now will not see me again;
your eyes will look for me, but I will be gone.

9 A cloud dissolves and is gone;
so the one who goes down to Sheol does not come back up.

10 He will never return to his house,
and his place will not recognize him anymore.

11 So I will not hold back my mouth.
I will speak from the anguish of my spirit;
I will pour out the bitterness of my soul.

12 Am I the sea? Am I the sea monster?
That you post a guard over me?

13 When I say, 'My bed will comfort me,
my couch will ease my complaint' —

14 then you terrify me with dreams
and frighten me with visions.

15 So my throat prefers strangling,
my bones prefer death to this body.

16 I am done. I will not live forever.
Leave me alone — my days are a breath.

17 What are human beings that you make so much of them,
that you fix your attention on them?

18 You examine him every morning
and test him every moment.

19 How long until you look away from me?
Will you not let me alone long enough to swallow my spit?

20 Even if I have sinned — what does that do to you,
O Watcher of Humanity?
Why have you made me your target?
Why have I become a burden to you?

21 Why not just forgive my rebellion
and take away my guilt?
For soon I will lie down in the dust,
and you will look for me — but I will be gone.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Tsava can mean military service, hard labor, or the term of service itself. The word appears in Numbers 1 for military conscription and in Isaiah 40:2 where Jerusalem's 'warfare' (tsava) is declared complete. Job universalizes the term: all human life is tsava — compulsory, exhausting, with a fixed term that cannot be shortened by the one serving it.

2. The eved ('slave, servant') yearns for tsel ('shade, shadow') — relief from the sun during forced outdoor labor. The hired worker yearns for po'alo ('his wages') — the only compensation that makes the drudgery worthwhile. Both images convey existence as endurance, not enjoyment. Job is the slave looking at the sun and the laborer counting the hours.

3. The verb hunchalti ('I have been made to inherit, allotted') implies that suffering is Job's assigned portion — his inheritance is not land or blessing but shav ('emptiness, worthlessness'). The nights of amal ('toil, misery, trouble') are minnu ('counted, appointed') — they have been deliberately measured out, not random.

4. The verb middad is uncertain — possibly 'measured out' (the evening is stretched long) or related to a root meaning 'to flee' (evening flees but is replaced by more darkness). The nedudim ('tossings, restless movements') describe insomnia driven by pain. Job is trapped between wanting the night to end and finding no rest within it.

5. The description is deliberately physical and repulsive. Rimmah ('maggots, worms') infest his open sores. Gush afar ('clods of dust/dirt') crust over the wounds. The verb raga' ('to break, crack') describes the skin splitting, and ma'as ('to reject, dissolve, run') suggests suppuration. Job's body is decomposing while he is still alive.

6. The areg ('weaver's shuttle') flies back and forth across the loom with blinding speed, and each pass adds one thin thread to the fabric. Job's days pass that fast, and when the thread runs out, the fabric is done. The tiqvah ('hope, expectation') that ends is both the thread itself (tiqvah can also mean 'cord, thread' — see Joshua 2:18) and the expectation of something better.

7. Job now begins addressing God directly. The imperative zakhor ('remember!') is a prayer verb — used throughout the Psalms to call God's attention to something He seems to have forgotten. Ruach ('wind, breath, spirit') emphasizes the brevity and insubstantiality of human life. The request is paradoxical: Job asks God to remember how forgettable human life is.

8. The shift to second person ('your eyes') confirms Job is now speaking to God. The phrase eineni ('I am not') is stark — not 'I will be absent' but 'I am not,' the language of nonexistence. Job warns God: the window for dealing with me is closing.

9. Sheol is the realm of the dead — not hell in the later Christian sense but the shadowy underworld where the dead exist in diminished form. Job's theology here reflects the standard ancient Israelite view: death is a one-way descent. The cloud metaphor emphasizes irreversibility — once a cloud dissipates, it does not reform.

10. The maqom ('place') that no longer recognizes the dead person personifies the home itself — the place where a person was known now treats him as a stranger. This verse anticipates Psalm 103:16 ('its place remembers it no more') and foreshadows Job's later meditation on death in chapter 14.

11. Job announces that his speech will be uncensored. The verb chasakh ('to restrain, hold back, spare') is negated — no filter, no diplomatic softening. The tsar ruach ('distress of spirit') and mar nefesh ('bitterness of soul') are the two sources of his speech: inner anguish and existential bitterness. What follows (verses 12-21) is directed entirely at God.

12. The yam ('sea') and tannin ('sea monster, dragon') are the primordial chaos forces that God subdued at creation (cf. Psalm 74:13, Isaiah 51:9). In Canaanite mythology, the sea god Yamm and the dragon Tannin were cosmic threats requiring divine combat. Job's question drips with sarcasm: I am one broken human being — do I really require the same level of divine containment as the forces of chaos?

13. Job attempts the most basic human remedy for suffering — lying down to rest. The eres ('bed, couch') and mishkav ('lying-place') represent the last refuge of the afflicted. But even this fails, as the next verse reveals.

14. God invades even Job's sleep. The chalomot ('dreams') and chezyonot ('visions') that should be channels of divine revelation become instruments of terror. The verb chitat ('to shatter, terrify') and ba'at ('to frighten, startle') describe a nocturnal assault. This responds directly to Eliphaz's night vision in 4:12-16 — Eliphaz offered his dream as evidence of divine wisdom; Job's dreams are evidence of divine persecution.

15. The verb bachar ('to choose, prefer') expresses a rational preference, not a moment of impulse. Machanaq ('strangling, suffocation') is chosen over continued existence in this decaying body. The 'bones' (atsmotai) represent the structural core of the person — even Job's framework wants out.

16. The opening ma'asti ('I reject, I am disgusted') has no stated object — Job rejects his own life, his situation, everything. The phrase lo le-olam echyeh ('I will not live forever') is not a theological statement about mortality but a practical argument: since I am going to die anyway, why torture me in the meantime? Hevel ('vapor, breath') emphasizes how brief and weightless human existence is.

17. The verbal and structural parallels to Psalm 8:4 are unmistakable and intentional. The question mah enosh ('what is a mortal?') uses enosh — the word for humanity that emphasizes frailty and mortality. The phrase tashit elav libekha ('you set your heart upon him') means you direct your focused attention toward him. In Psalm 8, this is beautiful. In Job 7, it is suffocating.

18. The verb paqad ('to visit, attend to, examine') can be positive (God visiting to bless) or negative (God visiting to punish). Here it means relentless inspection. The verb bachan ('to test, assay, refine') is metallurgical language — testing the purity of metal. Job feels like ore in a furnace that is never taken out because the Refiner never stops testing.

19. One of the most vivid lines in Job. The plea is for the smallest possible interval of divine inattention — just long enough to perform the involuntary act of swallowing saliva. The hyperbole makes a serious point: God's surveillance is so total that Job cannot perform the most basic bodily function without being watched.

20. The conditional chatati ('if I have sinned') does not concede guilt — it is a hypothetical that undermines the friends' logic. Even granting their premise (Job sinned), what damage does one human's sin inflict on the Almighty? The argument anticipates Elihu's point in 35:6-7. The title notser ha-adam parallels Daniel 4:13 where a 'watcher' is an angelic being monitoring earth. Job addresses God as the ultimate surveillance entity.

21. Job closes the chapter with breathtaking audacity. The verbs nasa ('to lift, carry away, forgive') and he'evir ('to cause to pass, remove') are standard terms for divine forgiveness. Job argues that pardon is the efficient solution: he is about to die anyway, so why not forgive and be done with it? The final image — God searching for Job in the morning and finding him gone — reverses the divine-human dynamic. Usually humans seek God; here God seeks Job and comes too late. The verb shichar ('to seek early, diligently') implies eager searching at dawn, but the dawn will reveal only dust.

8

Summary: *Bildad the Shuhite delivers his first speech, responding to Job with a sharper and more rigid version of Eliphaz's argument. Where Eliphaz was gentle and indirect, Bildad is blunt: Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty distort what is right? He implies that Job's children died because of their own sin, and that if Job himself were pure and upright, God would restore him. Bildad appeals to ancestral tradition — ask the former generations, search what their ancestors discovered — and draws two nature metaphors to prove his point: papyrus cannot grow without water (the godless cannot prosper without God), and a spider's web cannot bear weight (the confidence of the wicked collapses under pressure). He concludes with assurance: God does not reject a blameless person and does not support evildoers. If Job is truly innocent, his mourning will turn to laughter.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Bildad represents the voice of inherited tradition — he does not claim personal revelation (as Eliphaz did with his night vision) but appeals to the accumulated wisdom of past generations. His argument is structurally sound and theologically orthodox: God is just, sin has consequences, and the righteous are ultimately vindicated. The problem is that it is being applied to a situation where the premise does not hold. Bildad's cruelest moment comes in verse 4 where he essentially says Job's children must have sinned — otherwise why would God have killed them? This is the retribution principle at its most devastating: it requires that every sufferer be guilty, including dead children. The papyrus and spider-web metaphors are vivid and memorable, but they operate as closed systems — they assume that withering always indicates godlessness and that collapse always indicates wickedness, leaving no room for innocent suffering.*

Translation Friction: *Bildad's statement about Job's children (verse 4) is shocking in its pastoral insensitivity but logically consistent within his theology — if suffering is always punishment, then the dead children must have sinned. The text does not rebuke Bildad at this point; his theology will be dismantled gradually over the course of the dialogue and definitively in God's speech from the whirlwind (chapters 38-41). Bildad's*

appeal to tradition raises the question of whether inherited wisdom can account for unprecedented situations. His ancestors' teachings were true in many cases — the godless often do wither, the wicked often do collapse — but the universal claim ('always and without exception') breaks down in Job's case. The chapter also introduces a pattern in the dialogues: each friend is slightly harsher than the last, and each cycle of speeches escalates the conflict.

Connections: *Bildad's question 'Does God pervert justice?' (verse 3) echoes Abraham's plea in Genesis 18:25 ('Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'). The papyrus-in-the-marsh image connects to Egypt's Nile ecology and may reflect Bildad's Shuhite (eastern) perspective. The spider-web metaphor anticipates Isaiah 59:5-6 where the wicked 'weave spider webs' that cannot serve as clothing. Bildad's promise that God will fill Job's mouth with laughter (verse 21) echoes Sarah's laughter in Genesis 21:6 — in both cases, the question is whether the promise is too good to believe. The appeal to ancestral wisdom connects to Deuteronomy 32:7 ('Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will explain').*

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

2 How long will you go on saying these things?
The words of your mouth are a blustering wind.

3 Does God twist justice?
Does the Almighty distort what is right?

4 If your children sinned against him,
then he handed them over to the consequences of their rebellion.

5 But if you yourself seek God diligently
and plead with the Almighty —

6 if you are pure and upright,
then surely he will rouse himself for you
and restore your rightful home to prosperity.

7 Your former state will seem small,
but your future will flourish beyond measure.

8 Ask the previous generation, I urge you;
pay attention to what their ancestors discovered.

9 For we are only from yesterday and know nothing;
our days on earth are a shadow.

10 Will they not teach you and tell you?
Will they not bring forth words from understanding?

11 Can papyrus grow tall without a marsh?
Can reeds flourish without water?

12 While still in its prime, before it is cut,
it withers ahead of every other plant.

13 Such is the path of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless will perish.

14What he trusts in is fragile;
what he relies on is a spider's web.

15He leans on his house, but it does not stand;
he grabs hold of it, but it does not hold.

16He is lush in the sunlight,
and his shoots spread over his garden.

17His roots wind around a stone heap;
he clings to a house of rocks.

18But if he is torn from his place,
that place will deny him: 'I never knew you.'

19Such is the 'joy' of his way:
and from the soil, others spring up in his place.

20Look — God does not reject a blameless person,
and he does not take the hand of evildoers.

21He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.

22Those who hate you will be clothed in shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Bildad is identified by his clan, the Shuhites. Shuah was a son of Abraham by Keturah (Genesis 25:2), placing Bildad among the eastern peoples with Abrahamic lineage but outside the covenant line through Isaac. The Shuhites likely lived in the region east of the Jordan or in northern Mesopotamia.
2. Bildad opens with impatience. The phrase ruach kabbir ('a mighty/blustering wind') dismisses Job's entire speech as hot air — impressive in force but empty of substance. The verb temalel ('you speak') may carry a nuance of babbling or empty talk. Bildad's opening is confrontational where Eliphaz's was diplomatic.
3. Bildad's two rhetorical questions expect the answer 'no' and form the foundation of his entire argument. If God does not pervert mishpat ('justice, judgment') or tsedeq ('righteousness, what is right'), then suffering must indicate guilt. The verb avat ('to twist, bend, pervert') implies deliberate distortion — Bildad considers it unthinkable that God would bend the rules.
4. This is perhaps the cruelest single verse in the friends' speeches. Bildad implies that Job's ten dead children deserved their fate. The verb shilchem ('he sent them away, cast them off') combined with be-yad pish'am ('into the hand of their transgression') means God released them to the power of their own sin. The 'if' (im) provides thin plausible deniability, but the implication is clear: their death was judicial.
5. The verb shachar ('to seek early, seek diligently') implies earnest, dawn-rising devotion. Bildad offers a conditional promise: if Job turns to God properly, restoration is possible. The verb titchannan ('you make supplication, plead for grace') implies throwing oneself on God's mercy — acknowledging that you need something only God can give.
6. The condition is zakh ve-yashar ('pure and upright') — the same vocabulary the narrator used to describe Job in 1:1 (tam ve-yashar). Bildad unknowingly echoes God's own assessment of Job. The verb ya'ir ('he will rouse, awaken') suggests God has been dormant regarding Job's case and will wake up to act. The nevat tsidqekha ('dwelling-place of your righteousness') is Job's household restored to its former state.
7. Bildad promises that Job's reshit ('beginning, former state') will look like mits'ar ('smallness, insignificance') compared to the acharit ('latter end, future') that will yisgeh ('grow greatly, flourish'). This promise is technically fulfilled in 42:12 where Job's latter days are blessed more than his beginning — but not for the reasons Bildad assumes.
8. Bildad's epistemology is traditional: wisdom comes from inherited teaching, not personal experience or private revelation. The dor rishon ('former generation') and the cheqer avotam ('the searching/investigation of their fathers') represent accumulated generational wisdom. Bildad trusts tradition over individual claims.

9. Bildad acknowledges human limitation — a single lifetime is too short to accumulate sufficient wisdom. The tsel ('shadow') image describes days that have no substance. This is one of Bildad's most honest moments: he admits his own generation's ignorance. But his solution (trust tradition) creates its own problem — what if the tradition is incomplete?

10. The ancestors will yorukha ('instruct you') and bring forth words mi-libbam ('from their heart/mind'). The lev ('heart') in Hebrew is the seat of intellect and understanding, not primarily emotion. Their teaching comes from deep, considered thought — not surface reaction.

11. The first nature parable begins. Gome' ('papyrus') is an Egyptian marsh plant that requires standing water to survive. The achu ('reed, marsh grass') likewise depends on constant moisture. Both plants are impressive when growing but utterly dependent on their water source. Bildad's point: apparent prosperity that is not rooted in God (the water source) is doomed.

12. The papyrus dries out even while still be-ibbo ('in its freshness, greenness') — it has not been harvested (lo yiqqatef, 'not plucked') but dries up on its own when the water fails. It withers lifnei kol chatsir ('before all grass') — faster than ordinary plants, because its water dependency is greater. The metaphor warns: the higher the apparent prosperity, the more dramatic the collapse when the source dries up.

13. Bildad applies the metaphor: the shokhekhei El ('those who forget God') are the papyrus without water. The chanef ('godless, profane, polluted') person's tiqvah ('hope') will perish. The chanef is not necessarily an atheist but someone whose life is disconnected from God — outwardly prosperous but inwardly rootless.

14. The second metaphor begins. The verb yaqut ('will be cut off, snapped') describes the sudden breaking of the godless person's kislo ('confidence, self-assurance'). The beit akkavish ('house of a spider') — the web — serves as the image of misplaced mivtach ('trust, security'). A spider's web is an engineering marvel but structurally useless as shelter.

15. The verbs escalate: yish'en ('he leans') implies resting his weight on the web; lo ya'amod ('it does not stand') means it collapses. He yachaziq ('grips tightly') in desperation; lo yaqum ('it does not endure') means it offers no support. The web is a perfect image of the retribution principle inverted — it looks like structure but is structurally void.

16. Bildad shifts to a third image — a flourishing plant. The ratov ('moist, lush, fresh') plant appears healthy lifnei shamesh ('before the sun' — in full sunlight). Its yoneqet ('suckers, shoots, tendrils') spread over the garden. The initial appearance is one of vibrant, expanding life.

17. The roots intertwine around gal ('a heap of stones') and grip beit avanim ('a house of stones'). The plant appears anchored — its roots have found solid material. But stones are not soil; they provide grip without nourishment. The image suggests a life that looks established but is actually clinging to something that cannot sustain it.

18. The maqom ('place') personified denies ever knowing the plant — lo re'itikha ('I have not seen you'). This is the ultimate erasure: not just removal but disavowal. The place where the wicked person flourished acts as if he never existed. The echo forward to Matthew 7:23 ('I never knew you') may be coincidental but the dynamic is identical — a claim of relationship is denied by the one who matters.

19. The mesos darkho ('joy of his way') is bitterly ironic — everything the wicked person's life amounted to is dismissed as this. Meanwhile, acher ('another, others') grows from the same soil. The world replaces the wicked without noticing the substitution. The plant metaphor underscores that the wicked person's prosperity was never personal — it belonged to the soil and simply transfers to the next occupant.

20. Bildad's conclusion rests on two pillars: God does not yim'as ('reject, refuse, cast away') the tam ('blameless, complete, person of integrity'), and God does not yachaziq be-yad ('grasp the hand of, strengthen, support') the mere'im ('evildoers'). The word tam is the same term used to describe Job in 1:1. Bildad unknowingly affirms Job's character while undermining Job's experience.

21. Bildad's promise is beautiful in isolation: sechok ('laughter') filling the mouth and teru'ah ('joyful shouting, war cry of triumph') on the lips. The imagery is of a person so full of joy that it overflows audibly. Whether this promise is trustworthy depends on whether Bildad's theological framework is correct — the book will ultimately argue that it is incomplete.

22. Bildad closes with a symmetrical promise: Job's enemies will wear boshet ('shame') like a garment — visible, public, inescapable — while the ohel resha'im ('tent of the wicked') will cease to exist (einennu — 'it is not'). The tent image recalls the impermanence of nomadic life — even a tent, the most temporary of dwellings, outlasts the wicked person's hopes. Bildad's speech ends on a note of confident assurance that the moral order will hold. The book will test that confidence severely.

9

Summary: *Job responds to Bildad with what becomes the most legally structured speech in the dialogues so far. He agrees with Bildad's premise — yes, God is just — but draws a devastating conclusion: if God is just AND all-powerful, then no human can win a case against him. Job frames the problem as a courtroom drama: how can a mortal be righteous before God? If someone wanted to take God to court, he could not answer one charge in a thousand. God moves mountains, shakes the earth, commands the sun, and stretches out the heavens. He made the Bear, Orion, the Pleiades, and the southern constellations. He passes by and Job cannot see him. He snatches and no one can stop him. Even if Job were righteous, he would not dare answer; he could only plead for mercy before his Judge. Even if Job summoned God and God answered, Job doubts God would listen. God crushes him with a storm and multiplies his wounds without cause. He will not let Job catch his breath. If it is a matter of strength — God is mighty. If it is a matter of justice — who will set a court date? Even if Job were innocent, his own mouth would condemn him. Job arrives at his most radical statement: God destroys the blameless and the wicked alike. When disaster strikes, God laughs at the despair of the innocent. The chapter closes with Job's longing for an arbiter — someone who could stand between Job and God and remove God's rod so that Job could speak without terror.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter introduces the cosmic courtroom metaphor that will dominate the rest of Job's speeches. Job is not abandoning theology — he is doing theology at its most rigorous. He accepts that God is just and powerful, then asks the question no one else will ask: what happens when justice and power are concentrated in the same being who is also the opposing party? There is no appeals court, no independent judiciary, no neutral arbiter. God is simultaneously plaintiff, judge, and executioner. The legal vocabulary is precise: riv ('lawsuit'), tsaddiq ('righteous/innocent party'), mishpat ('justice/judgment'), mokiach ('arbiter/mediator'). Job is not cursing God — he is filing a brief. The constellation passage (verses 8-10) is one of the great astronomical texts of the ancient world, naming specific star formations and attributing their creation to God. The climax in verse 33 — the wish for a mokiach ('arbiter') between himself and God — is the theological seed that grows into Job's later demand for a go'el (redeemer, 19:25).*

Translation Friction: *Verse 22 ('He destroys the blameless and the wicked alike') is the most theologically explosive statement in the dialogues to this point. Job is not saying God is evil — he is saying God is indiscriminate, which in some ways is worse. An evil God could be opposed; an indiscriminate God cannot even be engaged. Verse 23 ('When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent') pushes further — God is not merely indifferent but actively contemptuous of innocent suffering. These verses have troubled interpreters for millennia. Some soften them: Job is describing how things appear, not how they are. Others take them at face value: Job, in his extremity, is making claims about God that are theologically wrong but psychologically honest. The book never directly refutes these verses — God's speech from the whirlwind (chapters 38-41) responds to Job's challenge but not by defending divine justice point by point.*

Connections: *The constellation names in verses 8-9 (Ash/Bear, Kesil/Orion, Kimah/Pleiades) recur in Job 38:31-32 where God throws them back at Job: 'Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?' The wish for an arbiter (verse 33) develops into the cry for a witness in 16:19 and reaches its climax in the go'el declaration of 19:25. The legal framework connects to Isaiah's trial speeches (Isaiah 41:1, 43:26) where God invites the nations to court. Job's complaint that God 'passes by and I do not see him' (verse 11) inverts Moses' experience at the rock cleft (Exodus 33:22) where God's passing by was a revelation; for Job, God's passing is an absence.*

1 Job responded:

2 Yes, I know this is true —
but how can a mortal be in the right before God?

3 If someone wanted to take him to court,
he could not answer one charge in a thousand.

4 He is wise in mind and vast in power.
Who has defied him and come out whole?

5 He moves mountains, and they do not know it —
he overturns them in his anger.

6 He shakes the earth from its place
and its pillars tremble.

7 He commands the sun, and it does not rise;
he seals up the stars.

8 He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the heights of the sea.

9 He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,
and the constellations of the southern sky.

10 He does great things beyond searching out,
wonders beyond counting.

11 He passes right by me, and I cannot see him;
he moves on, and I do not perceive him.

12 If he snatches something away, who can stop him?
Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'

13 God does not turn back his anger;
even the allies of Rahab cringe beneath him.

14 How then could I answer him
or choose my words to argue with him?

15 Even if I were righteous, I could not answer him;
I could only plead for mercy before my Judge.

16 Even if I summoned him and he responded,
I would not believe he was actually listening to me.

17 He crushes me with a storm
and multiplies my wounds without cause.

18 He will not let me catch my breath
but fills me with bitterness.

19 If it is a contest of strength — he is the mighty one.
If it is a matter of justice — who will set a court date for me?

20 Even if I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me.
Even if I am blameless, he would declare me crooked.

21 I am blameless — but I no longer know myself.
I despise my life.

22 It is all the same — that is why I said it:
he destroys the blameless and the wicked alike.

23 When a plague kills suddenly,
he laughs at the despair of the innocent.

24 The earth is handed over to the wicked.
He covers the faces of its judges.
If it is not he — then who?

25 My days are swifter than a runner;
they flee without seeing anything good.

26 They glide past like reed boats,
like an eagle swooping down on prey.

27 If I say, 'I will forget my complaint,
I will change my expression and force a smile' —

28 I dread all my sufferings.
I know that you will not declare me innocent.

29 I am already condemned —
so why should I struggle for nothing?

30 Even if I washed myself with snow
and scrubbed my hands clean with lye —

31 you would plunge me into a pit of filth,
and my own clothes would be disgusted by me.

32 For he is not a man like me, that I could answer him,
that we could go to court together.

33 There is no arbiter between us
who could lay his hand on us both.

34 Let him remove his rod from me,
and let his terror not frighten me.

35 Then I would speak without fearing him.
But as things stand — that is not my situation.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard dialogue introduction. Job responds to Bildad but will quickly move past the friend-to-friend argument and address the God-to-human problem directly.

2. Job's opening omnnam ('truly, indeed') concedes Bildad's basic claim. But the concession becomes the foundation for a more devastating argument. The phrase enosh im El ('a mortal with/before God') sets up the asymmetry that drives the entire chapter: the gap between human and divine is so vast that justice between them is structurally impossible.

3. The riv ('lawsuit, legal dispute') is not casual arguing but formal judicial proceedings. The ratio 'one out of a thousand' (achat minni alef) expresses overwhelming inadequacy — not that the human has no answers at all, but that even his best answers are drowned by the sheer volume of God's case.

4. The combination of chakham levav ('wise of heart/mind') and ammits koach ('mighty of strength') means God holds both intellectual and physical supremacy. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'no one.' The verb hiqshah ('hardened, stiffened') implies stubborn resistance. The verb vayishlam ('and was whole, prospered, came out intact') means no one who resisted God has ever emerged undamaged.

5. The hymn of divine power begins. The verb he'etiq ('to move, remove, displace') describes relocating entire mountains. The phrase ve-lo yad'u ('and they do not know') means the mountains are moved so effortlessly that they are unaware of being displaced. The overturn (hafakham) happens be-appo ('in his anger') — divine wrath reshapes geography.

6. Ancient cosmology imagined the earth resting on ammudim ('pillars, columns'). God shakes the earth so violently that even its foundations — the structures holding the world in place — yitpallatsun ('shudder, tremble'). The image conveys power over the fundamental architecture of reality.

7. God can cancel sunrise. The cheres ('sun') obeys his verbal command. The verb yachtom ('he seals') means he locks the stars away as one seals a document or a jar — their light is shut off by divine decree. This reverses creation: in Genesis 1, God called light into being; here he can revoke it.

8. The verb noteh ('stretching out') treats the heavens like a tent canopy being unfurled — God does it levaddo ('by himself alone'), needing no assistance. The phrase dorekh al bamotei yam ('treading on the high places of the sea') depicts God walking on the crests of ocean waves, asserting dominion over the chaotic waters. This image will later resonate with the Gospel accounts of Jesus walking on water.

9. Three specific star formations are named: Ash ('the Bear' — possibly Ursa Major or the star Arcturus), Kesil ('Orion' — the name means 'fool' or 'strong one'), and Kimah ('the Pleiades' — a tight cluster). The chadrei teman ('chambers of the south') refers to southern constellations invisible from northern latitudes — the mysterious stars below the horizon. God created not just the earth but the entire visible (and invisible) cosmos.

10. This verse nearly quotes Eliphaz's words from 5:9 — Job appropriates his friend's hymnic language but redirects it. In Eliphaz's mouth, God's unsearchable greatness was comforting. In Job's mouth, it is terrifying: God's deeds are beyond comprehension, which means his actions against Job are also beyond comprehension or challenge.

11. The invisibility of God compounds the legal problem. In a human courtroom, both parties are visible. But God ya'avor ('passes by') and Job lo er'eh ('cannot see'). God yachalof ('moves past, slips by') and Job lo avin ('cannot perceive, cannot understand'). The vocabulary of passing by echoes the Sinai theophany (Exodus 33-34) but without the revelation — God passes, but Job receives nothing.

12. The verb yachtof ('he snatches, seizes') describes sudden, irresistible taking. The two questions — 'who can stop him?' and 'who can challenge him?' — establish that God operates without accountability. No one has the standing to demand an explanation. This is Job's structural complaint: power without accountability is indistinguishable from tyranny, even if the powerful being is just.

13. Rahab is a mythological sea monster representing primordial chaos (distinct from Rahab of Jericho). The 'allies of Rahab' (ozrei Rahav) are the cosmic forces that sided with chaos against God at creation. Even these superhuman powers shachechu ('bow down, crouch, cringe') under God. Job's logic: if chaos monsters cannot withstand God, what chance does one man have?

14. The af ki ('how much more/less') construction draws the obvious conclusion: if Rahab's allies cannot stand before God, Job certainly cannot. The verb evcharah ('I would choose, select') suggests carefully picking legal arguments — but even the most eloquent brief is useless against an omnipotent opposing party.

15. The li-meshofti ('to my judge') identifies God explicitly as the presiding judge in this cosmic court. The verb etchannan ('I would plead for grace') is the posture of a defendant who has given up on acquittal and simply begs for leniency. Job's righteousness (tsadaqti) is real but irrelevant — the court is structured so that no defense can succeed.

16. The distrust is total. Even if God ya'anenni ('answered me'), Job lo a'amin ('would not believe, would not trust') that God ya'azin qoli ('was giving ear to my voice'). The verb he'emin ('to believe, trust') shares its root with emunah ('faithfulness'). Job's trust in the judicial process has collapsed — any divine response would feel like a formality, not genuine engagement.

17. The se'arah ('tempest, storm') will become theologically significant: God eventually answers Job from a se'arah (38:1). The word chinnam ('without cause, for nothing, gratuitously') is the same word the Accuser used in 1:9 ('Does Job fear God for nothing?'). The Accuser claimed Job's piety was not chinnam (not free, not without cause); Job now claims his suffering IS chinnam — without cause.

18. The verb hashev ruchi ('to return my breath/spirit') means to recover, to take a breather. God denies Job even momentary respite. Instead, God yasbi'eni mamerorim ('saturates me with bitter things') — the bitterness is force-fed until Job is full of it.

19. Job evaluates both options. Strength (koach): God wins automatically. Justice (mishpat): no one can set a court date (yo'ideni — 'summon me, appoint a hearing') because no authority exists above God to convene the court. Both paths — force and law — lead to the same dead end.

20. The verb yarshi'eni ('would condemn me, declare me guilty') is the legal opposite of 'justify' — it means to render a guilty verdict. The verb ya'aqsheni ('would make me crooked, would twist') suggests that God's cross-examination would distort even truthful testimony. Job's integrity (tam) cannot survive the courtroom because the court itself deforms whatever enters it.

21. Job states tam ani ('I am blameless') flatly, without qualification. But then: lo eda nafshi ('I do not know my own soul/self'). The suffering has made him a stranger to himself. His blamelessness is real but has become unrecognizable. The final phrase em'as chayyai ('I reject/despise my life') echoes 7:16 — Job's disgust with his own existence is a recurring refrain.

22. This is Job's most radical theological claim to this point. The tam ('blameless') and the rasha ('wicked') receive identical treatment — God mekalleh ('destroys, brings to an end') both. If the retribution principle were correct, these two categories would receive opposite outcomes. Job claims they receive the same outcome, which demolishes the entire framework his friends rely on.

23. The shot ('whip, scourge, plague') yamit pit'om ('kills suddenly') — death comes without warning or discrimination. And God yil'ag ('laughs, mocks') at the massat neqiyyim ('the testing/melting/despair of the innocent'). The claim that God laughs at innocent suffering is the extreme edge of Job's protest. The verb la'ag ('to mock, scorn') attributes contempt to God.

24. Job extends his indictment: the entire earth (erets) is given be-yad rasha ('into the hand of the wicked'). God yekhasseh ('covers') the faces of its judges — blinding them to justice. The closing challenge is devastating: im lo — efo mi hu ('if not [God] — then who?'). Job eliminates every alternative. If the world is unjust and God controls the world, God is responsible.

25. The rats ('runner, courier') was the fastest mode of communication in the ancient world — a professional messenger sprinting between cities. Job's days outrun even this. They barachu ('flee') and lo ra'u tovah ('see no good') — his life rushes past without a single moment of goodness.

26. Three speed images in two verses: the runner (v. 25), the oniyyot eveh ('reed boats' or 'papyrus skiffs' — light, fast vessels), and the nesher ('eagle, vulture') diving for food. Each image is faster than the last. Life is not merely passing — it is accelerating toward its end.

27. Job considers self-deception as a coping strategy: forget the complaint (sichah), abandon the grim face (e'ezvah fanai — 'I will leave/change my face'), and avligah ('I will brighten up, cheer myself'). The attempt at forced cheerfulness is immediately undone in the next verse.

28. The verb yagorti ('I dread, I am afraid of') reveals that Job's suffering is not merely present but anticipated — he fears what is still coming. The certainty lo tenaqqeni ('you will not hold me innocent, will not acquit me') means the verdict is already determined. No amount of self-encouragement (v. 27) can overcome the knowledge that the Judge has already decided.

29. The verb ersha ('I am wicked, I am condemned') may be Job's resigned acceptance of the verdict rather than a confession of actual guilt. If the outcome is predetermined, effort is hevel ('futility, vapor'). The verb iga ('I toil, I labor, I exhaust myself') describes wasted effort — fighting a case that is already lost.

30. Snow water was considered the purest natural cleanser. Bor ('lye, alkali soap') was the strongest cleansing agent available. Job imagines the most thorough purification possible — both natural (snow) and chemical (lye). Even this extreme cleansing will not hold, as the next verse reveals.

31. God undoes Job's cleansing by immersing him in shachat ('a pit, a ditch, corruption'). The result is so complete that even Job's salmotai ('garments, clothes') — inanimate objects — ti'avuni ('would abhor me, be disgusted by me'). The personification of clothing refusing to touch its wearer conveys total contamination. Any attempt at self-purification is reversed by God.

32. Job identifies the fundamental problem: God lo ish kamoni ('is not a man like me'). Legal systems require two parties of comparable standing. God and Job are not comparable. The phrase navo yachdav ba-mishpat ('we would come together in judgment') describes two litigants entering a courtroom as equals — which is impossible when one party created the other.

33. The mokiach (from the root y-k-ch, 'to argue, prove, decide') is not merely a referee but an authoritative arbitrator with power to bind both parties. The KJV's 'daysman' is an archaic English term for an arbiter or umpire. Job's cry for a mokiach is one of the most theologically pregnant moments in the book — the recognition that the God-human relationship needs a third party, someone with standing in both realms.

34. The shevet ('rod, staff') is the instrument of punishment. Job wants it removed — not because he denies God's authority but because the rod prevents honest speech. The eimatho ('his terror, the dread of him') paralyzes Job. He cannot speak freely while under active assault. The request is procedural: stop hitting me so I can present my case.

35. Job's closing is poignant: if the rod were removed, if the terror were lifted, he would speak (adabberah) without fear (lo ira'ennu). But ki lo khen anokhi immadi ('for it is not so with me') — his actual situation does not permit fearless speech. The chapter ends with Job unable to access the very thing he needs most: a fair hearing. The legal case remains filed but cannot proceed.

10

Summary: *Job continues speaking directly to God in what becomes the most intimate and accusatory prayer in the book so far. He declares that he loathes his life and will let his complaint run free. He demands that God tell him the charges — do not simply condemn me; tell me what you hold against me. He asks a series of devastating questions: Does it benefit you to oppress me? Do you have eyes of flesh — do you see as mortals see? Is your lifespan short like mine, that you hunt for my sin so urgently? Job then shifts to an agonized meditation on creation: your hands shaped me and made me — yet now you destroy me. Remember that you molded me like clay, poured me out like milk, curdled me like cheese, clothed me with skin and flesh, knit me together with bones and sinews. You gave me life and faithful love, and your care preserved my spirit. Yet all along you were hiding this in your heart — you were watching to condemn me, stockpiling charges. Whether guilty or innocent, it makes no difference. Job ends by asking God: why did you bring me out of the womb? Let me alone for the little time I have left before I go to the*

land of darkness and deep shadow, from which there is no return.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The creation imagery in verses 8-12 is among the most beautiful and theologically rich passages in Job. Job describes his own formation in language that parallels Genesis 2 (shaping from clay) but adds detail that anticipates Psalm 139 (knitting together in the womb). The milk-and-cheese metaphor for embryonic development is unique in the Hebrew Bible and reflects ancient Near Eastern understanding of conception: semen was thought to curdle in the womb like milk becoming cheese, with God as the artisan who shapes the resulting material. The theological force of this passage is not merely poetic — Job argues that God invested personal, intimate craftsmanship in creating him, which makes God's subsequent destruction of that creation morally incoherent. Why build something so carefully only to smash it? The chapter functions as an anti-creation psalm: where Psalm 139 celebrates divine knowledge of the person in the womb, Job 10 accuses God of building a person in order to destroy him.*

Translation Friction: *Job's accusation that God was secretly planning his destruction even while lovingly creating him (verses 13-14) raises the question of divine intentionality in suffering. Was Job built to be broken? The text does not answer this directly — the prose prologue (chapters 1-2) suggests Job's suffering originated in the heavenly council, not in a premeditated divine plan to destroy him. But Job, who has no access to the prologue's information, can only interpret his experience from below. His conclusion — God was hiding a destructive agenda inside an act of creation — is psychologically honest even if theologically incomplete. The closing description of Sheol as a 'land of darkness and deep shadow' (verses 21-22) is one of the most sustained depictions of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible, and it offers no hope: Sheol is not punishment but oblivion, a place where even light is darkness.*

Connections: *The creation language connects directly to Genesis 2:7 (forming from clay), Psalm 139:13-16 (knitting in the womb), and Isaiah 64:8 ('we are the clay, you are the potter'). The milk-and-cheese metaphor has parallels in the Babylonian creation text Atrahasis. Job's demand 'tell me the charges' (verse 2) continues the courtroom metaphor from chapter 9. The description of Sheol in verses 21-22 connects to Psalm 88:6 ('in the darkest depths') and anticipates the fuller treatment of death in Job 14. Job's plea 'leave me alone' echoes 7:16 and recurs in 14:6 — the refrain of a man who wants divine attention to stop.*

1 My soul is disgusted with my life.
I will give my complaint free rein;
I will speak from the bitterness of my soul.

2 I will say to God: Do not just condemn me —
tell me what charges you bring against me.

3 Does it benefit you to oppress,
to reject what your own hands have made,
while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?

4 Do you have eyes of flesh?
Do you see the way mortals see?

5 Are your days like the days of a mortal?
Are your years like a man's lifespan?

6 That you hunt for my guilt
and search out my sin?

7 You know full well that I am not guilty,
yet no one can rescue me from your hand.

8 Your hands shaped me and formed me,
every part of me together —
and now you swallow me up?

9 Remember that you made me from clay —
will you turn me back to dust?

10 Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese?

11 You clothed me with skin and flesh;
you wove me together with bones and sinews.

12 You gave me life and faithful love,
and your watchful care preserved my spirit.

13 But all along you were hiding this in your heart.
I know — this was your plan all along.

14 If I sin, you are watching.
You will not clear me of my guilt.

15 If I am guilty — woe to me.
If I am innocent — still I cannot lift my head.
I am filled with disgrace;
look at my misery!

16 If I hold my head high, you hunt me like a lion.
Again and again you show your terrifying power against me.

17 You bring fresh witnesses against me
and increase your anger toward me —
wave after wave of troops against me.

18 Why did you bring me out of the womb?
I wish I had died before any eye saw me —

19 as though I had never existed,
carried straight from the womb to the grave.

20 Are not my days nearly over? Stop.
Leave me alone so I can have a moment of relief

21 before I go to the place of no return —
to the land of darkness and death-shadow,

22 a land of deep gloom like thick darkness,
of death-shadow and chaos,
where even the light is like darkness.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb naqetah ('is disgusted, is weary, loathes') expresses visceral revulsion toward his own existence. The phrase e'ezvah alai sichi ('I will release my complaint upon myself') means Job will stop restraining his words — the dam breaks. The mar nefesh ('bitterness of soul') is the same phrase from 7:11, forming a refrain of anguish.

2. The verb tarshi'eni ('condemn me, declare me guilty') is legal terminology — Job demands that the conviction be accompanied by specific charges. The verb hodi'eni ('make known to me, inform me') requests formal disclosure. The verb teriveni ('you contend with me, you bring a lawsuit against me') uses the riv ('lawsuit') language from 9:3. Job insists on due process: if I am guilty, show me the evidence.

3. Three accusations in one verse. First: ta'ashoq ('you oppress') — God acts like a human tyrant. Second: tim'as yegi'a kappekha ('you reject the labor of your hands') — God despises his own handiwork, which is Job himself. Third: hofa'ta ('you shine, you beam') upon the atsat resha'im ('the counsel/plans of the wicked') — God favors the wicked while crushing the innocent. The word yegi'a ('labor, toil, product of work') emphasizes that Job cost God effort to create.

4. Job asks whether God's perception is limited like human perception. Einei vasar ('eyes of flesh') are eyes that can be deceived, that see only surfaces, that judge by appearances. The implied accusation: God is treating Job the way a flawed, surface-level human judge would — convicting on appearances rather than seeing the truth.

5. Job asks whether God is operating under time pressure. Human judges rush because their lives are short — they must close cases before they die. But God has unlimited time. So why the urgency? Why hunt for Job's sin as if the clock were running out? The question implies that God's aggressive investigation is disproportionate to an eternal being.

6. The verbs tevaqesh ('you seek, hunt for') and tidrosh ('you investigate, search out') describe an aggressive, relentless inquiry. God is not passively noticing sin but actively hunting for it. The avon ('guilt, iniquity') and chattat ('sin, failure') are the objects of divine pursuit. Job's complaint: God is looking for something that is not there.

7. Job makes two devastating claims in parallel. First: al da'tekha ki lo ersha ('upon your knowledge: I am not wicked') — God knows Job is innocent. This is not a plea but a statement of fact directed at the one being who can verify it. Second: ein mi-yadkha matsil ('there is no deliverer from your hand') — even knowing Job is innocent, God holds him in an inescapable grip. Knowledge of innocence plus refusal to release equals tyranny.

8. The verb itsevuni ('they shaped me, fashioned me') and va-ya'asuni ('they made me') describe deliberate, skilled craftsmanship. The phrase yachad saviv ('together all around') means God formed every part, every angle, the whole person. The final verb vatevalle'eni ('and you swallow me up, destroy me') is shockingly abrupt — the same hands that shaped now consume. The rhetorical force is: how can the maker destroy what he carefully made?

9. The ka-chomer ('like clay') echoes Genesis 2:7 where God formed Adam from the ground. The verb teshiveni ('you will return me') to afar ('dust') completes the cycle: from dust to clay to formed human to dust again. Job's argument is not against mortality itself but against the pointlessness of the cycle — why form clay into a person only to crumble it back to dust?

10. This unique metaphor describes conception and embryonic development. Ancient understanding held that semen (the 'milk') was poured into the womb and 'curdled' (taqpi'eni — 'you caused to thicken, coagulate') into solid form, like cheese forming from liquid milk. The imagery is surprisingly scientific for the ancient world and attributes the entire biological process to God's direct action.

11. God is described as both tailor (talbbisheni — 'you clothed me') and weaver (tesokhkheni — 'you wove me together, hedged me in'). The or ('skin') and basar ('flesh') are the outer garments; the atsamot ('bones') and gidim ('sinews, tendons') are the inner framework. The language of craftsmanship is intimate — God did not mass-produce Job but hand-crafted him.

12. This verse is the theological high point of Job's creation meditation. Chayyim ('life') is the gift; chesed ('faithful love') is the relationship; pequddah ('watchful care, visitation') is the ongoing maintenance. All three are attributed to God's direct, personal involvement. The verse makes the accusation of verses 13-17 even more devastating — everything described here was genuine, yet it was apparently the prelude to destruction.

13. The verb tsafanta ('you hid, stored up, concealed') reveals Job's darkest suspicion: the loving creation of verses 8-12 was a cover for a hidden agenda. The bilevavekha ('in your heart') means God's secret intention was internal, deliberate, premeditated. Job believes that while God was lovingly shaping him, God was simultaneously planning to destroy him. The zot ('this') refers to the suffering — it was immakh ('with you, in your possession') from the beginning.

14. The verb shemartani ('you watched me, guarded me, kept your eye on me') takes the positive verb of divine preservation (shamar — 'to keep, guard, watch over') and turns it sinister. The same watchfulness that 'preserved my spirit' in verse 12 now monitors for infractions. The lo tenaqqeni ('you will not acquit me, declare me clean') means no sin, once observed, is ever forgiven.

15. The double conditional destroys all options. Im rashati ('if I am wicked') — woe. Im tsadaqti ('if I am righteous') — still no relief; he lo essa roshi ('cannot lift his head') in dignity. The seva qalon ('full of disgrace, saturated with shame') applies regardless of guilt or innocence. The imperative re'eh onyi ('see my affliction!') demands that God observe the result of his own actions.

16. The shachal ('fierce lion') is one of several Hebrew words for lion, emphasizing ferocity and predatory power. God tetsudeni ('hunts me') as a lion stalks prey. The verb titpalla ('you show yourself wonderful, you display your extraordinary power') is normally used for God's miracles — here the 'wonders' are acts of destruction against Job. The word that describes the parting of the Red Sea now describes the assault on one man.

17. The legal and military metaphors merge. God techadesh edekha ('renews your witnesses') — each time Job answers one charge, God produces new testimony. God terev ka'askha ('increases your vexation/anger') — the divine wrath escalates rather than diminishing. The chalifot ve-tsava ('relays and army') describe military reinforcements arriving in waves. Job faces both an unwinnable legal case and an unwinnable war simultaneously.

18. Job returns to the birth-curse theme from chapter 3. The question lamah ('why?') demands purpose: what was the point of bringing me into existence? The verb egva ('I would expire, die') and the phrase ve-ayin lo tir'eni ('and no eye would have seen me') imagine a life that ended before it began — stillborn, unseen, unknown.

19. The phrase ka-asher lo hayiti ehyeh ('as if I had not been, I would be') expresses the wish for non-existence — not suicide but the elimination of his entire life from history. The trajectory mi-beten la-qever ('from womb to grave') eliminates everything between birth and death — all experience, all relationship, all suffering.

20. The plea is for a ceasefire. The verb yachdal ('let him cease, stop') and the imperative ve-shit mimmenni ('set yourself away from me, withdraw') ask God to disengage. The verb avligah ('I would brighten, I would find relief') asks for me'at ('a little') — not restoration but the smallest possible interval of peace before death.

21. The phrase ve-lo ashuv ('and I will not return') establishes death as a one-way journey. The erets choshekh ve-tsalmavet ('land of darkness and death-shadow') is Job's Sheol — not a place of punishment but of absolute darkness. The tsalmavet ('shadow of death' or 'deep darkness') combines tsel ('shadow') with mavet ('death') into a compound that describes the deepest possible obscurity.

22. Job piles darkness terms to describe Sheol: eifatah ('deep gloom, darkness'), ofel ('thick darkness, blackness'), tsalmavet ('death-shadow'), and lo sedarim ('no order, no arrangement') — chaos. The final line is devastating: va-tofa kemo ofel ('and it shines like darkness') — even what passes for light in Sheol is indistinguishable from darkness. It is a place where the categories of creation (Genesis 1:3-4, separating light from darkness) have been reversed. Sheol is un-creation. The chapter ends not with a plea or a hope but with a description of where Job believes he is headed — into the void.

11

Summary: *Zophar the Naamathite finally speaks — the third and harshest of Job's friends. Where Eliphaz appealed to experience and Bildad to tradition, Zophar appeals to the hidden depths of divine wisdom. He opens by attacking Job's verbosity: should a flood of words go unanswered? He accuses Job of claiming purity when God knows better. He then launches into a magnificent description of divine wisdom that is deeper than Sheol, longer than the earth, broader than the sea — and insists that if God were to speak, he would reveal secret sins Job does not even know about. God actually owes Job less punishment, not more. Zophar concludes with a conditional promise: if Job repents, life will be brighter than noon; if not, the wicked have no escape.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Zophar's speech contains some of the most beautiful theological language in the dialogue — his description of God's unsearchable wisdom in verses 7-9 anticipates Paul's exclamation in Romans 11:33. The irony is that Zophar uses magnificent theology in service of a terrible argument. He is right that God's wisdom is beyond human comprehension, but he draws exactly the wrong conclusion: that Job must therefore be hiding secret sins. The deeper irony is that the reader, who has access to chapters 1-2, knows that God's hidden wisdom actually vindicates Job — the very inscrutability Zophar celebrates is what makes Job's innocence possible within God's larger purposes. Zophar speaks better than he knows.*

Translation Friction: *Zophar is the most aggressive of the three friends, and his speech raises the question of whether theological correctness can coexist with pastoral cruelty. His doctrine of God is largely sound — God is unsearchable, God knows hidden sin, God's ways exceed human understanding. But he weaponizes every truth. The phrase 'God exacts less than your guilt deserves' (verse 6) is perhaps the cruelest single line any friend delivers: it tells a man covered in sores, bereaved of all his children, that he is actually getting off easy. Zophar's error is not in his theology but in his application — he assumes that because God can see hidden sin, God must be punishing hidden sin in Job's case.*

Connections: *Zophar's description of divine wisdom (verses 7-9) uses the language of cosmic measurement that reappears in God's own speech from the whirlwind in chapters 38-41. The difference is that God uses cosmic scope to humble all human certainty, while Zophar uses it to bolster his own certainty about Job's guilt. The conditional promise of restoration in verses 13-19 follows the same if-then logic as Eliphaz (5:17-27) and Bildad (8:5-7), forming a three-fold pattern that Job will systematically reject. Zophar's claim that the wicked 'will gaze but find no escape' (verse 20) anticipates the extended wicked-man speeches that dominate the second cycle.*

1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

2 Should a flood of words go unanswered?
Should a man of many lips be declared right?

3 Should your empty talk silence others?
When you mock, should no one put you to shame?

4 You have said, 'My teaching is flawless,
and I am pure in your sight.'

5 But if only God would speak!
If only he would open his lips against you!

6 He would show you the hidden depths of wisdom —
for true insight has two sides —
and you would know that God has forgotten
some of your guilt on your behalf.

7 Can you fathom the deep things of God?
Can you reach the outer limit of the Almighty?

8 It is higher than the heavens — what can you do?
It is deeper than Sheol — what can you know?

9 Its measure is longer than the earth
and wider than the sea.

10 If he sweeps past and imprisons,
if he convenes a court — who can stop him?

11 For he knows those who are worthless;
he sees wickedness — does he not take notice?

12 But a hollow man will gain understanding
when a wild donkey's colt is born human.

13 If you would set your heart right
and stretch out your hands to him —

14 if there is wickedness in your hand, throw it far away,
and do not let injustice dwell in your tents —

15 then you will lift your face without shame.
You will stand firm and will not be afraid.

16 For you will forget your misery;
you will remember it like water that has flowed past.

17 Your life will rise brighter than noon;
its darkness will become like morning.

18 You will trust, because there is hope.
You will look around and lie down in safety.

19 You will lie down with no one to frighten you,
and many will seek your favor.

20 But the eyes of the wicked will waste away;
escape will vanish from them,
and their hope will be their last breath.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard dialogue formula introduces the third friend. Zophar has waited through two full rounds — Eliphaz and Bildad have spoken, and Job has answered both. He has heard Job's increasingly bold claims of innocence and can no longer remain silent.

2. The rov devarim ('multitude of words') is Zophar's dismissal of everything Job has said — it is noise, not argument. The phrase ish sefatayim ('a man of lips') is contemptuous: Job is all mouth. The verb yitsddaq ('be justified, declared righteous') is the key issue — Zophar denies that talking more can make a person right.

3. The baddekha ('your empty talk, your boasts, your idle prattle') dismisses Job's arguments as substanceless. The verb til'ag ('you mock, scoff') accuses Job of mockery — presumably of the friends' theology. The verb makhlim ('one who shames, who silences with rebuke') is what Zophar intends to do: shame Job into repentance.

4. Zophar paraphrases Job's position: zakh liqchi ('pure is my teaching/doctrine') and bar hayiti ve-einekha ('clean I have been in your eyes'). The zakh ('pure, clean, transparent') and bar ('pure, bright, clean') are near-synonyms emphasizing total innocence. Zophar presents this as arrogance — Job claims perfection before God. In fact, Job has not claimed sinlessness but has insisted his suffering is disproportionate to any sin.

5. The mi yitten ('who would give' — the Hebrew idiom for 'if only, would that') expresses a passionate wish. Zophar is confident that if God spoke, God would confirm the friends' position and demolish Job's defense. The dramatic irony is that God will speak — in chapters 38-41 — but not at all in the way Zophar expects.

6. The ta'alumot chokhmah ('hidden things of wisdom, secrets of wisdom') are what God knows and Job does not. The kiflayim le-tushiyyah ('double to sound wisdom') is notoriously difficult — it may mean wisdom has two sides (a revealed and a hidden), or that God's wisdom is doubly effective. The crushing final clause: yasheh lekha Eloah me-avonekha ('God causes to be forgotten for you some of your guilt') — God is actually letting you off easy. You deserve worse than what you are getting.

7. The cheqer Eloah ('the searching out of God, the fathomable depths of God') asks whether divine nature can be fully explored. The takhlit Shaddai ('the limit, the boundary, the perfection of the Almighty') asks whether God has an edge that human inquiry can reach. Both questions expect the answer no — and Zophar is theologically correct here. The problem is what he does with this truth.

8. Zophar begins a four-directional survey of divine wisdom. Upward: govhei shamayim ('the heights of heaven') — God's wisdom exceeds the sky. Downward: amuqqah mi-She'ol ('deeper than Sheol') — it goes below the realm of the dead. The paired questions mah tif'al ('what can you accomplish?') and mah teda ('what can you know?') establish human helplessness before divine magnitude.

9. The horizontal dimensions complete the survey: arukkah me-erets middah ('longer than the earth is its measure') and rechavah minni yam ('broader than the sea'). God's wisdom extends in every direction beyond the limits of the created world. The four measurements — height, depth, length, breadth — anticipate Ephesians 3:18, where Paul uses the same four dimensions for the love of Christ.

10. Three verbs describe God's unchecked power. Yachalof ('he passes through, sweeps past') suggests unstoppable motion. Yasgir ('he shuts up, imprisons, hands over') describes confinement. Yaqhil ('he assembles, gathers, convenes') may refer to calling a judicial assembly. The rhetorical question umi yeshivennu ('who can turn him back?') echoes Job's own admission in 9:12. Zophar uses Job's concession against him.

11. The metei shav ('men of emptiness, worthless people') are those whose lives are hollow. God yada ('knows') them — the verb implies not mere awareness but penetrating insight. He yar'a aven ('sees iniquity') and the question ve-lo yitbonen ('will he not consider it, examine it closely?') implies that God always acts on what he sees. The implication aimed at Job: God has seen something in you.

12. This is one of the most biting proverbs in the dialogue. An ish navuv ('hollow man, empty-headed person') yillaved ('will gain a heart/mind') — when? When ayir pere ('a wild donkey's foal') adam yivvaled ('is born a human being'). In other words: never. A fool becoming wise is as likely as a wild donkey giving birth to a person. The saying may be aimed directly at Job — Zophar considers his claims of innocence to be the ravings of an empty mind.

13. Zophar now shifts to a conditional promise. The verb hakhinota ('you prepared, directed, established') libbeka ('your heart') means to align the inner self toward God. The parastah kappekha ('you spread out your palms') is the posture of prayer and supplication. Zophar assumes Job has not done this — that Job's prayers have been defiant rather than submissive.

14. The aven be-yadkha ('iniquity in your hand') is a metaphor for sin as something grasped, held, carried. The imperative harchiqehu ('put it far away, distance it') demands active removal. The avlah ('injustice, wrongdoing') must not tashken ('dwell, reside') in your ohalekha ('your tents') — sin must be evicted from the household. Zophar assumes hidden sin exists.

15. The tissa fanekha ('you will lift your face') is the posture of confidence and honor — the opposite of Job's current state where he 'cannot lift his head' (10:15). The mi-mum ('without blemish, without defect') means the face will be clear and unashamed. The mutsaq ('firm, solid, cast like metal') describes unshakeable stability. The lo tira ('you will not fear') completes the picture of restored confidence.

16. The amal ('toil, trouble, misery') that now dominates Job's existence will be forgotten — tishkach ('you will forget'). The simile ke-mayim avru ('like waters that have passed') pictures suffering as a stream that flows by and is gone. The verb tizkor ('you will remember') seems contradictory — you will forget it / you will remember it — but the point is that the memory will be as faint and distant as water that has already passed downstream.

17. The cheled ('lifespan, duration of life, the world of the living') will yaqum ('arise, stand up') mi-tsohorayim ('from/above noon') — life will be brighter than the brightest part of day. The tu'afah ('darkness, gloom' — or possibly 'you will fly, soar') ka-boqer tihyeh ('like the morning it will be') transforms darkness into dawn. Zophar promises total reversal: what is now midnight will become sunrise.

18. The verb vatachta ('you will trust, be confident') is grounded in ki yesh tiqvah ('because there is hope'). The word tiqvah ('hope, expectation') is significant — Job will deny having any hope in 14:19, making Zophar's promise feel hollow. The verb chafarta ('you will dig, search, look around') and la-vetach tishkav ('in security you will lie down') promise peaceful, untroubled rest — the opposite of Job's current tormented nights (7:3-4).

19. The ve-ravatsta ('you will lie down, recline') ve-ein macharid ('and there is no one causing terror') echoes the covenant blessings of Leviticus 26:6. The ve-chillu fanekha rabbim ('and many will entreat your face') means people will come seeking Job's favor, his blessing, his intercession — he will be restored to a position of honor. Zophar's promise, ironically, is exactly what happens in 42:8-10, but not because Job repented as Zophar prescribed.

20. The contrast to the blessed life of verses 15-19. The einei resha'im tikhleinah ('the eyes of the wicked will fail, waste away, be consumed') — they will watch for rescue that never comes. The manos avad minhem ('refuge has perished from them') — no escape route exists. The final image is devastating: tiqvatam mappach nafesh ('their hope is the expiration of breath') — the only thing the wicked have to look forward to is dying. Zophar frames two destinies: repentance leads to verses 15-19; refusal leads to verse 20. The unstated implication: choose, Job.

12

Summary: *Job responds to Zophar with biting sarcasm and a sweeping hymn to divine sovereignty. He opens by mocking the friends' confidence — 'No doubt wisdom will die with you!' — and insists he is not inferior to them in understanding. He points out a scandalous observation: the tents of robbers are at peace, while he, the righteous one, is mocked. Even the animals, birds, and fish know that God's hand has done this. Job then launches into a majestic but terrifying catalogue of God's power: God strips counselors of wisdom, makes judges fools, loosens the bonds of kings, leads priests away stripped, overthrows the mighty, removes speech from trusted advisors, pours contempt on nobles, uncovers deep darkness, and makes nations great only to destroy them. God's sovereignty is absolute — and that is exactly the problem.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Chapter 12 contains Job's first sustained hymn to God's power, and it is theologically disorienting because it sounds like praise but functions as accusation. The catalogue of divine actions in verses 14-25 reads like a psalm of sovereignty — God controls kings, priests, counselors, nations — but the tone is not celebratory. Job is saying: yes, God is sovereign over everything, and that sovereignty is terrifying because it includes the destruction of the innocent. Where Zophar argued that God's inscrutable wisdom should comfort Job, Job turns the argument around: God's inscrutable power is precisely what makes his situation unbearable. The one who could save is the one who destroys. Job agrees with his friends about God's power; he disagrees about whether that power is being exercised justly.*

Translation Friction: *The observation in verses 4-6 that the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer is one of the oldest and most persistent challenges to monotheistic theology. Job does not merely state the problem abstractly — he embodies it. He is the righteous man who has become a laughingstock, while the person who provokes God remains secure. The friends' theology cannot accommodate this data point. Job's hymn in verses 14-25 also raises a question the friends cannot answer: if God overthrows the wise, removes the speech of elders, and leads nations into chaos, how can the friends be sure their own wisdom has not been overthrown? Perhaps their confident theology is itself an example of the confusion God spreads.*

Connections: *The hymn to God's sovereignty in verses 14-25 parallels Isaiah 44:24-28 and Psalm 107, but with a crucial inversion — in those texts, God's control of nations is redemptive; here it is chaotic and terrifying. The animals-as-witnesses motif in verses 7-9 anticipates God's own appeal to creation in chapters 38-41. Job's sarcasm in verse 2 ('wisdom will die with you') prefigures his sustained mockery of the friends' certainty throughout chapters 12-14. The reference to 'those who are at ease' having 'contempt for misfortune' (verse 5) anticipates Amos 6:1 and the broader prophetic critique of comfortable theology.*

1 Then Job answered and said:

2 No doubt you are the only people that matter,
and wisdom will die when you do!

3 I have a mind just like yours.
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know things like these?

4 I have become a joke to my friends —
a man who called on God, and God answered him!
The righteous, blameless man is now a laughingstock.

5 Those at ease have contempt for misfortune —
'A shove to those whose feet already slip!'

6 The tents of destroyers are at peace;
those who provoke God feel secure —
those into whose hand God has delivered everything.

7 But ask the animals — they will teach you.
Ask the birds of the sky — they will tell you.

8 Or speak to the earth — it will teach you.
Let the fish of the sea inform you.

9 Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?

10 In his hand is the life of every living creature
and the breath of every human being.

11 Does not the ear test words
as the palate tastes food?

12 With the aged comes wisdom,
and with length of days, understanding.

13 With God are wisdom and strength;
counsel and understanding belong to him.

14 If he tears down, no one can rebuild.
If he imprisons a man, no one can open the door.

15If he holds back the waters, they dry up.
If he releases them, they overturn the earth.

16With him are strength and true wisdom.
Both the deceived and the deceiver belong to him.

17He leads counselors away stripped bare
and turns judges into fools.

18He strips the authority of kings
and binds a prisoner's loincloth around their waist.

19He leads priests away stripped bare
and overthrows those long established.

20He removes the speech of trusted advisors
and takes away the discernment of elders.

21He pours contempt on the noble
and loosens the belt of the strong.

22He uncovers deep things out of darkness
and brings death-shadow into the light.

23He makes nations great, then destroys them.
He expands nations, then scatters them.

24He strips the understanding from leaders of nations
and makes them wander in trackless wasteland.

25They grope in darkness without light;
he makes them stagger like drunkards.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard dialogue formula. Job is now responding to Zophar, but this speech (chapters 12-14) is his longest yet and addresses all three friends collectively.

2. Pure sarcasm. The omnam ('truly, indeed, no doubt') is ironic. The ki attem am ('for you are the people') mocks their assumption that they represent all human wisdom. The ve-immakhem tamut chokhmah ('and with you wisdom will die') ridicules the idea that their theology exhausts the available truth. When they are gone, all insight will supposedly vanish from the earth.

3. The levav ('heart, mind, understanding') is the seat of thought in Hebrew anthropology. Job's gam li levav kemokhem ('I too have a mind like yours') insists on intellectual equality. The lo nofel anokhi mikkem ('I do not fall below you') is a direct assertion of parity. The closing question — 'who does not know such things?' — dismisses the friends' theology as common knowledge, not special revelation.

4. The sechoq le-re'ehu ('a joke to his companion') describes social humiliation. The devastating irony: Job qore le-Eloah vayyaanehu ('called on God and he answered him') — Job's prayers were once answered, his relationship with God was once real and responsive, and now that same man is mocked. The sechoq tsaddiq tamim ('a laughingstock — the righteous, blameless one') uses the exact words God used to describe Job in 1:8 and 2:3. The man God called blameless is being laughed at by people who claim to speak for God.

5. The lappid buz ('a torch of contempt' or 'contempt for a torch') combined with le-ashtut sha'anan ('in the thinking of the comfortable one') captures the psychology of privilege: those at ease despise the suffering because it makes them uncomfortable. The nakhan le-mo'adei ragel ('prepared for the stumbling of feet') suggests the comfortable are ready to kick someone who is already falling. Job names a universal human tendency: the privileged dismiss the afflicted.

6. Job states the scandal bluntly: ohalim le-shodedim yishlavu ('the tents of robbers are at peace') while the righteous man suffers. Those who margizei El ('provoke God, enrage God') enjoy battukhot ('security, confidence'). The final clause is the most shocking: la-asher hevi Eloah be-yado ('to whom

God has brought into his hand') — God himself has made the wicked prosperous. The problem is not that God has failed to notice; it is that God has actively supplied the wicked.

7. Job invokes creation as witness. The behemot ('beasts, animals') will toreka ('teach you, instruct you'). The of ha-shamayim ('birds of the heavens') will yagged lakh ('declare to you, tell you'). Even animals understand what the friends refuse to see: that God's hand does whatever it does, including destroying the innocent. This passage anticipates God's own appeal to the animal kingdom in chapters 38-39.

8. The survey extends to all creation: earth itself and the fish of the sea. The siach la-arets ('speak to the earth, meditate with the ground') and degei ha-yam ('fish of the sea') complete a four-part witness list: land animals, birds, earth, fish. All of creation testifies to the same reality.

9. This is one of only two places in the poetic dialogue where the covenant name YHWH ('the LORD') appears rather than the generic El or Eloah. The yad YHWH asetah zot ('the hand of the LORD has done this') attributes the current state of affairs — including Job's suffering — directly to God's personal, covenantal action. Even creation knows what the friends deny: God did this.

10. The nefesh kol chay ('the soul/life of every living thing') and ruach kol besar ish ('the spirit/breath of all human flesh') are both in God's yad ('hand'). This is not a comfort but a statement of total dependence: every breath, every heartbeat, every moment of existence depends on a God who — Job has argued — acts inscrutably.

11. Job appeals to discernment: the ozen ('ear') tivchan ('tests, evaluates, assays') millin ('words') just as the chek ('palate') yit'am ('tastes') okhel ('food'). The implication: I have tasted your words, friends, and found them lacking. Discernment is not your exclusive property.

12. The yeshishim ('the aged, the very old') possess chokhmah ('wisdom') and the orekh yamim ('length of days') brings tevunah ('understanding'). This may be a concession — yes, age brings wisdom — that sets up the contrast in the next verse: but ultimate wisdom belongs to God alone. Alternatively, some read this as a question: 'Is wisdom only with the aged?' — challenging the friends' assumption that traditional wisdom is sufficient.

13. The immo ('with him') shifts the subject to God. The chokhmah u-gevurah ('wisdom and strength') and etsah u-tevunah ('counsel and understanding') are paired attributes. Job is not praising God here but setting up the terrifying hymn that follows: the question is not whether God has wisdom and power, but what he does with them.

14. The hymn to divine power begins. The verb yaharos ('he tears down, demolishes') is irreversible — lo yibbaneh ('it cannot be rebuilt'). The verb yisgor ('he shuts up, imprisons') al ish ('upon a man') is equally final — lo yippateach ('it cannot be opened'). God's destructive acts are permanent. The emphasis is not on God's power to build but on his power to destroy beyond repair.

15. God controls the fundamental element: mayim ('water'). The verb ya'atsor ('he restrains, withholds') causes drought — ve-yivashu ('and they dry up'). The verb yeshallechem ('he sends them out, releases them') causes flood — ve-yahpekhu erets ('and they overturn the earth'). Either way — drought or flood — the result is devastation. God's power over nature is absolute, and both its exercise and its restraint are catastrophic.

16. The oz ('strength, power') and tushiyyah ('effective wisdom, sound counsel, success') belong to God. But then the disturbing claim: lo shogeg u-mashgeh ('to him belong the one who goes astray and the one who leads astray'). Both the victim of deception and the perpetrator of deception are under God's authority. God owns both sides of every conflict. This is not comfort — it is a statement about God's complicity in the moral chaos of the world.

17. The catalogue of divine subversion begins. God molikhi yo'atsim sholal ('leads counselors away plundered/stripped') — the wise advisors are stripped of their wisdom and led away like captives. The shofetim yeholel ('judges he makes mad, makes foolish') — those entrusted with justice are driven to insanity. The institutions of human wisdom and justice are undone by the God who supposedly upholds them.

18. The musar melakhim pitteach ('the bond/authority of kings he opens/loosens') removes royal power. The va-ye'sor ezor be-motneihem ('and he binds a loincloth on their waists') replaces royal robes with the garment of a slave or prisoner. Kings become captives. The reversal is total and God-caused.

19. The kohanim ('priests') suffer the same fate as the counselors in verse 17 — sholal ('stripped, plundered'). The etanim ('the established ones, the mighty, the permanent') are yesallef ('overturned, twisted, subverted'). Even the religious establishment and the most entrenched powers are not secure against God's dismantling.

20. God mesir safah ('removes the lip/speech') of the ne'emanim ('the trusted ones, the reliable, the faithful') — those whose word was dependable are struck dumb. He yiqqach ta'am zeqenim ('takes the taste/discernment of elders') — the accumulated wisdom of age is confiscated. If the friends claim authority from age and tradition (as Bildad did in chapter 8), Job's reply is: God can void that authority in a moment.

21. God shofekh buz ('pours out contempt') upon nedivim ('nobles, princes, the generous ones'). The meziach afiqim rippah ('he loosens the waistband of the strong, slackens the channel of the mighty') renders the powerful helpless. The afiqim ('channels, strong ones') may refer to dried-up riverbeds — the mighty become empty channels. The belt loosened means they can no longer fight or work.

22. God megalleh amuqot minni choshekh ('reveals deep things from darkness') — what is hidden, God exposes. The va-yotse la-or tsalmavet ('and he brings death-shadow into light') reverses the relationship between light and darkness. The tsalmavet ('death-shadow, deep darkness') that closed chapter 10 is itself subject to God's revealing power. Even the deepest concealment cannot resist divine exposure.

23. The divine sovereignty extends to the level of entire civilizations. God masgi la-goyim ('makes the nations great, increases them') and then va-ye'abdem ('and he destroys them'). He shoteach la-goyim ('spreads out the nations, expands them') and then va-yanchem ('and he leads them away, guides them off'). The pattern is build-and-destroy, expand-and-scatter. Job is applying to nations what he experiences personally.

24. God mesir lev ('removes the heart/mind') of rashei am ha-arets ('the heads of the people of the land') — he takes their capacity for leadership. Then va-yat'em be-tohu lo darekh ('and he makes them wander in chaos without a path'). The word tohu ('formless void, chaos, wasteland') is the same word from Genesis 1:2 — God drives leaders back into pre-creation chaos. The trackless waste is the opposite of the ordered world God built.

25. The final image of the hymn: the once-great leaders yemasheshu choshekh ve-lo or ('grope in darkness and not light') — blind, disoriented, helpless. God va-yat'em ka-shikkor ('makes them wander like a drunk') — they reel without direction or purpose. This is the endpoint of God's sovereignty as Job sees it: not order from chaos but chaos from order, not light from darkness but darkness swallowing everything. The chapter ends not with praise but with a portrait of divine power that makes the world worse.

13

Summary: *Job continues his response to the three friends, but the tone shifts from the cosmic sovereignty hymn of chapter 12 to a direct, fearless demand to argue his case before God. He first tears into the friends: you are smearing lies over the truth; you are worthless physicians; your silence would be your greatest wisdom. He warns them that God will not be pleased with their defense — they are lying on God's behalf, and God will hold them accountable for their fraudulent advocacy. Then Job turns to God directly in what becomes the boldest speech in the dialogue so far. He declares: I have prepared my case; I know I will be vindicated. He asks only two things — remove your hand from me, and stop terrifying me — and then let us argue. He accuses God of treating him like an enemy, of chasing driven leaves, of writing bitter decrees against him, of punishing him for the sins of his youth, of tracking his every footstep. Job is not surrendering; he is filing a lawsuit against heaven.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Chapter 13 is the legal heart of Job's protest. The vocabulary shifts decisively to courtroom language: riv ('lawsuit, legal dispute'), yakach ('argue, prove, reason'), mishpat ('judgment'), and the repeated demand to present a case. Job essentially says: I will take this to court — with God as both the defendant and the judge. The audacity of this move cannot be overstated. In the ancient Near Eastern world, taking a god to court was unthinkable; in Israel, it was nearly blasphemous. Yet Job insists that truth demands it. His famous declaration in verse 15 — 'Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face' — is one of the most interpreted sentences in the Hebrew Bible, with a crucial textual variant between lo ('not/to him') that changes the meaning from defiant hope to defiant despair. Either reading makes Job extraordinary.*

Translation Friction: *The Ketiv/Qere variant in verse 15 is one of the most theologically consequential textual differences in the Hebrew Bible. The written text (Ketiv) reads lo with an aleph: 'I will not hope/wait' — pure defiance. The marginal reading (Qere) reads lo with a vav: 'I will hope in him' — defiant faith. The KJV follows the Qere ('Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him'), creating one of the most famous expressions of faith in English. But the Ketiv may be original, making Job's statement one of the most famous expressions of despair: 'He will kill me — I have no hope — but I will still argue my case.' Both readings produce extraordinary theology. Job's accusation that the friends are lying on God's behalf (verses 7-11) raises a question that echoes through church history: is it acceptable to make bad arguments for God? Job says no — God does not need human lies to defend himself, and those who offer fraudulent testimony on God's behalf will be judged for it.*

Connections: *The courtroom language connects to Isaiah 1:18 ('come, let us reason together' — the same verb yakach) and anticipates the legal resolution in chapters 38-42 where God does appear, though not as Job expected. Job's demand 'tell me my transgression and my sin' (verse 23) echoes his plea in 10:2 and will be partially answered in God's speech, which never names a sin but reframes the question entirely. The image of God watching footsteps (verse 27) connects to Psalm 139's omniscient surveillance, but where the psalmist finds comfort, Job finds persecution. The 'moth-eaten garment' image (verse 28) anticipates Isaiah 50:9 and 51:8.*

[1]Look — my eye has seen all of this;
my ear has heard and understood it.

[2]What you know, I know just as well.
I am not inferior to you.

3 But I want to speak to the Almighty.
I desire to argue my case before God.

4 But you — you smear on lies.
You are all worthless healers.

5 If only you would be completely silent —
that would be your wisdom!

6 Hear now my argument;
listen to the pleading of my lips.

7 Will you speak dishonestly on God's behalf?
Will you tell lies for him?

8 Will you show partiality on his behalf?
Will you argue God's case for him?

9 Will it go well for you when he examines you?
Do you think you can deceive him
the way you deceive a mortal?

10 He will surely rebuke you
if you secretly show partiality.

11 Will not his majesty terrify you?
Will not his dread fall upon you?

12 Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ash.
Your defenses are defenses of clay.

13 Be silent before me. Let me speak.
Then let whatever happens happen to me.

14 Why should I take my flesh in my teeth
and put my life in my hands?

15 Even if he kills me, I will wait for him —
but I will argue my ways to his face.

16 This itself will be my vindication —
that no godless person would dare come before him.

17 Listen carefully to my words;
let my declaration reach your ears.

18 Look — I have prepared my case.
I know that I will be vindicated.

19 Who will bring charges against me?
If anyone can, I will fall silent and die.

20 Only grant me two things,
and then I will not hide from your face:

21 Take your hand off me,
and stop terrifying me with your dread.

22 Then you call and I will answer,
or let me speak and you respond to me.

23 How many are my crimes and sins?
Show me my transgression and my sin.

24 Why do you hide your face
and treat me as your enemy?

25 Will you terrorize a wind-driven leaf?
Will you chase dry stubble?

26 You write bitter charges against me
and make me inherit the sins of my youth.

27 You put my feet in the stocks
and watch my every path.
You carve a mark around the soles of my feet.

28 Meanwhile he wastes away like something rotten,
like a garment eaten by moths.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Job opens by asserting his own firsthand experience: ra'atah eini ('my eye has seen') and shame'ah ozni ('my ear has heard'). The verb vataven lah ('and it understood for itself') asserts that Job's comprehension is independent — he does not need the friends to interpret reality for him. He has the same data they have and has drawn different conclusions.
2. The ke-da'tekhem yada'ti gam ani ('according to your knowledge I know, I also') is the second assertion of intellectual parity in two chapters (see 12:3). The lo nofel anokhi mikkem ('I do not fall below you') repeats the exact phrase from 12:3 — the repetition is deliberate emphasis. Job is not humbled by their arguments.
3. The turning point. Job shifts from addressing the friends to declaring his intention to address God directly. The verb adabber ('I would speak') el Shaddai ('to the Almighty') and the verb hokheach ('to argue, prove, reason, reprove') el El ('before God') use legal language. The verb chafats ('I desire, I delight in') shows this is not reluctant but eager — Job wants this confrontation.
4. Job's evaluation of the friends is devastating. The tofelei shaqer ('plasterers of falsehood, smearers of lies') pictures them as workers covering a crumbling wall with whitewash — an image Ezekiel 13:10-15 will later develop. The rof'ei elil ('healers of nothing, worthless physicians') means their prescribed remedy — repent and be restored — is useless because the diagnosis is wrong. They are treating a disease Job does not have.
5. The mi yitten hacharesh tacharishun ('who would give that you would be utterly silent') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis — total silence, not merely reduced speech. The u-tehi lakhem le-chokhmah ('and it would be for you as wisdom') means their silence would accomplish what their words have failed to do. The best theological contribution the friends can make is to stop talking.
6. The imperative shim'u na ('hear now!') demands attention. The tokhachti ('my argument, my reproof, my case') is from the same root as yakach (verse 3) — legal argumentation. The rivot sefatai ('the disputes/pleadings of my lips') uses the riv root again — these are formal legal pleadings, not casual complaints. Job is presenting his case, and the friends are the first audience before he turns to the divine court.
7. Job accuses the friends of pious fraud. The ha-le-El tedabberu avlah ('for God will you speak injustice?') asks whether God needs false advocates. The ve-lo tedabberu remiyyah ('and for him will you speak deceit?') doubles the accusation. The friends' theology is not merely wrong — it is dishonest, and it is dishonest in God's name. Job insists that lying for God is still lying.

8. The ha-fanav tissa'un ('will you lift his face?' — the idiom for showing partiality) accuses the friends of bias. In legal contexts, 'lifting the face' means judging in someone's favor regardless of the evidence — exactly what Leviticus 19:15 prohibits. The im la-El terivun ('will you conduct a lawsuit for God?') asks whether God has hired them as defense attorneys. The implication: God does not need corrupt lawyers.

9. Job warns the friends that their fraudulent defense of God will be investigated by God himself. The yachqor etkhem ('he will search you out, investigate you') turns divine scrutiny back on the friends. The ke-hatel be-enosh tehatellu vo ('as one mocks/deceives a human, will you deceive him?') asks whether they think God can be fooled. Their false testimony on God's behalf will not escape God's notice.

10. The infinitive absolute hokheach yokhiach ('he will certainly reprove, he will surely argue against') emphasizes certainty — God's rebuke of the friends is guaranteed. The ba-seter panim tissa'un ('in secret you lift the face') means their bias is hidden, operating under a veneer of piety, but God will expose it. The irony is prophetic: in the epilogue (42:7-8), God does rebuke the friends for not speaking rightly.

11. The se'eto ('his majesty, his exaltation, his lifting up') is what should make the friends afraid — not Job's suffering but God's scrutiny of their false testimony. The pachdo ('his dread, his terror') yippol aleikhem ('will fall upon you') reverses the expected direction of fear: the friends thought they were safely on God's side, but Job warns that God's judgment will fall on them for their dishonest advocacy.

12. The zikhronekhem ('your memorable sayings, your proverbs, your traditions') are mishlei efer ('proverbs of ash') — they crumble to nothing when tested. The gabbei chomer gabbeikem ('your defenses are defenses of clay') — their theological fortifications are made of mud. The imagery is of a wall that looks solid but dissolves under pressure. The friends' entire theological edifice, Job claims, is structurally unsound.

13. The imperative hacharishu mimmenni ('be silent away from me') dismisses the friends. The va-adabberah ani ('and I myself will speak') asserts Job's right to be heard. The ve-ya'avor alai mah ('and let pass over me what may') is the acceptance of risk — Job knows that confronting God could destroy him, and he accepts that possibility. This is courage, not recklessness.

14. Two idioms for extreme risk. The essa vesari ve-shinnai ('I carry my flesh in my teeth') pictures an animal carrying prey in its jaws — Job's own body is the prey he risks. The nafshi asim be-khappi ('I put my life in my palm') means to expose one's life to danger, holding it out where it can be snatched away. Job is saying: I have nothing left to lose. The risk of confronting God is no worse than what I already endure.

15. The most famous and most debated verse in Job. The Ketiv (written text) reads lo with an aleph — 'I will not wait/hope' — making Job's statement one of pure defiance: 'He will kill me; I have no hope; but I will still argue.' The Qere (marginal reading) reads lo with a vav — 'to him I will wait/hope' — making it an expression of faith through suffering. The KJV follows the Qere. Both readings produce extraordinary theology. The akh derakhay el panav okhiach ('but my ways to his face I will argue/prove') is unambiguous in either reading: Job will present his case directly to God, face to face, regardless of the cost. The verb okhiach (from yakach) is legal language — courtroom argumentation.

16. Job's logic is bold: the very fact that he dares to approach God proves he is not a hypocrite. A chanef ('godless person, hypocrite, profane person') lo yavo lefanav ('would not come before him') — a guilty man would flee God's courtroom, not demand a hearing. Job's willingness to stand before God is itself evidence of innocence. The hu li lishu'ah ('he is for me salvation' or 'this is my salvation') may mean either that God will be his savior or that this legal confrontation itself will save him.

17. The infinitive absolute shim'u shamoa ('listen — really listen') demands total attention. The millati ('my word, my speech') and achavati ('my declaration, my announcement') are what follows — Job's formal statement of his case. The be-ozneikhem ('in your ears') makes the friends witnesses to what Job is about to say to God.

18. The arakhti mishpat ('I have arranged my judgment, I have set my case in order') uses military and legal language — Job has marshaled his evidence and organized his arguments. The yada'ti ki ani etsddaq ('I know that I will be declared righteous, I will be vindicated') is not arrogance but legal confidence: when the evidence is heard, the verdict will be in his favor. The verb etsddaq ('I will be justified') is the passive of tsadaq — he expects to be declared righteous by the court.

19. The mi hu yarev immadi ('who is the one who will bring a lawsuit against me?') is a legal challenge — let my accuser step forward. The ki attah acharish ve-egva ('for then I would be silent and I would die') means: if someone can actually present a case against me, I will accept the verdict in silence, even unto death. But Job is confident no one can.

20. Job now addresses God directly with two preconditions for the trial. The akh shetayim al ta'as immadi ('only two things do not do to me') sets the terms. The az mippanekha lo essater ('then from your face I will not hide') means Job will appear in court — he will not flee — if these conditions are met. The conditions follow in verse 21.

21. The two conditions. First: kappekha me-alai harchaq ('your palm from upon me put far away') — stop the physical suffering so Job can think clearly enough to present his case. Second: eimatekha al teva'attanni ('your terror do not terrify me') — stop the psychological pressure of divine dread. Job needs a level playing field: he cannot argue his case while being simultaneously crushed and terrorized by the opposing party.

22. Job offers two formats for the trial. Either God calls the case and Job responds — the normal format where the accuser speaks first — or Job presents his case and God responds. Either way, Job insists on dialogue: call-and-answer, speak-and-respond. The current situation — God acting without speaking, punishing without explaining — is what Job finds intolerable.

23. Job demands formal charges. The kammah li avonot ve-chattat ('how many are my iniquities and sins?') asks for a number — quantify the charges. The pish'i ve-chattati hodi'eni ('my transgression and my sin — make me know') demands disclosure. Three words for sin are used: avonot ('guilt, iniquity'), chattat ('sin, failure, missing the mark'), and pesha ('transgression, rebellion, willful violation'). Job is not denying all sin — he is demanding that the specific charges be named.

24. The panekha tastir ('you hide your face') is the most devastating thing God can do in Hebrew theology — the withdrawal of the divine presence, the removal of favor, the cold shoulder of heaven. Psalm 13:1 asks the same question. The ve-tachsheveni le-oyev lakh ('and you count me as an enemy to you') means God has reclassified Job from beloved servant to hostile adversary. Job does not understand why.

25. The disproportion is absurd. Job compares himself to an aleh niddaf ('a leaf blown about, a driven leaf') — weightless, helpless, at the mercy of every breeze. Will the Almighty ta'arots ('terrify, crush, cause to tremble') something so fragile? Will God tirdof ('pursue, chase, hunt') qash yavesh ('dry stubble') — dead plant matter that the wind is already carrying away? The imagery exposes the grotesque imbalance between God's power and Job's vulnerability.

26. God tikhtov ('writes') merorot ('bitter things, bitter decrees') against Job — the image is of a judge writing a sentence. The verb torisheni ('you make me inherit, you cause me to possess') avonot ne'urai ('the iniquities of my youth') means God is reaching back to youthful mistakes and punishing a mature man for the follies of his younger self. Job considers this unjust — the punishment does not match the crime, and the crime may be decades old.

27. Three images of surveillance and confinement. God tasem ba-sad raglai ('puts my feet in stocks') — physical restraint. God tishmor kol orchotai ('watches all my paths') — total surveillance. God al shorshei raglai titchaqqeh ('upon the roots of my feet you inscribe yourself') — God literally marks the soles of Job's feet so that every step can be traced. The image is of a prisoner whose movement is completely monitored and controlled.

28. Job describes himself in the third person — a man who is disintegrating. The ke-raqav yivleh ('like rot he decays, like something decaying he wears out') and ke-veged akahlo ash ('like a garment a moth has eaten') present a body in slow decomposition. The garment image is particularly poignant: cloth that looks intact from a distance but crumbles at a touch because moths have consumed its structure from within. This verse serves as a bridge to chapter 14's meditation on human mortality.

14

Summary: *Job's speech reaches its climax with a meditation on human mortality that is among the most poignant passages in the Hebrew Bible. He begins with the observation that human life is short, troubled, and fragile — born of woman, few of days, full of turmoil, fading like a flower, fleeting like a shadow. He asks God: why scrutinize something so brief? Then comes the extraordinary tree metaphor: a tree has hope, because if it is cut down, it can sprout again — the scent of water will make it bud like a new plant. But a human being dies, lies down, and does not rise. The waters of the sea will fail and the river will dry up before a dead person wakes from sleep. Job then dares to imagine an impossible hope: what if God would hide him in Sheol until his anger passes, set an appointed time, and then remember him? If a man dies, will he live again? Job would wait through all the days of his hard service for the moment of renewal. But the hope collapses: God destroys human hope as water wears away stone. You overpower him forever and he departs; you change his face and send him away. His sons are honored and he does not know it. He feels only the pain of his own flesh and mourns for himself alone.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The tree-and-human contrast in verses 7-12 is one of the most structurally elegant poems in the Hebrew Bible. The tree has tiqvah ('hope') because biology allows regrowth; the human has no tiqvah because death is final. The contrast is devastating precisely because it is drawn from ordinary nature — anyone who has seen a stump sending up new shoots knows the tree's resilience. The human body has no equivalent mechanism. Yet in the middle of this despairing contrast, verses 13-15 contain what many scholars consider the closest approach to resurrection hope in the Hebrew Bible before Daniel 12:2. Job imagines God hiding him in Sheol temporarily, setting an appointed time, and then remembering him — calling him by name, and Job answering. The verb tiqra ('you would call') and e'eneka ('I would answer you') picture a divine summons that pulls Job out of death. The hope is expressed as a wish, not a doctrine, and it collapses by verse 19. But the fact that Job can even imagine it shows that the logic of his relationship with God pushes beyond what his theology can contain.*

Translation Friction: *The central tension of this chapter is between what Job knows and what he dares to wish. He knows humans die and do not return (verses 10-12). He wishes God would hide him in Sheol and then remember him (verses 13-15). He knows God destroys hope like water wears away stone (verse 19). The chapter oscillates between despair and impossible longing, never resolving into either pure hopelessness or confident expectation. This makes it the most emotionally complex passage in Job so far. The closing verses (20-22) are among the bleakest in the Hebrew Bible: the dead know nothing of their children's fate; they feel only their own pain. This is not the theology of heaven and hell — it is the theology of isolation, where death cuts every connection between the living and the dead.*

Connections: *The flower-and-shadow imagery of verse 2 connects to Psalm 103:15-16, Isaiah 40:6-8, and James 1:10-11. The tree metaphor in verses 7-9 inverts the blessed-man-as-tree image of Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:8 — those texts compare the righteous to a well-watered tree; Job says even a cut-down tree has more hope than a human. The 'if a man dies, will he live again?' of verse 14 becomes a theological landmark that later biblical writers — Daniel 12:2, Ezekiel 37, and eventually the New Testament — will answer. The water-wearing-away-stone image in verse 19 is one of the earliest uses of erosion as a metaphor for the slow destruction of hope.*

1 A human being, born of woman —
few days and full of turmoil.

2 He springs up like a flower and withers;
he flees like a shadow and does not last.

3 And on such a creature you fix your gaze?
You bring even me into judgment with you?

4 Who can bring something clean from what is unclean?
No one.

5 Since his days are determined,
the number of his months is with you.
You have set his limit, and he cannot pass it.

6 Look away from him so he can rest,
until he finishes his day like a hired worker.

7 For a tree has hope:
if it is cut down, it will sprout again,
and its new shoots will not stop coming.

8 Even if its root grows old in the ground
and its stump dies in the dust,

9 at the scent of water it will bud
and put out branches like a young plant.

10 But a man dies and lies powerless.
A human breathes his last — and where is he?

11 As waters vanish from the sea
and a river dries up and is gone,

12 so a man lies down and does not rise.
Until the heavens are no more, they will not awake;
they will not be roused from their sleep.

13 If only you would hide me in Sheol,
conceal me until your anger passes,
set me an appointed time — and then remember me!

14 If a man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my hard service I would wait

until my relief comes.

15You would call, and I would answer you.
You would long for the work of your hands.

16For now you count my every step,
but you would not keep watch over my sin.

17My transgression would be sealed in a bag;
you would plaster over my guilt.

18But a mountain falls and crumbles away,
and a rock is moved from its place.

19Water wears away stones;
floods wash away the soil of the earth —
and so you destroy the hope of a mortal.

20You overpower him forever, and he is gone.
You change his face and send him away.

21His sons rise to honor, and he does not know it.
They are brought low, and he is unaware.

22He feels only the pain of his own flesh;
his soul mourns only for itself.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. One of the most quoted verses in Job. The adam yelud ishah ('a human born of woman') establishes universal scope — every person who has ever lived. The qetsar yamim ('short of days') and seva rogez ('saturated with turmoil, agitation, trembling') define the human condition: brief and troubled. The rogez ('agitation, restlessness, rage, turmoil') is stronger than the KJV's 'trouble' — it implies constant inner disturbance.
2. Two images of impermanence. The ke-tsits yatsa ('like a blossom he comes out') and va-yimmal ('and he withers, is cut off') — the flower blooms and is gone. The va-yivrach ka-tsel ('and he flees like a shadow') and lo ya'amod ('and he does not stand, does not endure') — even a shadow has more persistence, since it returns the next day. The verb yivrach ('he flees') adds urgency: life does not merely pass — it runs away.
3. The accusation intensifies the disproportion: God paqachta einekha ('you have opened your eyes') upon something this fragile and fleeting. The tavi be-mishpat immakh ('you bring into judgment with you') subjects a flower-brief life to divine litigation. Job's argument: scrutinizing something this small and temporary is beneath God's dignity, or at least disproportionate.
4. The mi yitten tahor mi-tame ('who can give a clean thing from an unclean?') states the impossibility of moral purity arising from morally compromised human nature. The lo echad ('not one') is emphatic finality. Job is not confessing specific sin but acknowledging the universal human condition: if God demands absolute purity from beings born into impurity, the standard is impossible to meet. This anticipates Paul's argument in Romans 3 and 5.
5. Three statements of divine control over human lifespan. The charutsim yamav ('determined/decreed are his days') — the length of life is predetermined. The mispar chodashav ittakh ('the number of his months is with you') — God holds the count. The chuqqav asita ve-lo ya'avor ('you have made his statute and he cannot cross it') — a hard boundary exists. The chuqqav ('his statute, his decree, his boundary') is the fixed line of death that no human can cross.
6. The she'eh me-alav ('look away from upon him, gaze elsewhere') asks God to stop watching — the surveillance from 13:27 is unbearable. The ve-yechdal ('and let him cease, let him rest') asks for the relief of inattention. The ad yirtseh ke-sakhir yomo ('until he enjoys/completes like a hired worker his day') compares life to a laborer's shift: let the man finish his miserable workday in peace. The sakhir ('hired worker, day laborer') image recurs from 7:1-2.
7. The ki yesh la-ets tiqvah ('for there is for the tree hope') is one of the most important uses of tiqvah in the Hebrew Bible. The tree's hope is grounded in biology: im yikkaret ('if it is cut') ve-od yachalif ('and again it will renew itself'). The verb yachalif ('it changes, renews, puts forth new growth') describes the replacement of the old with the new. Job is observing nature with scientific accuracy in service of a theological argument.

8. The conditions are extreme: yazqin ba-arets shorsho ('its root grows old in the earth') and ve-afar yamut giz'o ('in the dust its trunk/stump dies'). The tree appears completely dead — old root, dead stump, buried in dust. Yet what follows (verse 9) reverses the death sentence. The contrast with the human condition (verses 10-12) is built precisely on this apparent death that is not final.

9. The me-reach mayim ('at the scent/smell of water') is extraordinary: the apparently dead stump is so alive beneath the surface that it can smell water approaching. The verb yafriach ('it will bud, blossom, sprout') and the phrase ve-asah qatsir kemo nata ('and it will produce a harvest/branch like a new planting') describe full regeneration. What looked dead becomes indistinguishable from something freshly planted. The tree's latent life exceeds all visible evidence.

10. The contrast is absolute. The ve-gever yamut va-yechelash ('and a strong man dies and is weakened, lies prostrate') — the gever ('strong man, warrior') is reduced to helplessness. The va-yigva adam ve-ayyo ('and a human expires and where is he?') asks the unanswerable question. The word ayyo ('where is he?') echoes through emptiness — there is no answer because there is no one there to answer.

11. The comparison shifts to water: azelu mayim minni yam ('waters depart from the sea') and nahar yecherav ve-yavesh ('a river dries up and is dried out'). The image is of total evaporation — the sea itself losing its water, a river becoming a dry bed. These are extreme, nearly impossible events used to describe how long the dead remain dead: the comparison continues in verse 12.

12. The ve-ish shakhav ve-lo yaqum ('and a man lies down and does not rise') states the finality of death. The ad bilti shamayim ('until the heavens are no more') sets the duration: as long as the sky exists, the dead remain dead. The lo yaqitsu ('they will not awaken') and lo ye'oru mi-shenatam ('they will not be roused from their sleep') use sleep as a metaphor for death — but unlike sleep, no morning comes. The phrase 'until the heavens are no more' has been read by later interpreters as allowing for a resurrection at the end of the cosmos, but in Job's context it means 'forever.'

13. The mi yitten ('who would give' — 'if only') introduces Job's impossible wish. The tatspineneni bi-She'ol ('you would hide me in Sheol') reimagines the underworld not as a prison but as a shelter — a place where God's wrath cannot reach. The tastireni ad shuv appekha ('you would conceal me until your anger turns back') imagines divine rage as temporary, something that will pass. The tashit li choq ('you would set me an appointed time') asks for a scheduled return date. The ve-tizkhereni ('and you would remember me') is the climactic verb — God's remembrance is the key that could unlock death.

14. The question im yamut gever ha-yichyeh ('if a strong man dies, will he live?') is the central theological question of the chapter — and arguably of the entire Hebrew Bible's wisdom tradition. Job does not answer it; he expresses willingness to wait: kol yemei tseva'i ayachel ('all the days of my military service/hard labor I would wait'). The tsava ('army, military service, hard labor') from 7:1 returns — life is forced service. The chalifati ('my relief, my replacement, my renewal') is the hoped-for change from death to life.

15. The tiqra ('you would call') ve-anokhi e'enekka ('and I would answer you') pictures the most intimate possible reunion: God calls Job by name from beyond death, and Job responds. The le-ma'aseh yadekha tikhsof ('for the work of your hands you would long, yearn') attributes to God a desire to reclaim what he made. The verb tikhsof ('you would yearn, long for, desire intensely') makes God the one who wants Job back. This is the most hopeful verse in Job — and it is framed as a wish, not a promise.

16. The ki attah tse'adai tispor ('for now you count my steps') describes the current reality of surveillance. The lo tishmor al chattati ('you would not watch over my sin') imagines the future hope: in that renewed relationship, God would stop tracking transgressions. The verse contrasts present reality (God the accountant tallying every misstep) with imagined future (God the forgiver who lets sin go). The conditional mood continues from verses 13-15.

17. Two images of sin being put away. The chatum bi-tsror pish'i ('sealed in a bundle is my transgression') pictures sin tied up in a pouch and sealed shut — filed away and forgotten. The va-titpol al avoni ('and you would plaster over my guilt') uses the same verb (tafal — 'to plaster, smear over') that Job used in 13:4 to accuse the friends of smearing lies. Here, God would plaster over guilt — covering it, concealing it, rendering it invisible. Some interpreters read this as continuing the hopeful wish; others see Job snapping back to bitter reality: God has my sins bagged as evidence.

18. The ve-ulam ('but, however') signals the collapse of hope. Even mountains — har nofel yibbol ('a mountain falling crumbles') — are not permanent. Even rock — tsur ye'taq mi-meqomo ('a rock is displaced from its place') — can be moved. If the most permanent things in nature are subject to destruction, what chance does hope have? Job is preparing to describe the erosion of human expectation.

19. This verse is the theological counterweight to verse 7. There, a tree had tiqvah. Here, God destroys the tiqvah of enosh ('a mortal, a frail human being'). The verb he'evadta ('you have destroyed, you have caused to perish') makes God the active agent of hope's destruction. Job does not say hope faded naturally — God killed it.

20. God titqefehu la-netsach ('you overpower him forever') — the victory is permanent and total. The va-yahalokh ('and he goes, departs') is the euphemism for death. The meshaneh fanav ('you change his face') may refer to the distortion of death — the face of the living becomes the mask of the dead. The va-teshallachehu ('and you send him away') is dismissal: God dispatches the human from the land of the living.

21. The cruelest dimension of death: total disconnection from one's children. The yikhbedu vanav ('his sons are honored') ve-lo yeda ('and he does not know') — the father cannot celebrate his children's success. The ve-yits'aru ('and they are diminished, suffer') ve-lo yavin lamo ('and he does not perceive it for them') — the father cannot grieve with his children in their pain. Death severs every relationship. The dead are cosmically alone.

22. The closing verse is devastating in its isolation. The akh besaro alav yikh'av ('only his flesh upon him is in pain') — the dead (or the dying) are reduced to bare physical sensation. The ve-nafsho alav te'eval ('and his soul upon him mourns') — even the soul's grief is self-referential, turned inward. There is no connection to others, no awareness of the world, no hope of reunion. Job's first speech (chapters 12-14) ends not with a cry to

God or a challenge to the friends but with a portrait of absolute human aloneness. The chapter closes the first cycle of speeches on the bleakest possible note.

15

Summary: *The second cycle of speeches begins with Eliphaz returning, and his tone has hardened considerably since his first speech (chapters 4-5). Gone is the delicate sympathy; Eliphaz now attacks Job directly. He accuses Job of undermining the fear of God with his words, of being crafted by his own mouth's cunning, of claiming wisdom that no human possesses. He asks devastating questions: Were you born before the hills? Did you listen in on God's secret council? What do you know that we do not? He appeals to the tradition of the ancients — the elders who received wisdom from the generation that held the land before any foreigner passed through it. Then Eliphaz launches into an extended portrait of the wicked man's fate: he writhes in torment all his days, terrible sounds fill his ears, he does not believe he will escape the darkness, he shakes his fist at God, he runs against God with a thick shield. His prosperity is temporary; his house will be desolate; fire will consume his tent. The wicked conceives trouble and gives birth to falsehood.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Eliphaz's second speech marks the deterioration of the dialogue. In his first speech (chapter 4), Eliphaz began with pastoral sensitivity and offered comfort alongside correction. Now he begins with insult: 'Should a wise man answer with wind?' The shift reveals the friends' growing frustration — Job's refusal to accept their theology has moved them from sympathy to hostility. The portrait of the wicked man in verses 20-35 is magnificent poetry in service of a flawed argument. Eliphaz describes the inner torment of the guilty conscience — the wicked man hears terrifying sounds in peacetime, expects the sword in prosperity, wanders looking for bread, knows that darkness is prepared for him. The psychological acuity is genuine; the application to Job is wrong. Eliphaz is describing a guilty person's experience, and Job is not guilty.*

Translation Friction: *Eliphaz's appeal to tradition (verses 17-19) raises the question of whether ancestral wisdom is self-validating. He claims authority from a chain of transmission: the wise men taught this, and they received it from the generation that held the land before foreigners arrived. The implication is that older wisdom is purer wisdom, uncorrupted by foreign influence. Job has implicitly challenged this by appealing to his own experience and to creation itself (12:7-9). The dialogue is now a contest between tradition (the friends) and experience (Job), with both sides claiming access to truth. Eliphaz's description of the wicked man as one who 'stretches out his hand against God' and 'runs against him with a thick shield' (verses 25-26) is particularly ironic: Eliphaz intends this as a warning to Job, but the reader recognizes that Job's legal challenge to God (chapter 13) is not defiance but desperate faith — Job confronts God because he still believes God is the only one who can vindicate him.*

Connections: *Eliphaz's question 'Were you the first man born?' (verse 7) may allude to Proverbs 8:22-31, where Wisdom was present before creation. The question implies Job claims primordial wisdom — which he does not. The portrait of the wicked in verses 20-35 parallels Psalm 73 (the prosperity of the wicked) and anticipates Bildad's extended version in chapter 18 and Zophar's in chapter 20. The friends' wicked-man speeches become increasingly elaborate across the second cycle, as if repetition and embellishment could make their theology more convincing. The image of the wicked man running against God with a thick-bossed shield (verse 26) anticipates the warrior imagery that God himself will use in chapters 39-41.*

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

2 Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge
and fill his belly with the east wind?

3 Should he argue with useless talk,
with words that accomplish nothing?

4 You are even undermining the fear of God
and diminishing devotion before him.

5 Your guilt is teaching your mouth what to say;
you have chosen the tongue of the crafty.

6 Your own mouth condemns you, not I.
Your own lips testify against you.

7 Were you the first human ever born?
Were you brought forth before the hills?

8 Did you listen in on God's secret council?
Do you limit wisdom to yourself alone?

9 What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is beyond us?

10 Among us are the gray-haired and the very aged —
men older even than your father.

11 Are God's consolations too small for you?
Is a word spoken gently to you not enough?

12 What has carried your heart away?
Why do your eyes flash?

13 That you turn your spirit against God
and let such words pour from your mouth?

14 What is a mortal, that he could be pure?
What is one born of woman, that he could be righteous?

15 If God puts no trust in his holy ones,
and even the heavens are not pure in his sight —

16 how much less a creature loathsome and corrupt —
a human being, who drinks injustice like water!

17 Let me show you — listen to me.
What I have seen, I will declare.

18 What the wise have declared —
what they did not conceal from their fathers —

19 to whom alone the land was given,
before any foreigner had passed through it.

20 All the days of the wicked, he writhes in torment.
The number of years hidden away for the tyrant —

21 Terrifying sounds fill his ears.
In the midst of peace, the destroyer comes upon him.

22 He does not believe he will return from darkness.
He is marked for the sword.

23 He wanders looking for bread — where is it?
He knows that a day of darkness stands ready at his hand.

24 Distress and anguish terrify him;
they overpower him like a king ready for battle.

25 Because he stretched out his hand against God
and set himself as a warrior against the Almighty.

26 He charges at him with neck outstretched,
behind the thick bosses of his shields.

27 Because he covered his face with his fat
and gathered thick flesh on his loins.

28 He has settled in destroyed cities,
in houses no one should inhabit,
which are destined to become rubble.

29 He will not grow rich; his wealth will not endure.
His possessions will not spread across the land.

30 He will not escape the darkness.
Flame will dry up his shoots,
and by the breath of God's mouth he will be swept away.

31 Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself,
for emptiness will be his reward.

32 Before his time, it will be fulfilled.
His palm branch will not stay green.

33 He will shed his unripe grapes like a vine;
he will cast off his blossoms like an olive tree.

34 For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.

35 They conceive trouble and give birth to wickedness;
their womb prepares deceit.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard dialogue formula opens the second cycle. Eliphaz speaks first again, maintaining the order established in the first cycle. But the content will be sharply different from his measured opening in chapter 4.

2. Eliphaz opens with an insult. The da'at ruach ('knowledge of wind, windy knowledge') dismisses Job's arguments as empty air. The verb yemalle qadim bitno ('he fills his belly with the east wind') pictures Job as bloated with the scorching desert wind — the qadim ('east wind, sirocco') that withers everything it touches. Job's words are not merely empty; they are destructive.

3. The hokheach be-davar lo yiskon ('to argue with a word that is not useful') and millin lo yo'il bam ('words that have no benefit in them') continue the dismissal. The verb yiskon ('is useful, is profitable') and yo'il ('benefits, helps') are economic terms — Job's words have no value, no return on investment. Eliphaz evaluates speech pragmatically: does it produce repentance? If not, it is worthless.

4. The accusation escalates. Job tafer yir'ah ('you break, annul, undermine the fear of God') — his words are not merely useless but dangerous to others' piety. The ve-tigra sichah lifnei El ('and you reduce/diminish prayer/meditation before God') means Job's public complaints discourage others from approaching God. Eliphaz frames Job's protest as a threat to the community's spiritual health.

5. Eliphaz claims Job's avon ('guilt, iniquity') ye'allef pikha ('instructs your mouth, teaches your mouth') — Job's sin is the source of his arguments, not his innocence. The tivchar leshon arumim ('you choose the tongue of the cunning/crafty') accuses Job of deliberate rhetorical manipulation. The arumim ('crafty, shrewd') is the same word used for the serpent in Genesis 3:1 — the association may be intentional.

6. Eliphaz claims he is not the accuser — Job's own words convict him. The yarshi'akha pikha ('your mouth declares you guilty') and sefatekha ya'anu vakh ('your lips answer/testify against you') turn Job's speech into self-incrimination. The legal language is pointed: Job wanted a trial (chapter 13), and Eliphaz says the trial is already over — Job has convicted himself from the witness stand.

7. Eliphaz mocks Job's claim to wisdom by asking whether Job has primordial knowledge. The ha-ri'shon adam tivvaled ('were you born as the first human?') asks whether Job was Adam — the first to exist, with unmediated access to God. The ve-lifnei geva'ot cholalta ('and before the hills were you brought forth?') echoes the language of Proverbs 8:25 where personified Wisdom was born before the hills. Job claims no such thing, but Eliphaz exaggerates to ridicule.

8. The be-sod Eloah tishma ('in the council/secret assembly of God did you hear?') asks whether Job eavesdropped on the divine deliberations. The sod ('secret, intimate counsel, council') is the heavenly assembly where God makes decisions — the very assembly described in chapters 1-2, to which Job has no access. The irony is profound: Job has not heard the divine council, but neither has Eliphaz — yet Eliphaz (who claimed a night vision in 4:12-16) acts as though he has.

9. The double question mah yada'ta ve-lo neda ('what do you know that we do not know?') and tavin ve-lo immanu hu ('what do you understand that is not with us?') challenges Job to demonstrate superior knowledge. The implied answer: nothing. Eliphaz assumes the friends collectively possess all available wisdom, and Job has nothing to add.

10. Eliphaz appeals to the authority of age. The sav ('gray-haired') and yashish ('very old, ancient') are among the friends' community. The kabbir me-avikha yamim ('greater in days than your father') claims a chain of authority that precedes even Job's father. In a culture where age conferred wisdom, this is a claim of overwhelming credentialed superiority.

11. The tanchumot El ('the consolations of God') refers to the comfort the friends have offered — which they consider to be God's comfort channeled through them. The ha-me'at mimmekha ('are they too small/insufficient for you?') accuses Job of rejecting divine comfort. The davar la'at immakh ('a word gently/softly with you') refers to their supposedly gentle approach. Eliphaz has apparently forgotten how gentle he has not been.

12. Eliphaz describes Job as emotionally uncontrolled. The mah yiqqachakha libbekha ('what takes you away, your heart?') means Job has been swept away by passion. The mah yirzemun einekha ('what do your eyes flash/wink at?') suggests either anger (flashing eyes) or conspiracy (winking). Eliphaz reads Job's emotional intensity as evidence of guilt rather than honest anguish.

13. The tashiv el El rukhekha ('you turn your spirit against God') describes open rebellion — Job's ruach ('spirit') is directed against the deity. The ve-hotseta mippikha millin ('and you bring forth from your mouth words') implies that Job's speech is a form of spiritual assault. Eliphaz frames Job's legal demand (chapter 13) as an attack on God.

14. Eliphaz echoes Job's own concession in 14:4 ('who can bring something clean from what is unclean?') but uses it differently. The mah enosh ki yizkeh ('what is a mortal that he should be clean?') and ki yitsddaq yelud ishah ('that one born of woman should be righteous?') deny the possibility of human purity. The enosh ('mortal, frail human') and yelud ishah ('born of woman') emphasize weakness and biological limitation. Eliphaz's argument: you cannot be innocent because no one can be.

15. Eliphaz reprises his argument from 4:18 but expands it. If God bi-qedoshav lo ya'amin ('does not trust his holy ones') — the angelic beings — and shamayim lo zakku be-einav ('the heavens are not pure in his eyes'), then how much less a human? The qedoshim ('holy ones') are the members of the divine council. If they are not trustworthy, the argument from lesser to greater makes human righteousness impossible.

16. The nit'av ('abominable, loathsome') and ne'elach ('corrupt, soured, curdled') describe the human condition as repulsive. The ish shoteh kha-mayim avlah ('a person who drinks injustice like water') is Eliphaz's most extreme characterization: humans do not merely commit sin occasionally — they consume it as naturally and constantly as drinking water. Sin is not an aberration but the human default. This totalizing view of human depravity leaves no room for Job's claim of relative innocence.

17. Eliphaz appeals to his own visionary authority: achavvekha ('I will show you, reveal to you'). The zeh chaziti ('this I have seen, envisioned') uses the verb chazah ('to see, to have a vision'), which connects to his earlier claim of a night vision (4:12-16). The va-asapperah ('and I will recount it') presents himself as a reliable witness to revealed truth.

18. The chain of authority: chakhamim yaggidu ('wise men have declared') and lo khichadu me-avotam ('they did not hide from their fathers') — the wisdom has been transmitted openly across generations. Eliphaz grounds his argument in tradition, in contrast to Job's appeal to personal experience and creation's witness.

19. The lahem levaddam nittenah ha-arets ('to them alone the land was given') and lo avar zar betokham ('no stranger passed through their midst') describe an idealized original community — pure, uncontaminated by foreign influence. This may refer to the patriarchal era or to an idealized pre-invasion period. The claim is that the wisdom Eliphaz channels comes from an uncorrupted source. The zar ('stranger, foreigner, outsider') represents theological contamination.

20. The extended portrait of the wicked man begins. The kol yemei rasha hu mitcholel ('all the days of the wicked he writhes, twists, trembles') describes lifelong inner torment. The mispar shanim nitspenu le-arits ('the number of years stored up for the tyrant') means the oppressor's remaining years are hidden from him — he lives in uncertainty about when his destruction will come. Eliphaz intends Job to see himself in this portrait.

21. The qol pechadim be-oznav ('the sound of terrors in his ears') describes the wicked man's constant auditory haunting — he hears threats even in silence. The ba-shalom shoded yevo'ennu ('in peace/prosperity a destroyer will come upon him') means security itself is illusory: the moment of greatest safety is the moment of greatest vulnerability. This is the psychology of guilt — the inability to rest even when no external threat exists.

22. The lo ya'amin shuv minni choshekh ('he does not believe in returning from darkness') describes a man who knows his doom is coming and cannot be escaped. The ve-tsafui hu elei charev ('and watched/waited for he is by the sword') means the sword is already appointed for him — it awaits him, patient and certain.

23. The noded hu la-lechem ayyeh ('he wanders for bread — where?') describes the wicked man reduced to a beggar, searching for food. The yada ki nakhon be-yado yom choshekh ('he knows that prepared at his hand is a day of darkness') means the man carries his own doom like an object in his possession. The day of darkness is not distant but immediate — it is at his hand, ready to deploy.

24. The tsar u-metsuqah ('distress and anguish, trouble and pressure') yeva'atuhu ('terrify him') are personified as attackers. The titqefehu ke-melekh atid la-kidor ('they overpower him like a king prepared for attack') compares the wicked man's suffering to being assaulted by a king with a prepared army. The kidor ('battle, attack') implies organized, military-grade destruction directed at a single person.

25. The cause of the wicked man's doom: natah el El yado ('he stretched out his hand against God') — direct, physical defiance. The ve-el Shaddai yitgabbar ('and against the Almighty he makes himself mighty, he acts as a warrior') describes someone who challenges divine power. Eliphaz intends this as a description of Job's legal challenge from chapter 13 — by demanding a hearing, Job has 'stretched out his hand against God.'

26. The yarutz elav be-tsavvar ('he runs at him with neck/neck outstretched') pictures a headlong charge — reckless, defiant. The ba-avi gabbei maginav ('with the thickness of the backs/bosses of his shields') describes the attacking warrior's shield wall — multiple shields with reinforced central bosses, the heaviest defensive armor used for aggressive assault. The wicked man charges God as if God were a fortified city to be stormed.

27. The wicked man's prosperity is described physically: kissah fanav be-chelbo ('he covered his face with his fat') and va-ya'as pimah alei khasel ('and he made thick fat upon his flank/loins'). The chelev ('fat') represents abundance, self-indulgence, and insulation from suffering. The man has padded himself against the world — he is so prosperous that fat covers even his face. But this prosperity, Eliphaz argues, is the prelude to destruction.

28. The wicked man vayishkon arim nikhchadot ('dwells in cities that have been destroyed, desolated') — he builds his life on ruins. The battim lo yeshvu lamo ('houses that should not be inhabited') are structurally unsound. The asher hit'atedu le-gallim ('which are prepared/destined to become heaps of stone') means the buildings themselves are on their way to collapse. The metaphor is of a man who builds on condemned property — his prosperity is structurally doomed.

29. Three negations destroy the wicked man's economic future. Lo ye'eshar ('he will not become rich') — his wealth has a ceiling. Lo yaqum cheilo ('his wealth will not stand, endure') — what he has will not last. Lo yitteh la-arets minlam ('his acquisitions will not extend to the earth') — his holdings will not spread. Each negation intensifies: no growth, no durability, no expansion.

30. The lo yasur minni choshekh ('he will not turn away from darkness') — the darkness from verse 22 is inescapable. The yonaqto teyabbesh shalhevet ('his tender shoot the flame will dry up') returns to the tree metaphor from chapter 14 but inverts it: where Job said a tree's shoot could revive, Eliphaz says the wicked man's shoot will be burned. The ve-yasur be-ruach piv ('and he will be removed by the breath of his mouth') — God's breath, or possibly the wicked man's own breath, will carry him away.

31. The al ya'amen ba-shav nit'ah ('let him not believe/trust in emptiness, he who is deceived') warns against self-deception: the wicked man's confidence in his prosperity is shav ('emptiness, vanity, falsehood'). The ki shav tihyeh temurato ('for emptiness will be his exchange/recompense') means he will receive nothing of value — his investment in wickedness will yield a return of zero.

32. The be-lo yomo timmale ('not in his day it will be completed/filled') means the wicked man's end will come prematurely — before his natural time. The ve-khippato lo ra'ananah ('and his palm frond/branch will not be green/flourishing') uses vegetation imagery again: the wicked man's life, like a palm branch, will wither before its season. Premature death is the marker of divine judgment.

33. Two agricultural images of aborted fruitfulness. The yachmos ka-gefen bisro ('he will drop violently like a vine his unripe grape') — the vine sheds its fruit before it matures. The ve-yashlekh ka-zayit nitsato ('and he will throw off like an olive tree his blossom') — the olive drops its flowers before they become olives. The wicked man's projects, relationships, and legacy will all be terminated before reaching maturity.

34. The adat chanef ('the congregation/company of the godless/hypocrites') will be galmud ('barren, desolate, childless') — their community will produce nothing lasting. The esh akhelah ohalei shochad ('fire has consumed the tents of bribery') destroys the physical dwellings of the corrupt. The shochad ('bribe') represents the mechanism of the wicked man's prosperity — he got rich through corruption, and corruption's rewards are consumed by fire.

35. The closing verse uses birth imagery for evil. The haroh amal ('conceiving trouble') and yalod aven ('giving birth to wickedness') picture sin as a pregnancy that inevitably delivers its offspring. The u-vitnam takhin mirmah ('and their belly/womb prepares deceit') completes the metaphor: the interior of the wicked is a womb that gestates deception. The language echoes Isaiah 59:4 and Psalm 7:14. Eliphaz's portrait of the wicked is complete: from inner torment (verses 20-24) to defiance of God (25-26) to fat prosperity (27) to inevitable collapse (28-34) to the fundamental nature of evil as a self-generating, self-reproducing force (35).

16

Summary: *Job responds to Eliphaz's second speech with biting sarcasm and raw anguish. He dismisses his friends as 'miserable comforters' whose windy speeches accomplish nothing. He then turns from them to describe what God has done to him — tearing him apart, gnashing teeth at him, handing him over to the wicked. The imagery shifts from legal to military to physical assault: God has shattered him, seized him by the neck, set him up as a target, and pierced his kidneys. Job weeps until his face is raw. Yet in the depths of this devastation, Job makes a stunning claim: even now, his witness is in heaven, his advocate is on high. He appeals past God-as-attacker to God-as-witness, splitting the divine into prosecutor and defense attorney simultaneously.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The theological breakthrough in verses 19-21 is extraordinary. Job has spent chapters arguing that God is his enemy, his attacker, his unjust judge. Now, without retracting any of that, he declares that his witness (ed) and advocate (sahad) are in heaven. Since no other heavenly being has been proposed as Job's defender, the most natural reading is that Job is appealing to God against God — the same deity who attacks him is the only one who can vindicate him. This is not cognitive dissonance but theological audacity. Job holds two truths simultaneously: God is destroying him, and God alone can save him. This paradox anticipates the resolution in chapters 38-42 where God does appear — not to explain the suffering but to reveal himself, which turns out to be what Job actually needed.*

Translation Friction: *The violent imagery in verses 9-14 — God tearing, gnashing teeth, slashing, seizing, shattering, piercing — is among the most physically graphic in the Hebrew Bible. God is described as a predator, a warrior, and an archer who uses Job for target practice. This language is offensive to any theology that insists God only acts benevolently, but the text does not flinch. Job is not speaking metaphorically about feeling abandoned — he is describing what he experiences as direct divine assault. The friends would say this is blasphemy; the book's narrator never corrects Job's language, and God in 42:7 will say Job spoke rightly. The other tension is the identity of the 'witness in heaven' (verse 19). Some interpreters identify this as an angelic mediator, but the context points to God himself — Job's only hope is that the God who wounds is also the God who sees.*

Connections: *Job's dismissal of his friends as 'miserable comforters' (verse 2) echoes Ecclesiastes 4:1 where the oppressed have no comforter. The tearing imagery (verse 9) connects to Hosea 5:14 where God declares 'I will be like a lion to Ephraim' — both texts portray God as predator. The witness-in-heaven theme (verses 19-21) anticipates Job 19:25 ('I know my Redeemer lives') and connects to the mediator/arbiter (mokiach) Job wished for in 9:33. The target imagery (verse 12) echoes Lamentations 3:12 ('he bent his bow and set me as a target'). Job's tears mingled with dust (verse 15) reverses the creation image of 10:9 where dust was the material of formation — now it is the residue of destruction.*

[1]Then responded:

[2]I have heard plenty of this before.
You are all miserable comforters.

3 Is there no end to these windy speeches?
What provokes you to keep answering?

4 I could speak the way you do —
if your soul were in my soul's place,
I could pile up words against you
and shake my head at you.

5 Instead I would strengthen you with my mouth;
the comfort of my lips would ease your pain.

6 If I speak, my pain is not eased.
If I hold back, what relief do I gain?

7 But now God has worn me out.
You have destroyed my entire household.

8 You have shriveled me up — and it testifies against me.
My wasting body rises as a witness,
accusing me to my face.

9 His anger tears me apart; he hates me.
He gnashes his teeth at me.
My enemy sharpens his eyes against me.

10 They gape at me with open mouths;
they strike my cheeks in contempt.
They mass together against me.

11 God hands me over to the unjust
and throws me into the hands of the wicked.

12 I was at peace, and he shattered me.
He seized me by the neck and smashed me to pieces.
He set me up as his target.

13 His archers surround me.
He splits open my kidneys without mercy;
he pours my bile out on the ground.

14 He breaks through me, breach after breach;
he charges at me like a warrior.

15 I have sewn sackcloth over my raw skin
and buried my dignity in the dust.

16 My face is raw from weeping,
and death-shadow covers my eyelids.

17 Yet there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.

18 O earth, do not cover my blood!
Let there be no resting place for my cry!

19 Even now — look! — my witness is in heaven;
my advocate is on high.

20 My friends mock me,
but my eye pours out tears to God.

21 Let him argue the case of a mortal before God,
as one argues for a neighbor.

22 For only a few years remain,
and I will walk the road of no return.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard response formula va-ya'an Iyyov va-yomar introduces Job's reply to Eliphaz's second speech (chapter 15). This is Job's fourth speech in the dialogue cycle.

2. The phrase menachamei amal ('comforters of trouble/misery') is devastatingly ironic — the friends came to comfort (2:11) but instead produce amal ('trouble, misery, toil'). Their comfort adds suffering. The kullekhem ('all of you') condemns every friend equally. This phrase has become proverbial in Western literature.

3. The divrei ruach ('words of wind') dismisses everything Eliphaz said as empty air. The verb yamritsekha ('emboldens you, provokes you') asks what drives the friends to keep speaking when their words accomplish nothing. Job turns Eliphaz's own rhetorical style against him.

4. Job imagines role reversal: lu yesh nafshekhem tachat nafshi ('if your soul were in place of my soul'). He claims he could do exactly what they do — heap up impressive-sounding theological arguments (achbirah aleikem be-millim — 'I would string together words against you') and shake his head in pious disapproval (ani'ah aleikem be-mo roshi). The point: their theology is easy when you are not the one suffering.

5. Job contrasts what he would do versus what the friends are doing. The verb a'ammitsekhem ('I would strengthen you') describes genuine encouragement. The nid sefatai ('motion of my lips, the comfort of my lips') would yachsokh ('restrain, hold back, ease') their grief. Job claims he would be a better comforter than they are — he would actually help.

6. A double bind: speaking does not diminish the ke'ev ('pain, anguish'), and silence (echdal — 'I cease, I hold back') brings no relief either. The mah minni yahalokh ('what departs from me') asks what portion of suffering leaves regardless of what Job says. The answer is: none. Speech and silence are equally futile.

7. The shift from 'he' (hel'ani — 'he has wearied me') to 'you' (hashimmota — 'you have desolated') is abrupt — Job addresses God directly mid-sentence. The kol adati ('all my company, my entire congregation/household') refers to everything and everyone Job had. The verb hashimmota ('you have devastated, made desolate') describes total destruction.

8. The verb tiqmeteni ('you have shriveled me, seized me, wrinkled me') describes the physical ravaging of Job's body. His emaciated appearance (kachashi — 'my leanness, my wasting away') functions as a le-ed ('witness') — in the retribution theology of the friends, his broken body is proof of guilt. Job's suffering is self-testifying: the worse he looks, the guiltier he appears. His own body has become evidence for the prosecution.

9. Three acts of divine aggression. God taraf ('tears, rips apart') like a predator dismembering prey. The verb va-yistemeni ('he hates me, holds a grudge against me') attributes personal animosity to God. God charaq alai be-shinnav ('gnashes his teeth at me') — an expression of rage and threat. The tsari ('my adversary, my enemy') who yiltosh einav ('sharpens his eyes') describes a predator locked onto prey. Job calls God his enemy without flinching.

10. The subject shifts to plural — pa'aru ('they gaped') — either the friends, the community, or enemies in general. The striking of the cheek (hikku lechayal — 'they struck my cheek') is a gesture of contempt and humiliation. The verb yitmalla'un ('they fill themselves up, they mass together') describes a mob assembling. Job is surrounded on every side.

11. The verb yasgireni ('he delivers me up, hands me over, surrenders me') is language of betrayal — a king surrendering a prisoner to his enemies. The avil ('the unjust, the perverse') and resha'im ('the wicked') may refer to the friends, to human enemies generally, or to the demonic forces Job imagines God has unleashed. The verb yirteni ('he throws me, hurls me') intensifies the violence.

12. Three stages of destruction. First: shalev hayiti ('I was at peace, I was secure') — Job's former life. Then va-yefarphereni ('he shook me violently, shattered me') — sudden, total disruption. Then achaz be-orpi ('he seized my neck') and va-yefatspetseni ('he smashed me to pieces'). Finally: va-yeqimeni lo le-mattarah ('he set me up as his target') — God positioned Job as a mark for archery practice. The progression from peace to target is one of the most visceral descriptions of divine assault in the Hebrew Bible.

13. The rabbav ('his archers, his many ones') surround Job — God commands a firing squad. The verb yefalach ('he cleaves, splits open') targets the kiliyotai ('my kidneys') — the seat of deepest emotion in Hebrew thought. The lo yachmol ('he does not spare, shows no mercy') emphasizes the ruthlessness. The merirati ('my gall, my bile') poured la-arets ('to the ground') describes a gut wound — Job's insides spilling out.

14. The noun perets ('breach, break') repeated — perets al penei parets ('breach upon the face of breach') — describes a wall being broken through again and again. Before one wound heals, another strike comes. The yarets alai ke-gibbor ('he runs at me like a warrior/champion') compares God to a charging soldier in battle. Job is a besieged city whose walls are crumbling under repeated assault.

15. The saq ('sackcloth') is sewn directly tafarti alei gildi ('onto my skin') — not worn as a garment but fused to his body. The gildi ('my skin') suggests raw, exposed flesh. The olalti be-afar qarni ('I have thrust my horn into the dust') is a metaphor of total humiliation: the qeren ('horn') symbolizes strength and dignity, and thrusting it into afar ('dust') means his honor is ground into the earth.

16. The verb chomarmeru ('is reddened, inflamed, burning') describes a face ravaged by constant tears. The tsalmavet ('death-shadow, deep darkness') on his afapai ('eyelids') — the shadow of death is so close that it literally sits on his eyes. Job sees through a veil of approaching death.

17. Job reasserts his innocence: lo chamas be-khappai ('no violence in my hands') — his hands are clean of wrongdoing. The chamas ('violence, injustice, wrongdoing') is the same word used of the generation destroyed in the flood (Genesis 6:11). And tefillati zakkah ('my prayer is pure') — not only his actions but his inner spiritual life is clean. This double declaration sets up the appeal to heaven in the verses that follow.

18. Job invokes the earth as witness, echoing Genesis 4:10 where Abel's blood cries out from the ground. Uncovered blood demands justice — if the earth covers it, the crime is hidden. Job commands the earth: al tekhassi dami ('do not cover my blood') — keep the evidence visible. His za'aqah ('outcry, cry for justice') must have no maqom ('place, resting place') — it must never settle, never be silenced, but keep reverberating until someone answers it.

19. The gam attah ('even now') is emphatic — despite everything Job has just described, despite God tearing him apart, even now he makes this claim. The edi ('my witness') is ba-shamayim ('in heaven'). The sahadi ('my advocate, my testifier') is ba-meromim ('in the heights, on high'). The identity of this heavenly witness is the central interpretive question. Since Job has no other heavenly ally in the book, the most coherent reading is that Job appeals to God against God — the same deity who attacks him must also be the one to testify for him.

20. The melitsai ('my interpreters, my scorners, my mockers') is deliberately ambiguous — the same word can mean 'my advocates' or 'my mockers.' If read as 'my advocates are my friends,' Job is being ironic — these supposed advocates mock him. The dalefah eini ('my eye drips, pours out') directs the tears el Eloha ('to God') — even while God is the attacker, God is also the one Job weeps toward. The theology of weeping toward your attacker is the emotional core of Job's faith.

21. The verb yokach ('let him argue, let him plead, let him decide') is legal language — Job wants his heavenly witness to serve as legal representative, arguing his case lifnei El ('before God'). The comparison — ke-ben adam le-re'ehu ('as a human being does for his friend/neighbor') — asks for the same simple advocacy that exists between humans. Job wants someone to stand up for him the way a neighbor would stand up for a neighbor. The tragedy is that the one he needs this from is also the one he is in dispute with.

22. The shenot mispar ('years of number,' meaning 'a countable number of years, a few years') emphasizes how little time Job has left. The orach lo ashuv ('the path I will not return') is the one-way road to Sheol — the same phrase from 10:21. Job's appeal for a heavenly witness is urgent because death is approaching. If vindication does not come soon, it will never come — or so Job believes at this point in the dialogue.

17

Summary: *Job continues his fourth speech, which began in chapter 16. His spirit is crushed, his days are extinguished, and the graveyard awaits. He challenges God directly: put up a pledge for me — who else will guarantee my case? He accuses God of closing the minds of his friends so they cannot understand, and declares that anyone who betrays a friend for profit will see his own children's eyes fail. Job has become a byword among the peoples, a man others spit at. His eyes grow dim from grief, his body wastes to a shadow. The righteous are appalled at him, yet the innocent will hold to their way. Job ends by addressing the friends: come back, all of you, try again — he will not find a wise man among them. His days are past, his plans are shattered, and the only house he can look forward to is Sheol, where he will make his bed in darkness and call corruption his father and the worm his mother and sister.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The legal metaphor reaches its most desperate point in verse 3: Job asks God to post bail for him — to provide a surety or guarantor (areveni). Since no human will vouch for Job (verse 5 implies his friends have betrayed him), only God can serve as both judge and bail-bondsman. This is the same paradox as 16:19-21: Job needs God to defend him in a case where God is the prosecutor. The chapter's ending (verses 13-16) is one of the bleakest passages in the book — Job addresses the grave as his home, darkness as his bed, decay as his family. Hope itself is personified only to be buried: where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? It will go down to the gates of Sheol; together we will descend into the dust.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 5 is notoriously difficult in Hebrew. The traditional reading — 'He who denounces his friends for a share of the spoil, the eyes of his children will fail' — may be a proverb about betrayal. Job may be accusing his friends of throwing him under the bus to maintain their theological system (which rewards them with the illusion of safety). The chapter's relationship to chapter 16 is debated: some scholars see 16-17 as a single continuous speech, while others detect a shift in tone at 17:1. The description of making one's bed in Sheol (verses 13-16) challenges any theology of afterlife hope — Job sees nothing beyond the grave at this point in the dialogue.*

Connections: *The plea for a divine surety (verse 3) connects to the mediator of 9:33 and the witness of 16:19 — a developing trajectory in which Job gropes toward a heavenly advocate. The byword theme (verse 6) anticipates Psalm 69:11 and connects to Deuteronomy 28:37 where becoming a byword is a covenant curse. The Sheol imagery (verses 13-16) builds on 10:21-22 and anticipates the fuller treatment of death in chapter 14. The corruption-as-father, worm-as-mother language (verse 14) inverts the creation theology of 10:8-12 where God was the intimate craftsman — now decay replaces the creator.*

1 My spirit is broken,
my days are snuffed out.
The graveyard is all that remains for me.

2 Mockers surround me;
my eyes stare at their hostility through the night.

3 Put up a pledge for me — be my guarantor yourself!
Who else would shake hands on my behalf?

4 For you have closed their minds to understanding;
therefore you will not let them triumph.

5 The one who denounces friends for profit —
his own children's eyes will fail.

6 He has made me a byword among the peoples;
I am one in whose face they spit.

7 My eyes grow dim from grief,
and my whole body is like a shadow.

8 The upright are appalled at this;
the innocent are outraged at the godless.

9 Yet the righteous will hold to their path,
and those with clean hands will grow stronger.

10 But come back, all of you — try again.
I will not find a wise man among you.

11 My days are gone; my plans are shattered —
the very desires of my heart.

12 They turn night into day;
they say light is near when darkness closes in.

13If I look for anything, Sheol is my home.
I have spread my bed in the darkness.

14I call out to the pit, 'You are my father!'
To the worm, 'My mother! My sister!'

15Where then is my hope?
My hope — who can see it?

16Will it descend to the gates of Sheol?
Will we sink down together into the dust?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Three short declarations of finality. The ruchi chubbalah ('my spirit is destroyed, broken, ruined') — the verb chaval means to bind or to ruin, and here describes a spirit that has been wrecked. The yamay niz'akhu ('my days are extinguished') uses the image of a lamp going out. The qevarim li ('graves belong to me, graves are mine') — the only thing Job can claim ownership of is a burial plot.

2. The hatulim ('mockers, scoffers') are with him — immadi ('beside me, with me') — meaning the friends who came to comfort are actually tormenting him. The talin eini ('my eye lodges, spends the night') in their hammerotam ('their provocations, their bitterness') — Job lies awake all night staring into the darkness of their accusations.

3. The imperative simah na ('set, place, put up') asks God to provide collateral. The areveni immakh ('be my surety with you, guarantee me beside yourself') is a legal request: in ancient courts, a guarantor posted bond to vouch for the accused. The mi hu le-yadi yittaqea ('who is it that would strike into my hand') — striking hands was the gesture that sealed a guarantee, like a handshake. Job asks: since no human will vouch for me, will you — the judge — also serve as my bail?

4. Job accuses God of deliberately hiding understanding from the friends: libbam tsafanta mi-ssekhel ('you have hidden their heart from insight'). The tsafanta ('you concealed') is the same verb from 10:13 where God hid a destructive plan. The al ken lo teromem ('therefore you will not exalt them') — their theological blindness, imposed by God, will ultimately prevent their vindication.

5. This appears to be a proverb Job quotes or coins. The le-cheleq yaggid re'im ('for a portion he declares against friends, he betrays friends for a share') describes someone who sells out a friend for personal gain. The punishment: einei vanav tikhlena ('the eyes of his sons will fail, waste away'). Job may be warning his friends: by condemning an innocent man to maintain your safe theology, you are the betrayers, and your children will pay.

6. The hitsigani li-meshol ammim ('he has set me up as a proverb/byword among the peoples') means Job's name has become a cautionary tale — 'don't end up like Job.' The tofe lifanim ('a spitting in the face') describes public contempt. The man who was gadol mi-kol bene qedem ('greatest of all the people of the east,' 1:3) is now a target of universal mockery.

7. The tekhah ('grows dim, fails') describes eyes losing their clarity from mi-ka'as ('from vexation, grief, anger'). The yetsuray ('my limbs, my formed parts') — from yatsar ('to form'), connecting back to creation language — are ka-tsel kullam ('all of them like a shadow'). The substantial body God formed is dissolving into insubstantiality.

8. The yesharim ('upright ones') yashommu ('are appalled, stunned') at what is happening to Job. The naqi ('the innocent') yit'orar ('rouses himself, is stirred up') against the chanef ('the godless, the hypocrite'). Job claims that genuinely righteous people are horrified by his treatment — only the hypocritical (his friends) can watch it unmoved.

9. Despite the horror of Job's situation, the tsaddiq ('righteous one') yo'chez darkho ('holds to his way, grips his path'). The tehor yadayim ('clean of hands') yosif omets ('adds strength, grows stronger'). This may be Job's defiant self-description: even witnessing God's assault on an innocent man, the truly righteous do not abandon their integrity. Or it may be a broader theological claim: injustice does not destroy righteousness but paradoxically strengthens it.

10. The ve-ulam ('but, nevertheless') introduces a challenge. Job invites the friends to tashuvu ('return, come back') and vo'u na ('come, please'). The invitation is sarcastic: try again if you want, but lo emtsa vakhem chakham ('I will not find among you a wise man'). After all their speeches, not one has shown genuine wisdom.

11. The yamay averu ('my days have passed') — time is running out. The zimmotai nitteku ('my plans are torn away, broken off') — every future intention has been severed. The morashei levavi ('the possessions/inheritances of my heart') are the deepest personal aspirations, now destroyed. Job has lost not just his present but his future.

12. The friends yasimu ('they set, they make') lailah le-yom ('night into day') — they call Job's darkness light. The or qarov ('light is near') mi-penei choshekh ('in the face of darkness') — they claim dawn is approaching when the darkness is actually deepening. Job accuses his friends of gaslighting: relabeling his suffering as a prelude to blessing when it is actually getting worse.

13. The im aqavveh ('if I hope, if I look for, if I wait') — whatever Job anticipates, it is she'ol beiti ('Sheol is my house'). The verb rippadti ('I have spread out, made comfortable') yet'su'ai ('my bed, my couch') ba-choshekh ('in the darkness'). The domestication of death — Sheol as home, darkness as bedroom — is both poetic and deeply disturbing. Job is making himself at home in the grave because he has no other home left.

14. Job replaces his family with death. The shachat ('pit, corruption, the grave') becomes avi ('my father'). The rimmah ('worm, maggot') becomes immi va-achoti ('my mother and my sister'). The inversion of creation is complete: in 10:8-12 God was the intimate craftsman who formed Job; now decay is his parent and the worm is his kin. The family that was killed in chapter 1 is replaced by the family of the grave.

15. The double use of tiqvati ('my hope') — first asking where it is (ayyeh efo — 'where then?'), then asking who can even perceive it (mi yeshurenah — 'who can discern it, who can see it?'). Hope is not merely absent but invisible — no one can locate it. The rhetorical question expects the answer: nowhere and no one.

16. The baddei she'ol ('bars/gates of Sheol') are the entrance to the underworld — once past them, there is no return. Job asks whether his tiqvah ('hope') will accompany him down to Sheol — and the implied answer is that hope dies at the gate. The im yachad al afar nachat ('if together upon the dust we rest') pictures Job and his hope descending into the grave together, where both are extinguished. The chapter ends not with defiance but with the quiet dissolution of everything.

18

Summary: *Bildad delivers his second speech, and it is a masterpiece of indirect cruelty. He opens by rebuking Job for treating his friends like cattle and demanding that the world rearrange itself for his sake. Then Bildad launches into an extended, vivid description of the fate of the wicked — their light goes out, their steps are trapped, their strength wastes away, disease devours their skin, they are torn from the security of their tent and paraded before the King of Terrors, sulfur rains on their dwelling, their roots dry up, their memory perishes from the earth, they have no descendant, and everyone who hears of their fate shudders. Bildad never says 'this is you, Job.' He does not have to. The entire speech is a portrait of Job's situation described as the fate reserved for the wicked. The theological argument is delivered entirely through imagery.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Bildad's rhetorical strategy is devastatingly effective precisely because it is indirect. He never accuses Job directly; he simply describes in meticulous detail what happens to 'the wicked' — and every detail matches Job's situation. The wicked man's light goes out (Job's prosperity is gone). Disease eats his skin (Job has skin disease). He is torn from his tent (Job lost his home). His children are gone (Job's children are dead). He has no descendant or survivor (Job's family line is destroyed). He becomes a horror to east and west (Job is a byword). Bildad has constructed a mirror and held it up to Job's face while insisting he is only talking about 'the wicked' in general. The speech is a case study in how theology can be weaponized — every statement is theologically defensible in isolation, but the cumulative effect is an assault on a suffering man.*

Translation Friction: *The 'King of Terrors' (melekh ballahot, verse 14) is one of the most evocative phrases in the Hebrew Bible. It likely refers to Mot, the Canaanite god of death, demythologized into a personification. The phrase suggests that behind Bildad's orderly retribution theology lurks something primal and terrifying — death itself as a king who claims subjects. Bildad intends this as a warning to Job, but the image escapes his theology: if death is a king with its own agency, then perhaps suffering is not always explained by personal sin. The chapter also raises the question of whether Bildad actually believes he is helping. His speech shows real theological sophistication and poetic skill — he is not a fool. He is a brilliant man deploying his brilliance in the wrong direction.*

Connections: *Bildad's light-and-darkness imagery connects to Proverbs 13:9 ('the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out') and 24:20. The trap-and-snare sequence (verses 8-10) has parallels in Psalm 140:5 and Proverbs 29:6. The 'firstborn of death' (verse 13) may echo Ugaritic mythology where Mot (Death) has offspring. The sulfur imagery (verse 15) connects to the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19:24. The erasure of name and memory (verse 17) is the ultimate curse in ancient Near Eastern culture — worse than death itself. Bildad's description of the wicked unknowingly echoes the prose prologue's description of what the Adversary did to Job, not what Job did to himself.*

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

2 How long will you keep setting traps with words?
Think first, and then we can talk.

3 Why are we treated like cattle,
regarded as stupid in your eyes?

4 You who tear yourself apart in your rage —
should the earth be abandoned for your sake?
Should the rock be moved from its place?

5 Indeed, the light of the wicked is extinguished,
and the flame of his fire gives no light.

6 The light in his tent grows dark;
his lamp above him is snuffed out.

7 His powerful stride is cut short;
his own schemes bring him down.

8 For he is driven into a net by his own feet;
he walks over a mesh trap.

9 A trap seizes him by the heel;
a snare grips him tight.

10 A rope lies hidden for him in the ground;
a trap waits for him on the path.

11 Terrors surround him on every side
and chase at his heels.

12 His strength is starved away;
disaster stands ready at his side.

13 Disease devours his skin piece by piece;
the firstborn of Death feeds on his limbs.

14 He is torn from the safety of his tent
and marched before the King of Terrors.

15 Strangers dwell in his tent — it is no longer his.
Sulfur is scattered over his home.

16 Below, his roots dry up;
above, his branches wither.

17 His memory perishes from the earth;
his name vanishes from the land.

18 He is driven from light into darkness,
chased out of the inhabited world.

19 He has no son or grandson among his people,
no survivor where he once lived.

20 Those in the west shudder at his fate;
those in the east are seized with horror.

21 Surely — this is the home of the unjust.
This is the fate of one who does not know God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Bildad ha-Shuchi ('the Shuhite') speaks for the second time. His first speech (chapter 8) was comparatively gentle; this one is sharper and more elaborately crafted.

2. The ad anah ('how long?') opens with impatience. The qintsei le-millin ('traps for words, ends of words') may mean either 'when will you stop talking?' or 'when will you stop laying word-traps?' The tavinu ('understand, consider') is a demand that Job think before speaking. The ve-achar nedabber ('and afterward we will speak') sets a precondition: Bildad will only converse with a rational Job.

3. Bildad takes offense: nechshavnu ka-behemah ('we are reckoned as beasts'). The behemah ('beast, cattle') implies mindless animals. The nitmeinu ('we are made unclean, regarded as blocked/stupid') be-eineikhem ('in your eyes') — Bildad feels Job has dismissed his friends as intellectually and morally beneath him. The plural 'your eyes' suggests Bildad speaks for all three friends.

4. Bildad reframes Job's complaint as self-destruction: toref nafsho be-appo ('tearing his own soul in his anger'). The rhetorical questions — ha-lema'ankha te'azav erets ('should the earth be abandoned for your sake?') and ye'taq tsur mi-meqomo ('should the rock move from its place?') — accuse Job of demanding that the entire moral order rearrange itself to accommodate his case. The tsur ('rock') symbolizes the fixed moral structure of the universe.

5. Bildad begins the extended metaphor of the wicked man's fate. The or resha'im ('light of the wicked') yid'akh ('is extinguished, goes dark'). The sheviv ishho ('the flame/spark of his fire') lo yiggah ('does not shine, does not glow'). In a world lit by oil lamps and hearth fires, the extinguishing of light means the end of life, warmth, and home — all of which Job has lost.

6. The or ('light') chashakh ('darkens') be-oholo ('in his tent') — the domestic space loses its warmth. The nero ('his lamp') alav ('above him, over him') yid'akh ('is extinguished'). The lamp hung above a person's head was the symbol of life and prosperity (see Proverbs 20:20, 24:20). When the lamp goes out, the household is finished.

7. The tsa'adei ono ('the steps of his strength, his vigorous stride') yetseru ('are confined, narrowed, shortened'). The atsato ('his counsel, his plan') tashllikhehu ('throws him down, casts him away'). The wicked man's own strength and intelligence become the instruments of his downfall — a key theme in wisdom literature.

8. The first of six trap terms in verses 8-10. The resheth ('net') catches him be-raglav ('by his feet'). The sevakhah ('mesh, lattice, snare') is something he yithallakh ('walks upon') — he does not see the trap beneath him. The imagery shifts from active pursuit to passive entrapment: the wicked man walks into his own destruction.

9. The pach ('trap, bird-snare') yo'chez be-aqev ('seizes by the heel'). The tsammim ('noose, snare, lasso') yachaziq ('strengthens its grip, holds fast') alav ('upon him'). The accumulation of trap vocabulary — resheth, sevakhah, pach, tsammim — creates a sense of inescapable entrapment. Wherever the wicked man steps, another snare awaits.

10. The chavlo ('his rope, his cord') is tamun ba-arets ('hidden in the earth') — a concealed tripwire. The malkudto ('his trap, his capture-device') is alei nativ ('upon the path') — set directly in his walking route. The six trap terms across three verses (resheth, sevakhah, pach, tsammim, chevel, malkkodet) form the most concentrated sequence of hunting/trapping vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible.

11. The ballahot ('terrors, sudden alarms') bi'atuhu ('terrify him') saviv ('all around, on every side'). The verb hefitsuhu ('they scatter him, drive him') le-raglav ('at his feet') — the terrors nip at his heels like hunting dogs driving prey. The shift from static traps (verses 8-10) to active pursuit (terrors chasing) intensifies the panic.

12. The yehi ra'ev ono ('his strength becomes hungry, is famished') — a personification where the man's own vitality wastes from hunger. The eid ('disaster, calamity') nakhon ('is prepared, stands ready') le-tsal'o ('at his side, at his rib'). Disaster is personified as a companion standing next to him, waiting for the right moment to strike.

13. The yo'khal baddei oro ('it devours the limbs/parts of his skin') describes a wasting disease consuming flesh — unmistakably echoing Job's condition. The bekhor mavet ('firstborn of Death') is a striking personification: Death has offspring, and the eldest — the most virulent disease — is the one consuming this man. In Canaanite mythology, Mot (Death) was a deity; here the image is demythologized but retains its primal force.

14. The yinnateq me-oholo mivtacho ('he is uprooted from his tent, his security') — the tent represents home, family, safety, and all of it is ripped away. The tats'idehu ('it marches him, makes him walk') le-melekh ballahot ('to the King of Terrors'). This melekh ballahot is one of the Hebrew Bible's most vivid images of death personified — Death as a king who holds court and summons subjects. The wicked man does not simply die; he is

formally presented to Death as a prisoner is presented to a conquering king.

15. The tishkon be-oholo mi-bbeli lo ('it dwells in his tent, from not being his') — something alien occupies what was once his home. The yezoreh al navehu gafrit ('sulfur is scattered upon his dwelling') echoes the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:24) where God rained gafrit ('sulfur, brimstone') on the cities. Bildad implies that the wicked man's home suffers a Sodom-like obliteration.

16. The tree metaphor: mi-ttachat ('from below') shorashav ('his roots') yivashu ('dry up'). Mi-mma'al ('from above') yimmal qetsiro ('his harvest/branch withers, is cut off'). The destruction is total — from root to crown. A tree attacked from both ends simultaneously cannot survive. The image anticipates the fuller tree metaphor in 14:7-9 where Job found some hope in a cut stump resprouting — Bildad allows no such hope.

17. The zikhro ('his memory, his remembrance') avad ('perishes, is destroyed') mini arets ('from the earth'). The ve-lo shem lo ('and no name belongs to him') al penei chuts ('upon the face of the outside, in the open places'). In ancient Near Eastern culture, the survival of one's name after death was the closest thing to immortality. To have your name erased was worse than death — it was as if you had never existed.

18. The yehdephuhu ('they drive him, thrust him') me-or el choshekh ('from light into darkness') — the reversal of creation itself, where God separated light from darkness (Genesis 1:4). The mi-tevel yenidduhu ('from the world they chase him') — tevel ('the inhabited world, the productive earth') expels him. The wicked man is un-created, pushed back into the primordial darkness.

19. The lo nin ('no offspring, no son') ve-lo nekhed ('and no grandson, no descendant') be-ammo ('among his people') — the family line is extinguished. The ve-ein sarid ('and there is no survivor') bi-megurav ('in his dwelling places'). Every detail matches Job's situation: his children are dead, his household destroyed, no heir remains. Bildad's 'general' description of the wicked is a precise portrait of Job.

20. The acharonim ('those who come after, those in the west') nashammu ('are appalled, stunned') al yomo ('at his day, at his fate'). The qadmonim ('those who came before, those in the east') achazo sa'ar ('are seized by a storm of horror'). The terms acharonim and qadmonim can mean either temporal (later/earlier generations) or geographical (west/east). Either way, the wicked man's destruction becomes a universal spectacle of horror.

21. Bildad's conclusion: akh elleh mishkenot avval ('surely these are the dwellings of the unjust'). The zeh meqom lo yada El ('this is the place of one who does not know God'). The avval ('unjust, unrighteous') and the lo yada El ('one who does not know God') are Bildad's categories for the person he has been describing. He closes the case: everything I described is what happens to the wicked. The listener — Job — is left to draw the obvious conclusion about himself.

19

Summary: *Job responds to Bildad with one of the most emotionally devastating and theologically explosive speeches in the entire book. He begins by asking how long the friends will torment him and crush him with words. He catalogs what God has done: walled up his road, stripped him of honor, demolished him on every side, uprooted his hope like a tree. God counts him as an enemy. His troops advance, siege his tent. Then Job turns to his social devastation — his family is estranged, his wife recoils from his breath, his intimate friends despise him, children mock him, his bones cling to skin. He pleads with the friends for pity: the hand of God has struck me. Then, out of this absolute nadir, Job makes the most famous declaration in the book: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, from my flesh I will see God — I myself will see him, my own eyes, not a stranger's.' He ends with a warning to the friends: if you pursue me as God does, beware the sword of judgment.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verses 25-27 represent the theological summit of the book of Job. From the pit of total abandonment — by God, by family, by friends, by his own body — Job erupts with a declaration of certainty that has no evidential basis whatsoever. He knows his go'el lives. He knows this Redeemer will stand on the earth. He knows he will see God with his own eyes. The word go'el is a kinship term: the go'el was the nearest relative obligated to redeem family members from slavery, avenge their blood, and restore their inheritance. By claiming a go'el, Job asserts that he has a kinsman in the highest court — someone bound by obligation to vindicate him. Since the book has established no heavenly intermediary other than God, the go'el is almost certainly God himself. Job is claiming that the God who destroys him is also the God who is obligated to redeem him. This is not hope despite despair — it is certainty forged in the furnace of despair. The passage has been read christologically since early Christianity (Handel's Messiah uses it), but its original force is even more radical: a man with no evidence, no ally, and no future declares that his Redeemer lives.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew of verses 25-27 is among the most textually difficult in the entire Hebrew Bible. Nearly every word is disputed. The phrase me-bessari echezeh Eloha ('from my flesh I will see God') could mean 'from within my flesh' (implying bodily resurrection) or 'apart from my flesh' (implying a vision after death). The word acharon ('last, latter') in 'he will stand upon the earth at the last' could mean 'at the end of time' or simply 'afterward, later.' The clause achar ori niqqefu zot ('after my skin has been struck/destroyed, this') is syntactically broken and has generated centuries of debate. What is clear is the emotional and theological trajectory: Job moves from total abandonment to absolute certainty about vindication, and he claims he will see God personally — be-essari ('my own eyes') and lo zar ('not a stranger'). The textual difficulties actually serve the passage: the language strains and breaks under the weight of what Job is trying to say, as if the Hebrew itself cannot contain the revelation.*

Connections: *The go'el concept connects to Ruth 3-4 (Boaz as kinsman-redeemer), Leviticus 25:25-55 (redemption of land and persons), Numbers 35:19 (the avenger of blood), and Isaiah 41:14, 43:14, 44:6 where God himself is called Israel's go'el. Job's declaration 'I will see God' (echezeh Eloha) anticipates the theophany in chapters 38-42 where Job does indeed see God. The phrase 'my own eyes and not a stranger's' connects to Moses seeing God 'face to face' (Exodus 33:11) and anticipates Psalm 17:15 ('I shall behold your face in righteousness'). The social alienation catalog (verses 13-19) parallels Psalm 88:8, 18 ('you have put my companions far from me'). Job's plea 'have pity on me, my friends' (verse 21) is the most direct emotional appeal in the book.*

1 Then responded:

2 How long will you torment my soul
and crush me with words?

3 Ten times now you have humiliated me.
You feel no shame in attacking me.

4 Even if I have truly erred,
my error remains my own affair.

5 If you truly intend to exalt yourselves over me
and use my disgrace as proof against me —

6 Then know this: it is God who has wronged me.
He has closed his net around me.

7 I cry out 'Violence!' but get no answer.
I scream for help, but there is no justice.

8 He has walled up my road so I cannot pass;
he has set darkness over my paths.

9 He has stripped my honor from me
and torn the crown from my head.

10 He demolishes me on every side until I am gone;
he uproots my hope like a tree.

11 His anger burns against me;
he counts me as one of his enemies.

12 His troops advance together;
they build siege ramps against me
and camp around my tent.

13 He has driven my family far from me;
those who know me have become strangers.

14 My relatives have abandoned me;
my close friends have forgotten me.

15 Those who live in my house and my servant women
treat me as a stranger.
I have become a foreigner in their eyes.

16 I call my servant, and he does not answer.
I must beg him with my own mouth.

17 My breath is repulsive to my wife;
I am loathsome to my own children.

18 Even young children despise me.
When I rise, they mock me.

19 All my closest friends despise me;
those I loved have turned against me.

20 My bones cling to my skin and my flesh;
I have escaped with nothing but the skin of my teeth.

21 Have pity on me! Have pity on me!
You are my friends!
For the hand of God has struck me.

22 Why do you pursue me the way God does?
Why are you never satisfied with my flesh?

23 If only my words were written down!
If only they were inscribed in a scroll!

24 With an iron stylus and lead,
chiseled into rock forever!

25 But I — I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.

26 Even after my skin has been stripped away,
from my flesh I will see God.

27 I myself will see him —
my own eyes will look on him, not a stranger's.
My heart faints within me with longing.

28 If you say, 'How shall we pursue him?' —
and 'The root of the problem lies in him' —

29 Then fear the sword yourselves!
For wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
so that you may know: there is a judgment.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard response formula. Job replies to Bildad's second speech (chapter 18), which indirectly described Job's exact situation as the fate of 'the wicked.'

2. Job mirrors Bildad's opening (18:2 — 'how long?') back at him. The togeyun nafshi ('you grieve/torment my soul') and tedakkhe'unani be-millim ('you crush me with words') make explicit what the friends deny: their theological speeches are instruments of torture. The verb dakha ('to crush') is used elsewhere for physical violence; here it describes the crushing power of bad theology.

3. The eser pe'amim ('ten times') is a round number meaning 'again and again' rather than a literal count. The takhlimu ('you shame, humiliate') is strong language. The lo tevoshu tahkeru li ('you are not ashamed to deal harshly with me, to harden yourselves against me') — the friends feel no compunction about their cruelty because they believe it is theologically justified.

4. A conditional concession: ve-af omnam shagiti ('and even if indeed I have erred'). The meshugati ('my error, my wandering') talin itti ('lodges with me, stays with me') — even if Job has sinned, it is between him and God, not the friends' business. The verb shagah ('to err, wander, go astray') implies unintentional mistake rather than deliberate rebellion.

5. The tagdilu ('you magnify yourselves, make yourselves great') alai ('over me, against me') describes the friends elevating themselves at Job's expense. The tokhichu alai cherpati ('you argue my reproach against me') — they use Job's suffering itself as evidence in their theological case. The logic is circular: Job suffers, therefore Job sinned, therefore his suffering is justified.

6. Job makes a staggering claim: Eloah ivvetani ('God has twisted me, perverted my cause, wronged me'). The verb avah means 'to twist, bend, pervert' — Job accuses God of perverting justice. The metsudo ('his net, his siege-work') alai hiqqif ('has surrounded me') — God has trapped Job in a net from which there is no escape. Ironically, Bildad just described the wicked being caught in nets (18:8); Job says God is the one who set the net.

7. The ets'aq chamas ('I cry out violence/injustice!') is the technical cry of a crime victim — the same word used of the violence that provoked the flood (Genesis 6:11). The ve-lo e'aneh ('and I am not answered') — the victim's cry goes unanswered. The ashavva ('I cry for help') produces ein mishpat ('there is no justice, no judgment'). The court is closed; the judge is the perpetrator.

8. God gadar orchi ('has fenced/walled my path') — the image of a road blocked by a stone wall. The lo e'evor ('I cannot pass through') describes total obstruction. The choshekh yasim ('he sets darkness') on Job's netivot ('paths, tracks') — even if Job could find a way around the wall, the road ahead is pitch dark. God has blocked both the route and the light needed to find an alternative.

9. The kevodi ('my glory, my honor') is hifshit ('stripped off') me-alai ('from upon me') — like stripping a robe from a king. The va-yasar ateret roshi ('and he removed the crown of my head') — the atarah ('crown, wreath') symbolizes dignity and social standing. Job was the greatest man in the east; now he is publicly degraded. The imagery of stripping and un-crowning echoes royal dethronement.

10. The yitteseni saviv ('he tears me down all around') describes demolition from every direction. The va-elakh ('and I go, I am gone') — Job is being erased. The va-yassa ka-ets tiqvati ('he uproots like a tree my hope') — the tree metaphor from 14:7 returns, but here it is worse: not the tree itself but the hope is uprooted. In 14:7 Job said a tree has more hope than a man; now even that tree-hope is pulled up by the roots.

11. The va-yachar alai appo ('his anger burns against me') — divine wrath is directed personally at Job. The va-yachsheveni lo ke-tsarav ('he reckons me as one of his adversaries') — God has classified Job as an enemy combatant. This is not theological abstraction but Job's lived experience: every aspect of his life has been systematically destroyed, which feels like the focused attention of an enemy.

12. The gedudav ('his raiding bands, his troops') come yachad ('together') — a coordinated military operation. They va-yassollu ('raise up, build a road/ramp') alai darkkam ('their way against me') — siege ramps for assaulting a fortified position. They va-yachanu saviv le-oholi ('and they encamp around my tent'). Job's tent — his last refuge — is under siege by God's own army.

13. The social catalog of abandonment begins. Achai ('my brothers, my family') me-alai hirchiq ('he has put far from me') — God is the agent of the estrangement. The yode'ai ('those who know me, my acquaintances') akh zaru ('have become utterly strange/foreign') mimmenni ('from me'). The verb zur ('to be a stranger') means they have become as foreign as people from another country.

14. The qerovai ('my near ones, my relatives') chadelu ('have ceased, stopped, abandoned'). The meyudda'ai ('my intimate acquaintances') shekhechuhi ('have forgotten me'). The progression intensifies: first brothers became strangers (v13), now relatives have actively abandoned and friends have erased him from memory.

15. The garei veiti ('the guests/residents of my house') and amhotai ('my maidservants') — even the people under his own roof — le-zar tachshevuni ('reckon me as a stranger'). The nokhri hayiti be-eineihem ('I have become a foreigner in their eyes'). The nokhri is the complete outsider, the alien with no rights. The man who was master of the household is now an unrecognized intruder in his own home.

16. The role reversal is total: Job, who once commanded servants, now qarati ('I call') and lo ya'aneh ('he does not answer'). The be-mo fi etchannen lo ('with my own mouth I plead with him, I beg him for grace') — the master begs the servant. The verb chanan ('to show grace, have mercy') is what subjects do before kings; now Job does it before his own household staff.

17. The ruchi zarah le-ishti ('my breath/spirit is strange/repulsive to my wife') — Job's wife, who in 2:9 told him to curse God and die, now cannot stand to be near him. The ve-channoti livnei vitni ('and my plea for grace to the children of my belly') — the livnei vitni ('sons of my body/womb') may refer to surviving children or to the memory of the dead ones. The devastation of the most intimate human bond — marriage — is expressed through the simple physical detail of unbearable breath.

18. The avilim ('young children, small boys') ma'asu vi ('reject me, despise me'). The aqumah va-yedabberu vi ('I rise and they speak against me') — even standing up provokes mockery. Children, who should show respect to elders, instead treat Job with contempt. In a culture that honored age, this represents the total collapse of social order around him.

19. The metei sodi ('the men of my council, my confidants') ti'avuni ('abhor me, find me loathsome'). The zeh ahavti ('those I loved') nehpekhu vi ('have turned against me'). The sod is the intimate circle of trusted advisors — the inner ring has become a circle of accusers. The verb hafakh ('to turn, overturn') means the love has been inverted into hostility.

20. The atsmi davqah be-ori u-vivsari ('my bone clings to my skin and flesh') describes extreme emaciation — no fat, no muscle, just bone pressed against skin. The va-etmalletah be-or shinnai ('I have escaped with the skin of my teeth') is the origin of the English idiom. Since teeth have no skin, the phrase means 'I have escaped with nothing at all' — survival by the thinnest possible margin, with literally nothing left.

21. The doubled chonnuni chonnuni ('have mercy on me, have mercy on me') is the most raw and direct plea in the book. The attem re'ai ('you are my friends') appeals to the relationship itself — if friendship means anything, show it now. The ki yad Eloha nag'ah bi ('for the hand of God has touched/struck me') gives the reason: Job does not ask for theological agreement, only for compassion in the face of divine assault. The verb naga ('to touch, strike, afflict') is the same word used in 1:11 and 2:5 where the Adversary requested permission to 'touch' Job.

22. The tirdephuni kemo El ('you pursue me like God') equates the friends' behavior with God's — both are relentlessly attacking him. The u-mibbessari lo tisba'u ('and from my flesh you are not satisfied') — they keep consuming his flesh metaphorically, feeding on his suffering, and never have enough. The friends have become additional predators alongside God.

23. The mi yitten ('who will give,' meaning 'if only, would that') introduces an urgent wish. Job wants his millai ('my words') yikkatevu ('written') — preserved in permanent form. The ba-ssefer ('in a book/scroll') ve-yuchchaqu ('and inscribed, engraved') intensifies the desire for permanence. Job wants a record that will outlast him — if he cannot win his case in life, perhaps the written testimony will vindicate him after death.

24. The permanence escalates: from scroll (v23) to rock. The et barzel ('iron pen/stylus') and oferet ('lead') — either an iron chisel with lead filling the carved letters, or an iron pen writing on a lead tablet. The la-ad ('forever, in perpetuity') ba-tsur ('in the rock') yechatsevu ('let them be hewn, carved'). Job wants his testimony carved in stone so that future generations can read it and judge. The irony: the book of Job itself fulfills this wish — his words have been preserved for three thousand years.

25. The go'el is one of the most theologically loaded terms in the Hebrew Bible. In its legal context (Leviticus 25, Numbers 35, Ruth 3-4), the go'el is the nearest kinsman who has the right and obligation to redeem — to buy back a relative from debt slavery, to purchase forfeited family land, to avenge the blood of a murdered relative. When applied to God (as in Isaiah 41:14, 43:14, 44:6, 44:24), it asserts that God stands in kinship relation to his people and is obligated — by his own covenant — to act on their behalf. Job's use of go'el is stunning because he claims this kinship obligation from a God he has accused of injustice. The acharon ('last, latter, final') is debated: it could mean 'at the last day' (eschatological), 'afterward' (temporal), or 'as the final witness' (legal). The verb yaqum ('he will stand, he will arise') is used for a witness or advocate taking the stand in court.

26. The textual difficulties in this verse are genuine and longstanding. The Masoretic text is likely corrupt at several points. The phrase niqqefu zot has been variously translated as 'they have struck off this,' 'they have cut around this,' 'they have destroyed this.' The referent of zot ('this') is uncertain — it may refer to the body, the skin, or the entire situation. Despite the textual chaos, the theological thrust is unmistakable: Job will see God. The min ('from') before bassari ('my flesh') has been the hinge of resurrection theology in Jewish and Christian interpretation. If it means 'from within my flesh,' this is a statement of bodily resurrection; if 'apart from my flesh,' it is a vision after death. The Hebrew supports both readings.

27. The triple emphasis on personal vision (I, my eyes, not a stranger's) counters any suggestion that vindication will come through someone else's testimony. Job demands direct encounter. The phrase ve-lo zar ('and not a stranger, not another') may also be translated 'and not estranged' — meaning Job will see God not as an enemy but as his go'el, his kinsman. The kalu khilyotai be-cheqi ('my kidneys are consumed in my lap/bosom') is pure emotional language — the yearning is so intense it feels like physical dissolution. The kidneys (kilayot) in Hebrew thought are the seat of the deepest emotions and conscience, equivalent to the 'heart' in modern English.

28. Job turns to warn the friends. Their impulse is mah nirdaf lo ('how shall we pursue him, what grounds for persecution?') — they are looking for more charges to bring. Their conclusion: shoresh davar nimtsa vi ('the root of the matter is found in him') — the cause of Job's suffering is in Job himself. Job quotes their position in order to dismantle it.

29. Job's closing warning is a threat. The guru lakhem ('be afraid for yourselves, tremble') mi-penei cherev ('before the sword') — the sword of divine judgment. The ki chemah avonot charev ('for wrath is the punishment of the sword') — the friends' sin of false accusation carries consequences. The lema'an ted'un shaddun ('so that you may know there is a judgment, there is a judge') — the same God they invoke against Job will judge them. The word shaddun may be related to Shaddai (the Almighty), creating a wordplay: the Almighty himself is the judge they should fear. Job in 42:7-8 will be vindicated and God will rebuke the friends — this warning proves prophetic.

20

Summary: *Zophar delivers his second and final speech in the dialogue cycle. He is stung by Job's warning of divine judgment (19:29) and responds with a lengthy meditation on the brevity of wicked prosperity. His central thesis: the wicked may enjoy temporary success, but their triumph is short-lived. The joy of the godless lasts only a moment. Even if the wicked man grows tall enough to touch the clouds, he will perish like his own dung. He swallows wealth but God forces him to vomit it back up. The sweetness of sin turns to venom in his stomach — he sucks the poison of cobras, and the viper's tongue kills him. He will not enjoy the rivers of honey and cream he accumulated. What he toiled for he gives back without swallowing; he gets no enjoyment from his wealth. Because he crushed and abandoned the poor, because he seized houses he did not build, his belly will know no peace, and nothing he desires will survive. God's burning anger will rain down on him as his food, and heaven and earth will rise against him. The produce of his house will be carried away, swept off in the day of God's wrath. This, Zophar concludes, is the portion God assigns to the wicked.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Zophar's speech is the most elaborate development of retribution theology in the dialogue. Where Eliphaz argued from experience and Bildad from tradition, Zophar argues from visceral imagery — the body itself becomes the theater of divine justice. The dominant metaphor is digestion: the wicked man swallows wealth (verse 15), but God makes him vomit it up. He eats sweetness that turns to cobra venom in his gut (verses 12-14). He gorges himself but gets no satisfaction (verse 20). His belly knows no peace (verse 20). The body rebels against ill-gotten gain. This is theology of the gut — the idea that the universe has a digestive system that rejects what was wrongly consumed. The imagery is powerful and contains a genuine moral insight: stolen wealth does not nourish. But Zophar deploys it as a weapon against Job, implying that Job's suffering is the cosmic gag reflex expelling something he swallowed wrongfully.*

Translation Friction: *Zophar's theology is not entirely wrong — the observation that ill-gotten wealth often destroys its possessor has empirical support. The problem is the application: Zophar assumes that all suffering is the rejection of ill-gotten gain, which requires assuming Job acquired his wealth dishonestly. The book has already established (1:1, 1:8, 2:3) that Job is blameless, but Zophar does not have that information. He is working from a theological system that cannot accommodate innocent suffering. This is the tragedy of the friends: they are not stupid or malicious, but their framework has no category for what is happening to Job. The speech also reveals Zophar's personal agitation — his opening words (verses 2-3) betray that Job's threat in 19:29 has gotten under his skin. He speaks from wounded pride as much as theological conviction.*

Connections: *The vomiting metaphor (verse 15) has a disturbing parallel in Leviticus 18:28 where the land 'vomits out' inhabitants who practice abomination. Zophar's cobra venom imagery (verses 14, 16) connects to Deuteronomy 32:33 ('their wine is the venom of serpents'). The 'rivers of honey and cream' (verse 17) inverts the promised land imagery of Exodus 3:8 ('a land flowing with milk and honey') — the wicked man will never enjoy his version of the promised land. The 'portion from God' language (verse 29) connects to the inheritance terminology used throughout the Hebrew Bible for Israel's relationship to the land. Zophar's speech is the last time he speaks in the book — he has no third speech, suggesting his argument has exhausted itself.*

1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

2 My troubled thoughts drive me to answer —
the agitation inside me compels me.

3 I hear a rebuke that insults me,
but the spirit of my understanding gives me an answer.

4 Surely you know this — it has been true from ancient times,
from the day humanity was set upon the earth:

5 The triumph of the wicked is short,
and the joy of the godless lasts only a moment.

6 Even if his greatness rises to the heavens
and his head reaches the clouds —

7 he will perish forever like his own dung.
Those who saw him will say, 'Where is he?'

8 He flies away like a dream and cannot be found;
he is chased off like a vision in the night.

9 The eye that glimpsed him will see him no more;
his place will never look upon him again.

10 His children will beg from the poor;
his own hands will give back his wealth.

11 His bones are full of youthful vigor,
but it will lie with him in the dust.

12 Though evil is sweet in his mouth
and he hides it under his tongue —

13 though he savors it and will not let it go,
holding it against the roof of his mouth —

14 but his food turns inside him;
it becomes cobra venom in his gut.

15 He swallows wealth, but vomits it back up.
God forces it out of his belly.

16 He sucks the poison of cobras;
the tongue of the viper kills him.

17 He will never see the rivers,
the streams flowing with honey and cream.

18 He gives back what he toiled for without swallowing it.
The profit of his trade brings him no joy.

19 Because he crushed and abandoned the poor,
because he seized a house he did not build —

20 Because he knew no peace in his craving,
nothing he desired will he save.

21 Nothing is left for him to consume;
therefore his prosperity will not endure.

22 At the peak of his abundance, distress finds him;
the full force of misery falls upon him.

23 When he is filling his belly,
God hurls his burning anger at him
and rains it down on him as his food.

24 He flees from the iron weapon,
but a bronze bow pierces him through.

25 He draws the arrow out — it exits through his back.
The gleaming point comes from his bile;
terrors descend on him.

26 Total darkness is stored up for his treasures.
A fire no one kindled consumes him;
it devours whatever remains in his tent.

27 The heavens expose his guilt;
the earth rises up against him.

28 The produce of his house is swept away,
washed out on the day of God's wrath.

29 This is the portion God assigns to the wicked,
the inheritance God has decreed for him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Zophar ha-Na'amati ('the Naamathite') speaks for the second and last time. He will not speak in the third cycle — some scholars believe his speech was lost or that the author intentionally omitted it to show the friends running out of arguments.
2. The se'ippai ('my disquieting thoughts, my anxious reflections') yeshivuni ('cause me to answer, drive me back'). The ba'avur chushi vi ('on account of my haste/agitation within me') — Zophar admits he is emotionally agitated. Job's warning about the sword of judgment (19:29) has disturbed him. His response is driven not by calm reflection but by urgency and personal offense.
3. The musar kelimmati ('the discipline/rebuke of my insult/shame') eshma ('I hear') — Zophar acknowledges that Job's words (particularly 19:29) felt like a personal attack. But ruach mi-bbinati ('a spirit from my understanding') ya'aneni ('answers me, gives me a response'). Zophar claims his reply comes from deep insight, not mere defensiveness — though the reader may doubt this.
4. Zophar appeals to primordial authority: ha-zot yadata ('do you know this') minni ad ('from eternity, from ancient times'). The minni sim adam alei arets ('since humanity was placed upon the earth') grounds his teaching in creation itself. Zophar claims his theology is as old as the human race.
5. Zophar's thesis statement: rinnat resha'im ('the shout of joy / triumph of the wicked') mi-qqarov ('is from near, is brief'). The simchat chanef ('the joy of the godless/hypocrite') adei raga ('until a moment, lasting only an instant'). Everything that follows is an elaboration of this claim: wicked prosperity is real but fleeting.
6. The si'o ('his exaltation, his height, his pride') ya'aleh la-shamayim ('goes up to the heavens'). The rosho ('his head') la-av yaggi'a ('reaches to the cloud'). The imagery evokes the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4) — human ambition reaching for the sky. The conditional 'even if' sets up the reversal that follows.
7. The reversal is brutal: ke-gelelo ('like his own dung, his own excrement') la-netsach yo'ved ('he perishes forever'). The man whose head touched the clouds will be reduced to waste. The ro'av ('those who saw him') yo'meru ayyo ('will say: where is he?'). The question ayyo ('where is he?') echoes the question asked about those who vanish without a trace.
8. The ka-chalom ('like a dream') ya'uf ('he flies away') — the wicked man's existence has the substance of a dream. The lo yimtsa'uhu ('they will not find him') — he vanishes completely. The yuddad ('he is driven away, chased off') ke-chezyon lailah ('like a night vision'). Both images — dream and night vision — describe something that seems real in the moment but has no substance when morning comes.

9. The ayin shezafattu ('the eye that caught sight of him, that glimpsed him') ve-lo tosif ('and it will not do so again'). The meqomo ('his place') — the physical location where he lived — teshurennhu ('will look upon him') no more. Even the place itself will not recognize him. The land forgets its former occupant.

10. The role reversal: banav ('his children') yerattsu dallim ('will seek favor from the poor, will court the destitute'). The children of the rich become supplicants to the poor. The yadav ('his hands') tashevnah ono ('will return his wealth/vigor') — what the wicked man accumulated will be forcibly returned, and his own hands will do the returning.

11. The atsmotav ('his bones') mal'u alumav ('are full of his youth, his youthful strength'). The irony: his body is strong, yet ve-immo al afar tishkav ('with him upon the dust it will lie down'). Youthful vigor offers no protection; it goes into the grave with him. Strength and death share the same bed.

12. The digestion metaphor begins. The tamtiq ('is sweet, he makes sweet') be-fiv ('in his mouth') ra'ah ('evil, wickedness') — sin tastes good. He yakhchidenah ('conceals it, hides it') tachat leshono ('under his tongue') — savoring it like a piece of candy held in the mouth. The image is of a man who relishes wrongdoing, who lets it dissolve slowly on his palate.

13. The yachmol ('he spares, cherishes, is reluctant to part with') aleiha ('over it'). The lo ya'azvenah ('he will not abandon it, let it go'). The yimna'enah ('he holds it back, keeps it') be-tokh chikko ('in the middle of his palate'). Three descriptions of the same reluctance to release: the wicked man clings to his sin the way a person clings to a delicious morsel.

14. The reversal: lachmo ('his bread, his food') be-me'av ('in his bowels, in his intestines') nehpakh ('is turned, is transformed'). What was sweet becomes merorat petanim ('the bitterness/gall of cobras') be-qirbo ('in his midst, in his insides'). The petanim ('cobras, asps') produce venom that destroys from within. The theological claim: sin may taste sweet but it metabolizes into poison.

15. The chayil ('wealth, strength, resources') bala ('he swallowed') — wealth is consumed greedily. But va-yeqi'ennu ('and he vomits it up') — the body rejects it. God himself is the agent: mi-bbitno yorishennu El ('from his belly God dispossesses him, drives it out'). The image is of God reaching into the wicked man's stomach and forcing the ejection of stolen goods. The verb yarash in the hiphil means 'to dispossess,' connecting economic robbery to bodily purging.

16. The ro'sh petanim ('the poison/venom of cobras') yinaq ('he sucks, he nurses') — the wicked man drinks venom as if nursing from a breast. The taharghehu ('it kills him') leshon ef'eh ('the tongue of the viper'). The snake imagery intensifies: in verse 14 the venom was inside him; now he actively drinks it. The ef'eh ('viper') is a different species from the peten ('cobra'), broadening the threat — every kind of serpent contributes to his destruction.

17. The al yere' ('he will not see') bi-felaggot ('the channels, the water-courses') naharei nachalei ('rivers of streams of') devash ve-chem'ah ('honey and cream/butter'). The rivers of honey and cream invert the promised land imagery — Exodus 3:8's 'land flowing with milk and honey' described God's gift to his people. The wicked man forfeits this abundance. He will never enjoy the prosperity he thought he was building.

18. The meshiv yaga ('he returns what he labored for') ve-lo yivla ('and he does not swallow') — forced restitution. The ke-cheil temourato ('like the wealth of his exchange/profit') ve-lo ya'alos ('and he does not rejoice'). The digestion metaphor continues: the wicked man cannot even swallow his gains. The food is snatched from his mouth before it reaches his stomach.

19. The cause: ritsats ('he crushed, he shattered') azav dallim ('he abandoned the poor'). The bayit gazal ('a house he seized, stole') ve-lo yivnehu ('and he did not build it') — he appropriated what others built. This verse provides the ethical basis for the entire speech: the wicked man's wealth comes from exploitation of the vulnerable. The poor (dallim) are his victims.

20. The lo yada shalev be-vitno ('he did not know calm/contentment in his belly') — the gut of the greedy person is never at rest. The ba-chamudo ('in his desire, with what he craves') lo yemallit ('he will not rescue, he will not save'). The insatiable appetite destroys itself: because the craving never stops, nothing is ever secured. The belly, seat of appetite, becomes the seat of punishment.

21. The ein sarid le-okhlo ('there is no survivor/remnant for his eating') — he has consumed everything and nothing remains. The al ken lo yachil tuvo ('therefore his good/prosperity will not last, will not endure'). The verb chul ('to endure, to wait, to writhe') suggests that prosperity itself cannot bear to stay in the possession of such a person.

22. The bi-melo'ot sifqo ('in the fullness of his sufficiency/abundance') yetser lo ('it is narrow for him, distress comes upon him'). At the very moment of maximum prosperity, the reversal begins. The kol yad amel ('every hand of the toiler/sufferer') tevo'ennu ('comes upon him') — either the hands of those he oppressed rise against him, or 'every afflicting hand' strikes him. Maximum wealth and maximum suffering coincide.

23. The yehi le-malle vitno ('let it be to fill his belly') — the moment of consumption. God yeshalach bo charon appo ('sends against him his burning anger'). The ve-yamter aleimu ('and he rains upon them') bilchumo ('as his food, while he eats'). God's wrath becomes the wicked man's meal — he opens his mouth to eat and swallows divine fury instead. The rain of anger echoes the rain of sulfur on Sodom (Genesis 19:24).

24. Escape is impossible: yivrach ('he flees') mi-nnesheq barzel ('from the weapon of iron'). But tachliphehu ('it passes through him') qeshet nechusah ('a bow of bronze'). Avoiding one threat exposes him to another. The iron and bronze represent the two dominant metals of ancient warfare — every direction of flight leads to another weapon.

25. The shalaf ('he draws out') va-yetse mi-ggevah ('and it comes out from his back/body') — the arrow has passed entirely through him. The baraq ('lightning, gleam') mi-mmeroroto ('from his bile, from his gall') — the bright arrowhead emerges from his internal organs, smeared with bile. The emim ('terrors') are alav ('upon him'). The physical detail is clinically graphic — Zophar describes a fatal through-and-through wound with the arrow exiting the gall bladder.

26. The kol choshekh tamun li-tsefunav ('all darkness is hidden for his stored treasures') — what the wicked man hoarded in secret will be met by darkness. The te'okhllehu esh lo nuppach ('a fire not blown/kindled consumes him') — a supernatural fire, not started by human hands, devours him. This echoes the fire from God in 1:16 that consumed Job's sheep. The yera sarid be-oholo ('it goes badly for the survivor in his tent') — even any remaining household member suffers.

27. The shamayim ('heavens') yegallu ('reveal, uncover, expose') avono ('his iniquity, his guilt'). The erets ('earth') mitqomemah ('rises up, stands up against') lo ('against him'). The entire created order — heaven and earth — conspires to judge the wicked man. The cosmos itself is a witness for the prosecution. This is the opposite of Job's plea in 16:18, where he asked the earth not to cover his blood — Zophar claims the earth actively exposes the wicked.

28. The yigel yevul beito ('the produce/yield of his house is carried off') — everything the household generated is confiscated. The niggarot ('poured out, washed away like a flood') be-yom appo ('on the day of his anger') — the day of divine wrath washes away all possessions like a flash flood. The verb nagar ('to pour, flow, be poured out') suggests an unstoppable torrent.

29. Zophar's conclusion: zeh cheleq adam rasha me-Elohim ('this is the portion of a wicked person from God'). The nachalat imro me-El ('the inheritance of his decree/word from God') — God himself has assigned this fate. The cheleq ('portion, share, allotment') and nachalah ('inheritance') are land-distribution terms — just as Israel received an inheritance of land from God, the wicked receive an inheritance of destruction. Zophar frames cosmic retribution as divine estate planning. The speech ends with absolute confidence in its own framework — a confidence the book will dismantle.

21

Summary: *Job delivers his devastating reply to Zophar's second speech and, by extension, to the entire retribution theology shared by all three friends. His argument is simple and empirical: the wicked DO prosper. They live to old age, grow mighty in power, see their children established, and their houses are safe from fear. Their bulls breed without fail, their children dance, they sing to the timbrel and harp, and they spend their days in prosperity. They say to God, 'Leave us alone — we have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?' And yet nothing happens to them. Job asks: how often does the lamp of the wicked actually go out? How often does calamity actually fall on them? The friends claim God stores up punishment for the wicked man's children — but Job says: let God punish the man himself, so he can feel it. What does a dead man care what happens to his household after he is gone? Job observes that both the wicked and the righteous end up in the same dust, eaten by the same worms. The friends' theology does not match observable reality. He dismisses their comfort as empty lies.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is Job's most sustained empirical argument and represents a direct inversion of Zophar's speech in chapter 20. Where Zophar said wicked prosperity is brief (20:5), Job says the wicked grow old and mighty (21:7). Where Zophar described children begging from the poor (20:10), Job describes children dancing and secure (21:11-12). Where Zophar claimed divine wrath falls on the wicked as food (20:23), Job says the wicked eat and drink in peace and dismiss God entirely (21:14-15). Point by point, Job dismantles the retribution framework with observation. The theological danger of Job's argument is real: if the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, what is the moral structure of the universe? Job does not answer this — he simply insists on stating the problem honestly rather than burying it under pious theory. His argument anticipates Ecclesiastes and Psalm 73.*

Translation Friction: *Job's claim that the wicked prosper unchecked creates a theological crisis that the book does not resolve in conventional terms. The friends' retribution theology (the righteous prosper, the wicked perish) is the dominant framework of Proverbs and Deuteronomy. Job does not deny that framework as an ideal — he denies it as a reliable description of observable reality. This puts him in tension not only with his friends but with large portions of Israel's wisdom tradition. The resolution comes only in the theophany (chapters 38-42), where God does not explain the moral calculus but reveals a universe of overwhelming complexity that exceeds human categories of fairness. Job's argument in chapter 21 is the necessary demolition work that makes the theophany meaningful — without the honest acknowledgment that retribution theology fails empirically, God's answer from the whirlwind would be addressing a straw man.*

Connections: *Job's observation that the wicked dismiss God ('Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?' — verse 15) parallels Pharaoh's defiance in Exodus 5:2 ('Who is YHWH that I should obey his voice?'). The image of the wicked spending their days in prosperity echoes Psalm 73:3-12, where the psalmist is troubled by the same observation until he enters the sanctuary. The claim that the righteous and wicked share the same fate in death*

anticipates Ecclesiastes 9:2-3 ('the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked'). Job's dismissal of vicarious punishment for children (verse 19) engages the principle stated in Exodus 20:5 (visiting iniquity on children to the third and fourth generation) and anticipates Ezekiel 18's rejection of that principle: 'The soul that sins, it shall die.'

1 Then Job answered and said:

2 Listen — truly listen to my words,
and let that be the comfort you offer me.

3 Bear with me while I speak,
and after I have spoken — then you may mock.

4 Is my complaint directed at a human being?
If so, why should I not lose patience?

5 Turn to me and be appalled.
Put your hand over your mouth.

6 When I think about it, I am horrified;
shuddering seizes my body.

7 Why do the wicked go on living,
growing old and even gaining power?

8 Their children are secure before them,
their descendants right before their eyes.

9 Their houses are at peace, free from dread;
the rod of God does not fall on them.

10 His bull breeds without fail;
his cow calves and does not miscarry.

11 They send out their little ones like a flock;
their children dance and play.

12 They lift up the tambourine and lyre
and celebrate to the sound of the flute.

13 They finish their days in prosperity
and go down to the grave in peace.

14 They say to God, 'Leave us alone!
We have no desire to know your ways.'

15 'Who is the Almighty that we should serve him?
What do we gain by praying to him?'

16 Yet their prosperity is not in their own hands.
The counsel of the wicked is far from me!

17How often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out?
How often does their disaster come upon them?
How often does God deal out pain in his anger?

18How often are they like straw before the wind,
like chaff that the storm sweeps away?

19You say, 'God stores up his punishment for his children.'
Let God repay the man himself, so he knows it!

20Let his own eyes see his ruin!
Let him drink the wrath of the Almighty!

21What does a dead man care about his household after him,
once the count of his months is cut short?

22Can anyone teach God knowledge,
he who judges even the exalted ones?

23One person dies in perfect wholeness,
completely at ease and secure.

24His body is full of nourishment;
his bones are rich with marrow.

25Another dies with a bitter soul,
having never tasted anything good.

26Side by side they lie in the dust,
and the worms cover them both.

27Look — I know your thoughts
and the schemes you devise against me.

28You say, 'Where is the great man's house?
Where is the tent where the wicked lived?'

29Have you never asked travelers on the road?
Do you not recognize their testimony?

30The wicked is spared on the day of disaster;
he is carried away from the day of wrath.

31Who denounces his conduct to his face?
Who repays him for what he has done?

32He is carried to his tomb in honor,
and a watch is kept over his burial mound.

33The clods of the valley lie gently on him.
All humanity follows in his path;
those who went before him are beyond counting.

34So how can you comfort me with empty breath?
Nothing is left of your answers but lies.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Standard response formula. Job replies to Zophar's second speech (chapter 20). What follows is the most empirically grounded argument in the entire dialogue.

2. The shim'u shamoa ('hear, truly hear' — the infinitive absolute intensifies the command) millati ('my word, my speech'). Job demands genuine attention rather than the rehearsed theological responses the friends keep delivering. The tehi zot tanchumoteikhem ('let this be your consolations') is biting: the best comfort the friends can offer is simply to listen.

3. The se'uni ('bear me, endure me, lift me up') ve-anokhi adabber ('and I myself will speak'). The ve-achar dabbri tal'ig ('and after my speaking, mock') — Job grants sarcastic permission: go ahead and mock, but at least hear me out first. The verb la'ag ('to mock, to scorn') acknowledges that Job expects ridicule rather than understanding.

4. The he-anokhi le-adam sichi ('is my complaint to/against a human?') — Job's grievance is not against the friends but against God, or against the way the universe operates. The ve-im maddua lo tiqtsar ruchi ('and if so, why should my spirit not be short/impatient?'). The qatsar ruach ('short of spirit') idiom means losing patience. Job's real quarrel is cosmic, not interpersonal.

5. The penu elai ('turn to me, face me') ve-hashammu ('and be desolate, be appalled, be stunned'). Job tells the friends that what he is about to say should shock them. The simu yad al peh ('put your hand on your mouth') — the gesture of silenced astonishment. This gesture will reappear when Job himself is silenced by God's speech (40:4).

6. The ve-im zakharti ('and when I remember, and when I consider') ve-nivhalti ('I am terrified, I am dismayed'). The achaz bissari pallatsut ('trembling/shuddering seizes my flesh'). Job is not exaggerating for effect — the reality he is about to describe genuinely horrifies him. The observation that the wicked prosper is not a comfortable conclusion; it terrifies the person who draws it.

7. The three verbs form a devastating sequence: yichyu ('they live'), atequ ('they grow old'), gavru chayil ('they become mighty in power'). Each verb escalates: survival, longevity, increasing strength. This is the exact opposite of the three-fold destruction pattern the friends describe for the wicked. Job does not deny that some wicked people perish — he denies that all of them do, which is enough to destroy the friends' universal claims.

8. The zar'am ('their seed, their offspring') nakhon ('is established, secure, firm') lifneihem immam ('before them, with them'). The tse'etsa'eihem ('their offspring, their descendants') le-eineihem ('before their eyes'). The wicked not only survive — they see their children thrive. This directly contradicts Bildad's claim that the wicked are childless (18:19) and Zophar's claim that their children beg from the poor (20:10).

9. The batteihem shalom mi-ppachad ('their houses are peace/wholeness away from fear') — the shalom here is not merely the absence of trouble but the positive state of well-being. The lo shevet Eloha aleihem ('no rod of God upon them') — God's disciplinary instrument does not strike them. The shevet ('rod, staff, scepter') is the instrument of correction. The wicked live uncorrected.

10. Agricultural prosperity: shoro ibbar ('his bull impregnates, breeds') ve-lo yag'il ('and does not fail, does not reject'). The tefallet parato ('his cow delivers') ve-lo teshakkel ('and does not miscarry, does not lose her young'). Livestock fertility was the primary measure of economic prosperity. The wicked man's herds flourish. Job describes what he himself once had (1:3) — and what was taken from him, not because of wickedness but by divine testing.

11. The yeshallechu ka-tson avileihem ('they send out like a flock their young children') — the image is of carefree children tumbling out to play like lambs in a pasture. The yaldeihem yeraqqedun ('their children dance, skip, leap'). The picture is one of innocent joy and security. Job himself had ten children (1:2) who feasted together (1:4-5) — and all were killed in a single day (1:18-19). The description of happy children belonging to the wicked is excruciating in light of Job's loss.

12. The yis'u ke-tof ve-khinnor ('they lift up the tambourine and the lyre') — these are instruments of celebration and worship. The yismechu le-qol ugav ('they rejoice at the sound of the pipe/flute'). The wicked enjoy music, feasting, and joy. The tof, kinnor, and ugav form a trio of instruments associated with festivity (cf. Genesis 31:27, Isaiah 5:12). The wicked live in perpetual celebration.

13. The yekhallu va-ttov yemeihem ('they complete/finish in good/prosperity their days') — their entire life, from beginning to end, is prosperous. The u-ve-rega she'ol yechatu ('and in a moment to Sheol they descend'). The be-rega ('in a moment') here describes a quick, painless death — not the drawn-out suffering of prolonged disease. The wicked die easily. They do not linger in agony the way Job does. The verb nachat ('to descend, to go down') to She'ol describes a peaceful departure, not a violent removal.

14. The va-yomeru la-El sur mimmenu ('they say to God: turn aside from us, depart from us'). The ve-da'at derakhekha lo chafatsnu ('and the knowledge of your ways we do not desire'). The wicked explicitly reject God — not in secret, but openly. They tell God to go away. And God, apparently, does nothing. This is the fact that horrifies Job: active, vocal rejection of God goes unpunished while Job, who never rejected God, is destroyed.

15. The Shaddai ('the Almighty') is one of the primary divine names in Job, used 31 times in the book. The wicked use the name dismissively — not denying God's existence but questioning his relevance. The verb ya'al ('to profit, to benefit') in the hiphil means 'to gain advantage' — religion is treated as an investment, and the wicked find the returns insufficient. The verb paga ('to meet, to encounter, to intercede') means 'to approach God in prayer.' The wicked see no point in praying.

16. Job inserts a disclaimer: hen lo be-yadam tuvam ('indeed, their good/prosperity is not in their hand') — their prosperity ultimately comes from God, not from their own doing. The atsat resha'im rachaqa menni ('the counsel of the wicked is far from me') — Job distances himself from their philosophy. He is not endorsing atheism or rebellion against God. He is simply reporting what he observes. The disclaimer prevents the friends from accusing Job of adopting wicked ideology.

17. The kammah ('how often?') is a rhetorical question expecting the answer 'rarely.' The ner resha'im yid'akh ('the lamp of the wicked goes out') quotes the friends' own imagery back at them — Bildad said exactly this in 18:5-6. Job asks: how often does it actually happen? The avalanche of 'how often' questions exposes the gap between the friends' confident claims and observable reality. The chavalim ('cords of pain, birth-pangs, destruction') yechalleq be-appo ('he distributes in his anger') — God supposedly distributes punishment in anger, but Job asks how often this actually occurs.

18. Job continues the 'how often' challenge from verse 17, now applied to the classic imagery of divine judgment. The ke-teven lifnei ruach ('like straw before the wind') and ke-mots genavatto sufah ('like chaff that the storm steals away') are standard images for the destruction of the wicked (Psalm 1:4, Isaiah 17:13). Job does not deny that this sometimes happens — he denies that it happens reliably or universally. The imagery is borrowed from the friends' own vocabulary and turned into a skeptical question.

19. Job quotes the friends' defense: Eloah yitspon le-vanav ono ('God stores up his iniquity for his children') — the claim that God punishes the wicked man's descendants rather than the wicked man himself. Job finds this morally outrageous: yeshallem elav ve-yeda ('let him repay him so that he knows it') — what good is punishment that the guilty party never experiences? The demand for personal accountability anticipates Ezekiel 18's insistence that 'the soul that sins, it shall die' — not the son, not the grandson, but the sinner himself.

20. The yir'u einav kido ('let his eyes see his destruction') — Job demands that the wicked man witness his own punishment. The u-me-chamat Shaddai yishteh ('and from the fury of the Almighty let him drink') — drinking God's wrath is a recurring biblical image (Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15). Job's point is ethical: justice requires that the guilty person experience the consequences, not have them transferred to innocent descendants.

21. The ma cheftso be-veito acharav ('what is his pleasure/desire in his house after him') — once dead, the wicked man is beyond caring what happens to his family. The u-mispar chodashav chutsatsu ('and the number of his months is cut in half, cut off') — his allotted time has expired. The argument is pragmatic and devastating: vicarious punishment is no punishment at all, because the dead are beyond caring.

22. The ha-le-El yelammod da'at ('shall anyone teach God knowledge?') — Job anticipates the objection that he is instructing God on how to run the universe. He deflects it with irony: God judges ramim ('the exalted, the high ones') — a possible reference to angelic beings or heavenly powers. Job is not claiming to teach God; he is pointing out that God's actual practice does not match the friends' theory about God's practice.

23. The zeh yamut be-etsem tummo ('this one dies in the bone/essence of his completeness/integrity') — tummo comes from the same root as tam, the word used to describe Job in 1:1. One person dies in full integrity, with everything intact. The kullo shal'anan ve-shalev ('wholly at ease, wholly tranquil'). Job is describing the peaceful death of someone who lived well — perhaps even a righteous person. The contrast with verse 25 will be devastating.

24. The atinav ('his pails' or 'his sides/flanks') mal'u chalav ('are full of milk') — the image is of a body abundantly nourished, fat with health. The u-moach atsmotav yeshuqqeh ('and the marrow of his bones is moistened, is well-watered'). Marrow-rich bones signify vitality and health. This person dies in a state of complete physical abundance.

25. The nefesh marah ('bitter soul, embittered life') describes someone whose entire existence has been suffering. The lo akhal ba-ttovah ('he never ate in/with good') is a summary of deprivation. Job may be describing himself: a righteous man who now dies in bitterness without having tasted good. The parallel with verse 23 forces the reader to confront the randomness of human experience.

26. The yachad al afar yishkavu ('together upon the dust they lie down') — the prosperous and the bitter, the righteous and the wicked, end up in the same place. The ve-rimmah tekhassah aleihem ('and the worm covers over them') — maggots make no moral distinctions. This verse is the conclusion of the two-death comparison: whatever differences existed in life, death erases them. The observation anticipates Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 ('all go to one place; all are from the dust, and all return to the dust').

27. The hen yadati machshevoteikhem ('indeed I know your thoughts') — Job reads the friends' minds. He knows what they are thinking even before they say it. The u-mezimmot alai tachmose ('and the plots/devices against me you do violence with'). The verb chamas ('to do violence, to wrong') is used for the friends' theological arguments — Job considers their reasoning an act of violence against him.

28. Job quotes the friends' expected response: ayyeh beit nadiv ('where is the house of the noble/generous one?') ve-ayyeh ohel mishkenot resha'im ('and where is the tent of the dwelling-places of the wicked?'). The friends point to destroyed estates as proof that wickedness leads to ruin. The nadiv ('noble, generous, prince') is used here ironically or as a euphemism — the friends mean 'the wicked tyrant' but use a polite term.

29. The ha-lo she'altem overei derekh ('have you not asked those who pass by on the road?') — Job appeals to the testimony of travelers, people with wide experience of the world. The ve-ototam lo thenakkeru ('and their signs/evidence you do not recognize, you do not regard as foreign'). Job tells the friends to get out of their theological echo chamber and ask people who have actually seen the world. Eyewitness testimony contradicts the friends' theory.

30. The le-yom eid yechasekh ra ('on the day of calamity the evil one is spared, held back, kept from harm'). The le-yom avarot yuvalu ('on the day of fury/wrath they are led away to safety'). This is the travelers' testimony: when disaster strikes, the wicked man is somehow protected. He escapes the catastrophe that should have destroyed him. The verb chasakh ('to spare, to withhold, to hold back') means the wicked man is actively preserved from the destruction that retribution theology says should find him.

31. The mi yaggid al panav darko ('who tells his way to his face?') — no one confronts the wicked man. He is too powerful, too insulated. The ve-hu asah mi yeshallem lo ('and what he has done, who repays him?') — no one holds him accountable. The double mi ('who?') expects the answer 'no one.' The wicked man lives without confrontation and dies without recompense.

32. The ve-hu li-qevarot yuval ('and he to the graves is carried') — the wicked man receives a proper funeral procession. The ve-al gadish yishqod ('and over the heap/mound he watches' or 'a watch is kept over his tomb'). The gadish ('heap, mound, stack') refers to the burial mound or monument. The wicked man not only dies peacefully (verse 13) but is buried with honor, his grave tended and guarded. Even in death, he receives dignity that his victims may never have known.

33. The matqu lo rigvei nachal ('sweet to him are the clods of the valley/wadi') — even the earth that covers his grave is gentle. The poetic image of death as sweetness inverts the normal imagery of the grave as harsh and cold. The acharav kol adam yimshokh ('after him all humanity is drawn, follows') — everyone eventually follows the dead man into the grave. The u-lefanav ein mispar ('and before him there is no number') — countless dead preceded him. The observation universalizes: death is the great equalizer, and neither righteousness nor wickedness changes its terms.

34. Job's devastating conclusion: ve-eikh tenachamuni havel ('and how can you comfort me with vapor/emptiness/breath?'). The hevel ('vapor, breath, vanity') is the signature word of Ecclesiastes — everything the friends have said is as insubstantial as exhaled air. The u-teshuvoteikhem nish'ar ma'al ('and in your answers what remains is treachery/unfaithfulness'). The ma'al ('treachery, unfaithfulness, trespass') is a covenant term — the friends have committed a breach of faith. Their comfort is not merely inadequate; it is a betrayal. Job ends where he began: the only real comfort would have been listening (verse 2), but instead the friends offered theology that cannot survive contact with reality.

22

Summary: *Eliphaz delivers his third and final speech, and it represents a dramatic escalation. In his first speech (chapters 4-5) Eliphaz was gentle and diplomatic, offering general wisdom. In his second speech (chapter 15) he grew sharper. Now he abandons all restraint and launches direct, specific accusations against Job. He begins with a theological argument: can a man be useful to God? God has no need of human righteousness. Then Eliphaz springs the trap: is it for your piety that God rebukes you? No — it must be because your wickedness is great and your sins are endless. He then invents a catalog of specific crimes: Job stripped the naked of their clothing, withheld water from the thirsty, refused bread to the hungry, sent widows away empty, and crushed the arms of orphans. That is why snares surround him, sudden terror overwhelms him, darkness covers his sight, and a flood of water engulfs him. Eliphaz then describes the wicked who say to God 'what can the Almighty do?' — echoing Job's own words from chapter 21. He closes with an appeal: if Job will return to the Almighty, put away iniquity, and throw his gold into the dust, then the Almighty will be his gold, and God will hear his prayer. The speech is the most theologically coercive moment in the dialogue.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Eliphaz's third speech marks the moment when retribution theology turns from implicit accusation to explicit fabrication. In chapters 4-5, Eliphaz suggested that all humans sin; in chapter 15, he argued that no mortal can be righteous before God. But here he lists specific crimes: Job withheld water, denied bread, stripped clothing, abused widows and orphans. These are the classic prophetic sins — violations of social justice listed in Isaiah 58, Ezekiel 18, and Amos 2. The devastating irony is that the reader knows from the prologue (1:1-5) and from God's own testimony (1:8, 2:3) that none of these accusations are true. Eliphaz has been driven by his theological system to invent sins that Job did not commit. This is the ultimate indictment of retribution theology: when the framework demands guilt and reality provides none, the theologian manufactures evidence. The friends' pastoral failure is complete — they have moved from misdiagnosis to bearing false witness.*

Translation Friction: *Eliphaz's speech contains genuine theological truth mixed with devastating misapplication. His opening point — that human righteousness does not benefit God (verses 2-3) — is actually sound theology that God himself will affirm in the speeches from the whirlwind. His closing appeal (verses 21-30) — that repentance leads to restoration and intimacy with God — contains beautiful promises that are true in general. The tragedy is that both the theology and the appeal are aimed at a man who does not need to repent of the crimes he is accused of. Eliphaz is offering real medicine to a patient who does not have the disease he diagnosed. The result is that true theology becomes an instrument of cruelty. This is the book's deepest warning: correct doctrine wrongly applied is more dangerous than honest doubt, because it carries the authority of truth while doing the work of lies.*

Connections: *Eliphaz's catalog of sins (verses 6-9) mirrors the prophetic social-justice tradition: withholding water and bread from the hungry (Isaiah 58:7, Ezekiel 18:7, 16), stripping clothing from the naked (Amos 2:8, Ezekiel 18:7), mistreating widows and orphans (Exodus 22:22-24, Isaiah 1:17, 23). The command to throw gold into the dust (verse 24) connects to Job's later oath in 31:24-25 where he swears he never placed his confidence in gold. Eliphaz's promise 'you will pray and he will hear you' (verse 27) is fulfilled ironically in 42:8-9, where God commands Eliphaz to ask Job to pray on Eliphaz's behalf — the exact reversal of Eliphaz's assumed roles. The description of God in the high heavens (verse 12) uses language that will reappear in God's own speeches (38:31-33) but with radically different implications.*

1 Then responded:

2 Can a man be of use to God?
Even a wise man benefits only himself.

3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous?
Does he profit if you make your ways blameless?

4 Is it for your piety that he rebukes you?
Is it for that that he brings you to trial?

5 Is not your wickedness vast?
Are not your sins without end?

6 For you took pledges from your relatives for no reason
and stripped the clothing from the destitute.

7 You gave no water to the exhausted
and withheld bread from the starving.

8 The powerful man — the land belonged to him.
The privileged one settled in it.

9 You sent widows away empty-handed
and crushed the arms of orphans.

10 That is why snares surround you
and sudden terror overwhelms you.

11 Or is it darkness so thick you cannot see,
and a flood of water covering you?

12 Is not God in the heights of heaven?
Look at the topmost stars — how far above they are!

13 And yet you say, 'What does God know?
Can he judge through the thick darkness?'

14 Clouds are a screen for him — he cannot see!
He walks along the vault of heaven.

15 Will you keep to the ancient path
that the wicked have trodden?

16 They were snatched away before their time;
a river poured over their foundations.

17 They said to God, 'Leave us alone!'
And 'What can the Almighty do to us?'

18 Yet it was God who filled their houses with good things.
The counsel of the wicked is far from me!

19 The righteous see it and rejoice;
the innocent laugh them to scorn.

20 'Surely our adversary is cut off,
and fire has consumed what they left behind.'

21 Make peace with God and be reconciled to him;
through this, good will come to you.

22 Receive instruction from his mouth;
store his words in your heart.

23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be rebuilt.
Put injustice far from your tent.

24 Throw your gold in the dust,
your gold of Ophir among the stones of the stream.

25 Then the Almighty will be your gold,
your precious silver heaped high.

26 Then you will delight in the Almighty
and lift your face toward God.

27 You will pray to him, and he will hear you;
you will fulfill your vows.

28 You will decide on a matter, and it will stand.
Light will shine on your paths.

29 When others are brought low, you will say, 'There is lifting up!'
He saves the one whose eyes are downcast.

30 He delivers even one who is not innocent;
he is rescued by the cleanness of your hands.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Eliphaz ha-Temani ('the Temanite') speaks for the third and final time. Teman was a region in Edom associated with wisdom (Jeremiah 49:7, Obadiah 8-9). Eliphaz has been the most measured of the three friends, but this speech abandons his earlier restraint entirely.

2. The verb sakan ('to be of service, to be useful, to benefit') appears twice. The gaver ('strong man, hero') cannot benefit God. The maskil ('the wise one, the prudent one, the one who acts with insight') benefits only aleimu ('upon himself, for himself'). Eliphaz starts with God's transcendence — a true starting point — but draws a false conclusion from it.

3. The ha-chefets le-Shaddai ki titsddaq ('is it desire/pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous?') — does God benefit from Job's righteousness? The ve-im betsa ki tattem derakhekha ('or is it gain/profit that you perfect your ways?'). The Shaddai ('the Almighty') is contrasted with human righteousness (tsadaq) and blamelessness (tamam). The tam ('blameless') root echoes God's own description of Job in 1:8 and 2:3 — Eliphaz unwittingly uses the very term God used to vindicate Job.

4. The ha-mi-yir'atkha yokhichekha ('is it from your fear/reverence that he reproves you?') — Eliphaz asks rhetorically whether God is correcting Job because Job is too pious. The implied answer is absurd: of course not. The yavo immekha ba-mmishpat ('does he come with you into judgment?') — would God take a pious man to court? Eliphaz's logic is that since God would never punish piety, Job must have committed sins worthy of punishment.

5. The pivot: ha-lo ra'atkha rabbah ('is not your evil/wickedness great?'). The ve-ein qets la-avonotekha ('and there is no end to your iniquities'). Eliphaz has moved from insinuation to direct accusation. The ein qets ('no end, infinite') is an extraordinary claim — Job's sins are not merely present but limitless. This is the necessary conclusion of Eliphaz's syllogism: God punishes sin, Job is being punished severely, therefore Job's sin must be severe. The logic is airtight and completely wrong.

6. The first fabricated charge: tachbol achekha chinnam ('you took pledges from your brothers/kinsmen for nothing') — seizing collateral from family members without cause. The u-vigdei arummim tafshit ('and the garments of the naked you strip off'). Taking a poor person's garment as collateral was explicitly prohibited in Exodus 22:26-27 and Deuteronomy 24:12-13, because the cloak served as a blanket for sleeping. Eliphaz accuses Job of the exact crime the Torah forbids. The reader knows this is false — Job will later swear an oath denying these charges (31:19-20).

7. The second fabricated charge: lo mayim ayef tashqeh ('not water to the weary/exhausted you give to drink'). The u-me-ra'ev timna lachem ('and from the hungry you withhold bread'). Denying water and bread to the needy is a fundamental violation of ancient Near Eastern hospitality law and Israelite covenant obligation (Isaiah 58:7, Ezekiel 18:7). Eliphaz constructs a portrait of Job as a cruel oppressor — the opposite of who Job actually was.

8. The ve-ish zeroa ('and the man of arm/power') lo ha-arets ('to him the land') — Eliphaz describes a world where the powerful seize land. The u-nesu fanim ('and the one lifted of face, the honored one, the privileged one') yeshev bah ('dwells in it'). Eliphaz implies that Job was one of these powerful landowners who dispossessed others. The 'man of arm' is an idiom for someone who uses force to get what he wants.

9. The climactic accusation: almanot shillachta reiqam ('widows you sent away empty') — Job allegedly dismissed vulnerable women with nothing. The u-zero'ot yetomim yedukka ('and the arms of the fatherless are crushed'). Widows and orphans are the two most protected categories in Israelite law (Exodus 22:22-24, Deuteronomy 10:18, 27:19). To abuse them invites divine wrath directly. Eliphaz is accusing Job of the most socially heinous crimes in Israel's moral vocabulary. The irony is savage: Job, who chapter 29 will reveal was the supreme protector of widows and orphans, is accused of being their oppressor.

10. The al ken ('therefore, for this reason') draws the causal link: because of the crimes listed in verses 6-9, sevivotekha pachim ('around you are traps/snares') and vivahalekha pachad pit'om ('sudden fear/dread terrifies you'). Eliphaz's logic is simple: Job's suffering (snares, terror) is the direct consequence of Job's sins (oppression). The al ken is the hinge of retribution theology — the word 'therefore' that connects sin to suffering. Job has spent the entire dialogue trying to break this causal link.

11. The o choshekh lo tir'eh ('or darkness — you cannot see') — Job's suffering is like being engulfed in impenetrable darkness. The ve-shif'at mayim tekhassekka ('and an abundance of waters covers you') — the flood imagery describes being overwhelmed, drowned in calamity. Both images — darkness and drowning — describe the totality of Job's affliction, which Eliphaz attributes to hidden sin.

12. The ha-lo Eloha govah shamayim ('is not God in the height of the heavens?') establishes divine transcendence. The u-re'eh rosh kokhavim ki rammu ('and see the head/top of the stars, how high they are'). Eliphaz uses God's exalted position to set up his next argument: some people think God's height means he cannot see what happens below (verse 13). The stars' height is a measure of divine transcendence — but Eliphaz will argue that transcendence does not equal ignorance.

13. Eliphaz attributes to Job the claim: ma yada El ('what does God know?') — that God is ignorant of human affairs. The ha-be'ad arafel yishpot ('can he judge through the deep darkness/thick cloud?') — the arafel is the dense cloud associated with God's presence on Sinai (Exodus 20:21, Deuteronomy 4:11). Eliphaz accuses Job of saying that the cloud that surrounds God blocks his vision. Job never actually said this — Eliphaz is constructing a straw man from Job's complaints about divine injustice.

14. Continuing the alleged quote from Job: avim seter lo ('clouds are a covering/hiding-place for him') ve-lo yir'eh ('and he does not see'). The ve-chug shamayim yithalakh ('and the circle/vault of heaven he walks about'). The chug ('circle, vault, horizon') describes the dome of the sky. Eliphaz portrays Job as claiming God is a distant deity who strolls along the sky dome, hidden by clouds, oblivious to earthly affairs. This caricature is unfair — Job has never denied God's awareness; he has challenged God's justice.

15. The ha-orach olam tishmor ('will you keep/guard the path of antiquity?') — Eliphaz warns Job against following the ancient road of the wicked. The asher darkhu metei aven ('which the men of wickedness/iniquity walked'). The orach olam ('eternal path, ancient way') may refer to the way of the generation before the flood (Genesis 6). Eliphaz implies Job is heading down the same path that led to divine catastrophe.

16. The asher qummettu ve-lo et ('who were seized/shriveled and not in time, before their time') — premature death. The nahar yutsaq yesodam ('a river/flood was poured out on their foundation'). The flood reference almost certainly alludes to the generation of Noah (Genesis 6-8). Eliphaz cites the flood as proof that God does indeed judge the wicked — but Job has never denied that God sometimes judges. Job has denied that God always judges, and that all suffering is judgment.

17. The ha-omerim la-El sur mimmenu ('those who say to God: depart from us') directly echoes Job's quotation in 21:14. Eliphaz throws Job's own words back at him — the wicked who dismissed God in Job's speech are now cited as examples of the path Job is following. The u-ma yif'al Shaddai lamo ('and what can the Almighty do for/to them?') — the wicked challenged the Almighty's power or relevance. Eliphaz implies that Job's complaints about divine injustice amount to the same defiance.

18. The ve-hu mille batteihem tov ('and he filled their houses with good') — Eliphaz acknowledges (as Job did in 21:16) that God is the source of the wicked's prosperity. The va-atsat resha'im rachaqa menni ('and the counsel of the wicked is far from me') is an almost verbatim repetition of Job's own disclaimer in 21:16b. Eliphaz appropriates Job's language, claiming the same distance from wicked ideology. The verbal echo is pointed: I can say it too, and when I say it, I mean it.

19. The yir'u tsaddiqim ve-yismachu ('the righteous see and rejoice') — when the wicked are finally punished, the righteous celebrate. The ve-naqi yil'ag lamo ('and the innocent one mocks them'). Eliphaz describes the satisfaction of the righteous when justice is done. The tsaddiqim ('righteous') and naqi ('innocent, clean') are exactly what Job claims to be — but Eliphaz has already placed Job among the wicked, not among the righteous onlookers.

20. The righteous taunt the wicked: im lo nikhchad qimanu ('surely our adversary/opponent is cut off, destroyed'). The ve-yitram akhlah esh ('and their remnant/excess fire has consumed'). The qimanu is debated — it may mean 'our adversary,' 'our substance,' or 'those who rose against us.' The fire consuming the remnant echoes the supernatural fire in 20:26. The righteous rejoice that nothing of the wicked remains.

21. Eliphaz shifts to appeal: hasken na immo ('be familiar with him, acquaint yourself with him now'). The u-shelam ('and be at peace, be reconciled'). The bahem tevo'atkha tovah ('through these things good will come to you'). The verb sakan ('to be familiar, to be of service, to know intimately') invites Job into restored relationship with God. The appeal is beautiful in isolation — the tragedy is that it presupposes Job has been estranged from God by his own wickedness, which is not true.

22. The qach na mi-ppiv torah ('receive, please, from his mouth instruction/teaching') — torah here means 'instruction, teaching, guidance' rather than the formal Torah/Pentateuch. The ve-sim amarav bi-lvavekha ('and place his sayings in your heart'). Eliphaz counsels Job to listen to God's instruction and internalize it. The irony is that God's actual instruction, when it comes (chapters 38-41), will vindicate Job and rebuke Eliphaz.

23. The conditional promise: im tashuv ad Shaddai ('if you return to the Almighty') tivvaneh ('you will be built, you will be restored'). The verb shuv ('to return, to turn back, to repent') is the fundamental verb of repentance in Hebrew. The tarchiq avlah me-ohalekha ('put injustice far from your tent'). Eliphaz promises restoration through repentance — a true theological principle misapplied to a man who has nothing to repent of in the way Eliphaz means.

24. The ve-shit al afar batser ('and put upon the dust gold/ore') — Eliphaz commands Job to throw his gold on the ground, treating it as worthless. The u-ve-tsur nechalim Ofir ('and in the rock of the streams, Ophir gold'). Ophir was the legendary source of the finest gold (1 Kings 9:28, 10:11). The command is to renounce wealth as a source of security. Ironically, Job will later swear that he never placed his trust in gold (31:24-25), making Eliphaz's command unnecessary.

25. The wordplay is significant: batser ('gold, ore') in verse 24 becomes betsarekha ('your gold/treasure' or possibly 'your stronghold') in verse 25, with Shaddai as the subject. The verb hayah ('to be, to become') marks the exchange: throw away gold, receive God. The to'afot ('heaps, abundance, heights') describes the overwhelming quantity of divine provision.

26. The ki az al Shaddai tit'annag ('for then over/upon the Almighty you will take delight') — the verb anag ('to be delicate, to take pleasure, to delight') describes intimate enjoyment of God's presence. The ve-tissa el Eloha panekha ('and you will lift your face to God') — the lifted face is the posture of confidence and intimacy, the opposite of the downcast face of shame. Eliphaz promises that repentance will restore Job's ability to look God in the eye.

27. The ta'tir elav ('you will pray abundantly to him, you will entreat him') ve-yishma'ekka ('and he will hear you'). The u-nedarekha teshallem ('and your vows you will pay/fulfill'). Eliphaz promises that restored prayer will be answered and vows can be completed. The promise is fulfilled in a way Eliphaz never imagined: in 42:8-9, God instructs the friends to ask Job to pray for them. Job's prayer is the one that God hears — not as a restored sinner but as a vindicated righteous man.

28. The ve-tigzar omer ('and you will decree a word/matter') ve-yaqom lakh ('and it will be established for you, it will stand') — Job's decisions will succeed, his plans will come to fruition. The ve-al derakhekha nagah or ('and upon your paths light shines'). Darkness was Job's condition (verse 11); Eliphaz promises light. The promise of light upon one's path echoes Psalm 119:105 ('your word is a lamp to my feet'). Eliphaz envisions full restoration: answered prayer, successful plans, illuminated paths.

29. The ki hishpilu ('when they are brought low, humbled') va-tomer gevah ('and you will say: exaltation, lifting up, pride/height'). Job will become a source of hope for the humbled, declaring that God lifts up the lowly. The ve-shach einayim yoshia ('and the downcast of eyes he saves'). The shach einayim ('lowered eyes, cast-down eyes') describes humility or shame. God saves the humble. Eliphaz's theology here aligns with Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:7-8) and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:52) — God brings down the proud and lifts up the lowly.

30. The yemallit i naqi ('he delivers the not-innocent' or 'he delivers the island/coastland of the innocent') — the phrase is textually difficult. If i naqi means 'not innocent,' then even the guilty are delivered through the intercession of a righteous person. If it means 'the island of the innocent,' it describes God's protection of the innocent. The ve-nimlat be-vor kappekha ('and he is rescued by the cleanness/purity of your hands'). Either way, Eliphaz promises that clean hands lead to deliverance. The supreme irony: in 42:8, Job's clean hands will indeed deliver Eliphaz himself. The friend who demanded Job repent will be saved by Job's prayer. Eliphaz spoke more truly than he knew.

23

Summary: *Job responds to Eliphaz's third speech with a passionate longing for direct access to God. He wishes he could find God, approach his dwelling, and lay out his case before him in a formal legal hearing. Job is confident that if he could only get a hearing, God would listen — a righteous person could reason with God and be acquitted forever. But God is unfindable. Job searches east, west, north, and south and cannot locate him. Yet even in God's absence, Job insists that God knows his way and that he would emerge from testing like refined gold. Job has not departed from God's commands; he has treasured the words of God's mouth more than his daily bread. But God is singular in purpose — who can turn him? What he desires, he does. God will carry out the decree appointed for Job, and many such decrees remain. This is why Job is terrified in God's presence: the Almighty has made his heart faint. Darkness covers Job's face, but he is not silenced by it.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter captures one of the most profound spiritual paradoxes in all of scripture: the simultaneous conviction that God is just and the experience that God is absent. Job does not abandon either truth. He believes that a face-to-face encounter with God would result in his vindication (verses 6-7), yet he cannot find God anywhere (verses 8-9). The four-directional search in verses 8-9 — forward, backward, left, right (or east, west, north, south) — is a poetic way of saying Job has exhausted every possibility. God is everywhere in power but nowhere accessible in person. The chapter also contains Job's most extraordinary claim about his own integrity: he has kept God's way, not turned aside from his commands, and valued God's words more than food (verses 11-12). This is not self-righteousness — it is a man who has nothing left except the truth of his own conduct, and he refuses to surrender it even to God.*

Translation Friction: *The tension in this chapter is between Job's confidence in the outcome of a hearing (verses 6-7) and his terror at God's inscrutability (verses 13-17). These are not contradictory but sequential: Job believes he would be acquitted if he could get a hearing, but he also recognizes that God operates by purposes Job cannot fathom or redirect. The phrase 'he is singular — who can turn him?' (verse 13) is not a statement about God's unity (monotheism) but about God's unilateral sovereignty — God does what God wants, and no argument, however valid, can change his course. This produces terror, not comfort. Job's final words in the chapter (verses 15-17) describe genuine dread: God has made his heart soft with fear, and thick darkness covers his face. The chapter ends not in resolution but in holy terror before an absent, inscrutable, unchallengeable God.*

Connections: *Job's longing to find God's dwelling place (verse 3) anticipates the theophany in chapters 38-41 where God finally does appear — though not in any location Job could have searched. The legal language of presenting a case (verses 4-5) connects to Job's earlier courtroom imagery in 9:14-20 and 13:18-22. The four-directional search (verses 8-9) parallels Psalm 139:7-10 ('Where shall I go from your Spirit?'), but where the psalmist finds God everywhere, Job finds God nowhere. The gold-refining metaphor (verse 10) connects to Malachi 3:2-3 ('he is like a refiner's fire') and 1 Peter 1:7 ('the testing of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire'). Job's claim to treasure God's words above food (verse 12) parallels Psalm 119:103 ('How sweet are your words to my taste') and anticipates Jesus' quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3 ('man shall not live by bread alone').*

1 Then responded:

2 Even today my complaint is bitter rebellion.
His hand is heavy on me despite my groaning.

3 If only I knew where to find him —
that I could come to his dwelling place!

4 I would lay out my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.

5I would learn what words he would answer me
and understand what he would say to me.

6Would he contend with me by brute force?
No — he would simply give me his attention.

7There an upright person could reason with him,
and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.

8But I go forward — he is not there.
I go backward — I cannot perceive him.

9I turn to the north where he is working — I cannot take hold of him.
He wraps himself in the south — I cannot see him.

10But he knows the way I have walked.
When he has tested me, I will come out as gold.

11My foot has held to his steps;
I have kept his way and not turned aside.

12I have not departed from the command of his lips.
More than my daily bread,
I have treasured the words of his mouth.

13But he is singular in purpose — who can turn him?
What he desires, he does.

14For he will carry out the decree appointed for me,
and many such decrees are stored with him.

15Therefore I am terrified before him.
When I consider, I am filled with dread of him.

16God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has filled me with terror.

17Yet I am not silenced by the darkness,
nor by the deep gloom that covers my face.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Standard response formula. Job replies to Eliphaz's third speech (chapter 22), which directly accused Job of specific sins — oppressing the poor, withholding bread from the hungry, stripping the naked. Job does not address these accusations point by point but instead pivots to his deepest desire: to find God and present his case directly.

2. The gam ha-yom ('even today, still today') — the suffering has not abated. The meri sichi ('my complaint is rebellion, my speech is defiance') — Job acknowledges that his words sound like revolt against God. The yadi kavdah al anchati ('my hand / his hand is heavy upon my groaning') — the ketiv reads yadi ('my hand'), but many follow the qere yado ('his hand'), meaning God's hand presses heavier than Job's groans can express. Either reading conveys that the weight of affliction exceeds Job's capacity to voice it.

3. The mi yitten yadati ('who will grant that I knew') is the classic Hebrew formula for an unrealizable wish — 'if only.' The ve-emtsa'ehu ('and I would find him') — the verb matsa ('to find') implies searching for someone who is not in plain sight. The tkhunato ('his dwelling, his established place, his seat') — Job wants to approach the place where God holds court, where a case can be formally presented. The longing is not for mystical union but for legal access.

4. The e'erkhah ('I would arrange, order, set in array') lefanav ('before him, before his face') mishpat ('judgment, legal case') — the verb arakh is used for setting things in order, as a lawyer prepares a brief. Job has been building his case for chapters and wants a courtroom in which to present it. The ufi amalle tokhachot ('and my mouth I would fill with arguments, proofs, rebukes') — tokhachot are reasoned arguments, evidence-based proofs, not mere complaints.

5. The ed'ah millim ya'aneni ('I would know the words he would answer me') — Job craves not silence but response. He wants God to speak, even in rebuke, because speech implies engagement. The ve-avinah mah yomar li ('and I would understand what he says to me') — Job believes he has the capacity to comprehend God's answer if only God would give one. This confidence will be tested in chapters 38-41 when God does speak and Job discovers that understanding is more complex than he anticipated.

6. The ha-be-rov koach yariv immadi ('would he by greatness of power contend with me?') — Job asks whether God would use overwhelming force to win the argument rather than engaging the merits. His answer: lo ('no'). The akh hu yasim bi ('only he would put/set [attention] in me, he would attend to me') — Job's deepest conviction: if God engaged him as a person rather than crushing him as an insect, the outcome would be justice. The word yasim can mean 'place, set, give attention to' — God would take Job's case seriously.

7. The sham ('there' — at God's dwelling, in his court) yashar ('an upright person') nokhach immo ('could argue, reason, dispute before him'). Job identifies himself as yashar ('upright') — the same word used by God to describe Job in 1:8 and 2:3. The va-afaltah ('and I would escape, be delivered, be acquitted') la-netsach ('forever, permanently') mi-shofti ('from my judge'). The acquittal would be final. Job's confidence is not arrogance — it rests on the premise that truth presented before a just judge must produce justice.

8. The hen qedem ehelokh ('behold, forward/eastward I go') ve-einennu ('and he is not there, he does not exist [in that place]'). The ve-achor ('and backward/westward') ve-lo avin lo ('and I cannot perceive him, I have no understanding of him [there]'). The qedem (east, the direction one faces) and achor (behind, west) form the first pair of the four-direction search. The verb avin ('I perceive, I understand') — Job cannot even detect God's presence, let alone find his courtroom.

9. The semo'l ('left' = north, since one faces east) ba'asoto ('when he works, where he acts') ve-lo achaz ('and I cannot grasp, seize, take hold of him'). The ya'atof yamin ('he wraps/conceals [himself on] the right' = south) ve-lo er'eh ('and I cannot see'). God is active (ba'asoto — 'in his working') but invisible; present in power but absent to perception. The verb ataf ('to wrap, cover') suggests God deliberately conceals himself. Job's frustration is not with God's nonexistence but with God's hiddenness — the deus absconditus, the hidden God.

10. The pivot: ki yada ('for he knows') derekh immadi ('the way with me, the path I have taken'). Even though Job cannot find God, God knows exactly where Job is and what he has done. The bechanani ('when he has tested me, tried me, assayed me') — the verb bachan is a metallurgical term for testing ore in fire. The ka-zahav etse ('like gold I will come out') — Job will emerge from suffering purified, not destroyed. Gold tested in fire loses its impurities but retains its substance. Job's integrity is the gold that will survive the furnace.

11. The ba-ashuro ('in his step, in his track') achazah ragli ('my foot has grasped, held fast'). Job claims to have walked precisely in God's footprints. The darkko shamarti ('his way I have kept, guarded') ve-lo at ('and I have not turned aside, deviated'). The verb shamar ('to keep, guard') is the covenant word for obedience — the same verb used in 'keep my commandments.' Job's claim is not casual piety but covenant faithfulness.

12. The me-chukki ('more than my portion/allotment') is sometimes read as me-chukko ('more than his decree') — 'I have stored up the words of his mouth more than his statutes require.' But the more natural reading takes chukki as 'my portion' — that is, my daily allotment of food. The tsafanti ('I have treasured, hidden away') imrei fiv ('the words of his mouth') uses the same verb used for storing up treasure in a vault. God's words are not merely obeyed but hoarded as precious.

13. The ve-hu be-echad ('but he is in one, he is singular, he is unique') — this is not a statement about monotheism but about God's unilateral sovereignty. God's purpose is one, unified, and unchangeable. The u-mi yeshivennu ('and who can turn him back, cause him to return, change his mind?') — the answer is: no one. Not Job's arguments, not his innocence, not his suffering. The ve-nafsho ivvetah va-ya'as ('and his soul desired and he did') — the sequence is desire followed immediately by action with no obstacle between. God's will encounters no resistance. This is the source of Job's terror: a God who cannot be persuaded is a God who cannot be sued.

14. The yashlim ('he will complete, fulfill, carry out') chukki ('my statute, what is decreed for me'). God has a plan for Job and will execute it to completion regardless of Job's protests. The ve-kahennah rabbhot immo ('and like these many things are with him') — this is not Job's only case. God has countless such decrees, countless inscrutable purposes. Job's suffering is one entry in an infinite ledger of divine purposes he cannot read.

15. The al ken ('therefore, on account of this') mi-panav ('from his face, before his presence') ebbahel ('I am dismayed, terrified, alarmed'). The realization of God's unturnable sovereignty (verse 13) produces not comfort but terror. The etbonen ('when I consider, reflect, think carefully') ve-efchad mimmennu ('and I fear/dread him'). The more Job thinks about God's nature, the more frightened he becomes. This is the opposite of the friends' theology, which says reflection on God should produce peace.

16. The El herakh libbi ('God has softened my heart') — the soft heart here is not tender devotion but the weakness of fear. A soft heart in this context is a heart that has lost its courage, like wax melting. The Shaddai hivhilani ('the Almighty has terrified me, dismayed me') — the title Shaddai ('the Almighty') intensifies the terror: it is not a minor deity but the supreme power of the universe who has shattered Job's courage.

17. The ki lo nitsmatti ('for I was not cut off, silenced, destroyed') mi-penei choshekh ('before the darkness, on account of the darkness'). Despite everything — God's terrifying inscrutability, the total inability to find him, the crushing weight of undeserved suffering — Job refuses to be silenced. The u-mi-panai kissah ofel ('and from my face thick darkness covers') — deep gloom veils Job's vision, but he keeps speaking. The chapter ends in darkness but not in silence. Job's refusal to stop talking is itself an act of defiance and faith: he will not accept a universe where suffering has no

hearing.

24

Summary: *Job asks the central question of theodicy: why does the Almighty not set times for judgment so that those who know him can see justice done? He then surveys the world and catalogs the crimes that go unpunished. The wicked move boundary stones, steal flocks, drive off the orphan's donkey, take the widow's ox as a pledge, and push the poor off the road. The destitute are forced to forage like wild donkeys in the wasteland, gleaning fields that are not theirs, gathering in the vineyards of the wicked. They sleep naked without covering in the cold, drenched by mountain rain, clinging to rocks for shelter. The fatherless are snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized as a pledge. The naked go about without clothing, carrying sheaves while they starve, pressing oil within the walls of the wicked while they go thirsty. From the city the dying groan, the wounded cry for help — yet God charges no one with wrongdoing. Then Job turns to a different class of evildoers: those who rebel against the light — the murderer, the adulterer, the thief — who operate in darkness and are friends with deep shadows. Yet despite all this, Job acknowledges that the wicked are swept away like foam on the surface of water, their portion of land is cursed, drought and heat consume them as the grave consumes sinners, the womb forgets them, the worm feeds sweetly on them, and they are broken like a tree. Job ends with a challenge: if this is not so, who can prove me a liar?*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is one of the most socially conscious passages in the Hebrew Bible. Job is not arguing theology in the abstract — he is describing actual human suffering: landless laborers foraging for scraps, naked workers pressing olive oil they will never taste, infants seized from their mothers as debt pledges, the dying groaning from the rubble of destroyed cities while God does nothing. The catalog in verses 2-12 is a protest against systemic injustice that reads as freshly today as it did three thousand years ago. What makes it theologically explosive is the conclusion Job draws: God sees all of this and does not act. The friends argued that God reliably punishes the wicked; Job looks at the world and sees the opposite. The chapter also contains an extraordinary literary shift in verses 13-17, where Job describes 'rebels against the light' — murderers, adulterers, and thieves who operate in darkness. These verses may represent Job quoting the friends' theology back to them, or they may be Job's own acknowledgment that evil exists in both daylight oppression and nocturnal crime.*

Translation Friction: *Chapter 24 is one of the most textually difficult chapters in Job. The Hebrew is corrupt in several places, and the logical structure is debated. Verses 18-24 present the most significant interpretive problem: they describe the destruction of the wicked in language that sounds more like the friends' theology than Job's. Some scholars believe these verses are a fragment of Zophar's missing third speech that was accidentally inserted here. Others argue that Job is sarcastically quoting what the friends would say. Still others read them as Job's genuine concession that the wicked do eventually perish, but only after inflicting enormous damage — and that God's delay in acting is itself the scandal. The tension between verses 1-17 (the wicked prosper and the innocent suffer) and verses 18-24 (the wicked are eventually destroyed) is the interpretive crux. This rendering reads the chapter as a unified speech in which Job moves from protest to bitter acknowledgment: yes, the wicked may eventually be swept away, but the delay is unconscionable and the damage is irreversible.*

Connections: *Job's catalog of social injustice (verses 2-12) parallels the prophetic indictments in Isaiah 5:8 ('Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field'), Amos 2:6-7 ('they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals'), and Micah 2:1-2 ('they covet fields and seize them'). The boundary-stone theft (verse 2) violates Deuteronomy 19:14 and 27:17. The widow's ox as pledge violates Deuteronomy 24:17. The naked going without clothing while pressing oil (verse 11) is a concrete illustration of the exploitation Amos denounces. Job's opening question — 'Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment?' — anticipates Habakkuk 1:2-4 ('How long, O Lord, must I call for help?') and the New Testament parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). The 'rebels against the light' section (verses 13-17) connects to John 3:19-20 ('people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil').*

1 Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment?
Why do those who know him never see his days of reckoning?

2 The wicked move boundary stones.
They steal flocks and graze them as their own.

3 They drive off the orphan's donkey;
they take the widow's ox as a pledge.

4 They shove the poor off the road.
The afflicted of the land are forced into hiding together.

5 Look — like wild donkeys in the wilderness they go out,
rising early to search for food.
The wasteland is their bread for their children.

6 They harvest fodder in fields not their own
and glean in the vineyard of the wicked.

7 They spend the night naked, without clothing,
with no covering against the cold.

8 They are drenched by mountain rainstorms
and cling to the rock for lack of shelter.

9 They snatch the fatherless child from the breast;
they seize the infant of the poor as a pledge.

10 They go about naked, without clothing;
they carry sheaves while starving.

11 Between the olive rows they press out oil;
they tread the winepresses yet go thirsty.

12 From the city the dying groan,
and the throats of the wounded cry for help —
yet God charges no one with wrongdoing.

13 There are those who rebel against the light.
They do not recognize its ways
or stay on its paths.

14 At first light the murderer rises;
he kills the poor and the needy.
In the night he becomes a thief.

15 The eye of the adulterer watches for twilight,
saying, 'No eye will see me' —
and he puts a covering over his face.

16In the dark they break into houses
that they marked during the day.
They want nothing to do with the light.

17For morning is the shadow of death to them;
they are at home with the terrors of deep darkness.

18He is swift on the surface of the water —
their portion of land is cursed.
No one turns toward their vineyards.

19As drought and heat steal away the melted snow,
so the grave swallows those who have sinned.

20The womb that bore him forgets him.
The worm feeds sweetly on him.
He is remembered no more,
and wickedness is snapped like a tree.

21He preys on the barren woman who cannot bear children
and shows no kindness to the widow.

22Yet God drags away the mighty by his power.
They rise up, but have no assurance of life.

23God gives them security, and they lean on it,
but his eyes are on their ways.

24They are exalted for a little while — then they are gone.
They are brought low; they wither like everything else.
They are cut off like the heads of grain.

25If this is not so, then who can prove me a liar
and reduce my words to nothing?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Shaddai ('the Almighty') opens the chapter with the divine name that emphasizes power — if God is almighty, the failure to establish judgment times is a choice, not an inability. The ittim ('times, seasons') connects to Ecclesiastes 3:1 ('for everything there is a season') — but unlike Ecclesiastes, Job sees no evidence that the season of justice ever arrives. The verb tsafan ('to hide, store up') may mean that the times are hidden from view or that they have been stored away and never released.

2. The gevulot yassigu ('they move boundary markers, they push back landmarks') — land theft by moving the stones that mark property lines. This is one of the most condemned crimes in the Torah (Deuteronomy 19:14, 27:17) because it robs families of their ancestral inheritance. The eder gazlu va-yir'u ('a flock they seize and graze it') — the stolen flock is brazenly grazed in public. The crimes are not hidden; they happen in broad daylight.

3. The chamor yetomim yinhagu ('the donkey of orphans they drive away') — the donkey is the working animal of the poor, essential for subsistence farming. To steal an orphan's donkey is to destroy the orphan's livelihood. The yichbelu shor almanah ('they take as pledge the ox of the widow') — the ox pledged as collateral for a loan the widow cannot repay. The Torah specifically prohibits taking a widow's garment as pledge (Deuteronomy 24:17); taking her ox — her means of survival — is even more devastating.

4. The yattu evyonim mi-ddarekh ('they turn aside the needy from the way, the road') — the poor are literally pushed off public pathways, denied freedom of movement. The yachad chubbe'u aniyyei erets ('together they hide themselves, the afflicted of the earth') — the poor are driven underground, forced to conceal themselves from their oppressors. They hide as a group because individually they have no protection.

5. The hen pera'im ba-midbar ('behold, wild donkeys in the desert') — the poor are compared to wild donkeys, feral animals scavenging in barren land. The yatse'u be-fo'olam ('they go out in their work') meshachare la-ttaref ('seeking early for prey/food') — their 'work' is foraging, their daily occupation is the animal search for scraps. The aravah lo lechem la-ne'arim ('the wasteland is his bread for the young ones') — the desert itself is the only pantry for their children. Civilization has expelled them; the wilderness is all that remains.

6. The ba-ssadeh belilo yiqtsoru ('in the field his fodder/mixed grain they harvest') — they reap not grain for themselves but animal feed from someone else's field. The ve-kerem rasha yelaqgeshu ('and the vineyard of the wicked they glean') — gleaning is the desperate act of the destitute, gathering what harvesters leave behind. The bitter irony: the poor glean in the vineyards of the very people who impoverished them.

7. The arom yalinu ('naked they lodge, they spend the night') mi-bbeli levush ('without clothing'). The ve-ein kesut ba-qqarah ('and there is no covering in the cold'). The double negation — without clothing, without covering — emphasizes total destitution. These are not beggars who have some rags; they have nothing between their skin and the night air. The qarah ('cold') in the Judean hill country can drop to near freezing in winter.

8. The mi-zzerem harim ('from the downpour of the mountains') yirtavu ('they are soaked, made wet'). Mountain rain in the Near East arrives as sudden, cold deluges. The u-mi-bbeli machseh ('and for lack of shelter') chibbequ tsur ('they embrace the rock') — they press their bodies against cliff faces, seeking any protection. The verb chabaq ('to embrace') is normally used for human affection; here the poor embrace stone because they have no one and nothing else.

9. The yigzelu mi-shod yatom ('they tear away from the breast the fatherless') — a nursing infant is ripped from its mother, either to be taken as a debt-slave or simply as an act of cruelty. The ve-al ani yachbolu ('and against the poor they take a pledge') — the poor person's child becomes collateral for debt. This is the moral nadir of Job's catalog: the commodification of infants. The Torah's pledge laws (Exodus 22:25-27, Deuteronomy 24:10-13) were meant to prevent exactly this.

10. The arom hillekhu beli levush ('naked they walk about without clothing') reprises verse 7 but now in daylight — this is not nighttime exposure but public nakedness during working hours. The u-re'evim nas'u omer ('and hungry they carry the sheaf') — they harvest grain they will never eat. They handle food all day and go home with nothing. The cruelty is precise: the workers produce abundance for others while they themselves starve.

11. The bein shurotam yatshiru ('between their rows/walls they press oil') — the poor labor pressing olives between stone walls, extracting oil they will never use. The yeqavim darkhu va-yitsma'u ('winepresses they tread and they thirst') — they stomp grapes to make wine and are denied even water. The juxtaposition is devastating: oil and wine — symbols of prosperity and celebration — are produced by people who cannot drink. This is the purest expression of exploitation: the laborer creates wealth and receives nothing.

12. The tiflah ('unseemliness, folly, impropriety, wrongdoing') is the key word. God lo yasim tiflah ('does not impute/assign tiflah') — does not charge anyone with wrongdoing for causing this suffering. The verb sim can also mean 'to pay attention to' — God does not regard the outrage. Either reading produces the same conclusion: the suffering of the innocent receives no divine response. This is Job's most direct challenge to the retribution theology of the friends.

13. The hemmah hayu be-morde or ('they are among the rebels against the light') — a new category of evildoer. Where verses 2-12 described oppressors who operate in plain sight, verses 13-17 describe those who specifically choose darkness. The lo hikkiru derakhav ('they do not recognize its ways') ve-lo yashvu bi-ntivotav ('and they do not dwell in its paths') — they reject the light both intellectually (do not recognize) and practically (do not walk in). The 'light' is both literal (daylight) and metaphorical (moral truth, God's order).

14. The la-or yaqum rotse'ach ('at the light the murderer rises') — he rises at dawn not for honest labor but to kill. His victims are specific: yiqtol ani ve-evyon ('he kills the afflicted and the needy') — the vulnerable, those who cannot defend themselves. The u-va-llailah yehi kha-gannav ('and in the night he becomes like a thief') — the same person is murderer by day and burglar by night. The dual identity suggests a professional criminal for whom violence is a way of life.

15. The ve-ein no'ef ('and the eye of the adulterer') shamrah neshef ('watches for, waits for the twilight/dusk'). The adulterer's eye — the organ of desire — monitors the fading light, waiting for darkness to enable his transgression. The le'mor lo teshureni ayin ('saying: no eye will perceive me') — he believes darkness makes him invisible. The ve-seter panim yasim ('and a covering of face he places') — he veils his face as disguise. The irony: he hides from human eyes but not from God's, yet as Job has established, God apparently does nothing about it.

16. The chatar ba-choshekh battim ('he digs through in the darkness houses') — ancient houses had mud-brick walls that could be tunneled through. The yomam chittemu lamo ('by day they sealed/marked for themselves') — they scouted targets during daylight, marking which houses to rob at night. The lo yade'u or ('they do not know light') — they have rejected light entirely. The phrase echoes verse 13: these are rebels against the light in the most literal sense — they live their true lives only in darkness.

17. The ki yachdav boqer lamo tsalmavet ('for together morning is to them the shadow of death') — what is safety for the righteous (dawn, morning light) is mortal danger for the wicked. Morning exposes them. The ki yakkir balhot tsalmavet ('for he recognizes the terrors of deep darkness') — the deep darkness that terrifies normal people is familiar territory for them. They know its terrors not as threats but as companions. The tsalmavet ('shadow of death, deep darkness') appears twice, framing the verse with the oppressive weight of moral darkness.

18. The interpretive crux of the chapter begins here. The qal hu al penei mayim ('he is light/swift upon the face of the waters') — the wicked man is like foam or flotsam, skimming the surface and quickly swept away. The tequllal chelqatam ba-arets ('their portion in the land is cursed') — the property they accumulated is blighted. The lo yifneh derekh keramim ('he does not turn toward the way of vineyards') — no one visits their vineyards, which are abandoned and cursed. Some scholars read these verses as Job quoting the friends' position; this rendering takes them as Job's bitter acknowledgment that the wicked do eventually vanish — but only after the damage is done.

19. The tsiyyah gam chom ('drought and also heat') yigzelu meimei shaleg ('snatch away waters of snow') — snowmelt vanishes in the desert heat, leaving no trace. The she'ol chat'u ('Sheol / the grave [takes] those who have sinned') — the grave absorbs sinners the way dry ground absorbs water. The verb gazal ('to steal, snatch') is the same verb used for the wicked stealing flocks in verse 2 — what the wicked did to others, death does to them.

20. Four rapid images of annihilation. The yishkachehu rechem ('the womb forgets him') — the mother who bore him has no memory of him; his very origin erases him. The metoqu rimmah ('the worm finds him sweet') — decomposition is described with the same word for sweetness (matoq) used for the wicked savoring sin in 20:12. What was sweet to him in life, the worm finds sweet in death. The od lo yizzakher ('he is not remembered anymore') — total social erasure. The va-tishshaver ka-ets avlah ('and wickedness is broken like a tree') — injustice is snapped off like a dead branch.

21. The ro'eh aqarah lo teled ('he feeds on / mistreats the barren woman who does not give birth') — the barren woman in ancient Israel was already socially vulnerable; the wicked man exploits her further. The ve-almanah lo yetiv ('and the widow he does not treat well, does no good to') — the two most vulnerable categories of women in Israelite society — barren and widowed — receive no mercy from the wicked. This echoes the specific charges in verses 3 and 9.

22. The u-mashakh abbirim be-khocho ('and he draws/drags the mighty ones by his power') — the subject shifts to God, who uses his power to pull down the strong. The yaqum ve-lo ya'amin ba-chayyim ('he rises but does not trust in life') — even when the powerful person stands up, he has no confidence in his own survival. The mighty man's strength is no protection against God's sovereign timing. This verse may mark Job's turn toward acknowledging that God does eventually act against the powerful — but on God's schedule, not the schedule of the victims.

23. The yitten lo la-vetach ('he gives him security, safety') ve-yisha'en ('and he leans on it, relies on it') — God permits the wicked to feel safe, to rest in their prosperity. But ve-eineihu al darkheihem ('and his eyes are upon their ways') — God watches. The security is temporary and observed. The wicked lean on what God gives, not knowing that God's eyes never leave them. The verse introduces a surveillance metaphor: God's patience is not indifference but watchfulness.

24. The rommu me'at ('they are raised up a little while') ve-einennu ('and he is no more, he is gone') — the exaltation is brief and the vanishing is total. The ve-humkhu ka-kkol yiqqafetsun ('and they are brought low, like all they are gathered up') — death is the great equalizer; the mighty are collected like everyone else. The u-khe-ro'sh shibbolet yimmalu ('and like the head of a stalk of grain they are cut off') — the grain-harvest image: the wicked are mown down like ripe grain at harvest time. The head of grain stands tall and full, then the sickle comes.

25. Job's closing challenge: ve-im lo efo ('and if not, then') mi yakhziveni ('who will make me a liar, who will prove me false?'). The ve-yasem le-al millati ('and make my word into nothing') — who can empty Job's argument of its force? The challenge is directed at the friends: if Job's description of unpunished evil and unexplained suffering is wrong, let someone refute it with evidence, not theology. The chapter ends not with resolution but with a gauntlet thrown down. No one in the dialogue will pick it up. Only God, in chapters 38-41, will answer — and even then, not by refuting Job's observations but by reframing the entire question.

25

Summary: *Bildad delivers his third and final speech — the shortest speech by any of the three friends, only six verses. He has run out of material. His argument reduces the entire retribution theology of the friends to a single, blunt assertion: God is so overwhelmingly sovereign and pure that no human being can be righteous before him. Dominion and dread belong to God. He makes peace in his high places. His armies are without number. His light shines everywhere. How then can a mortal be right before God? How can one born of woman be pure? Even the moon is not bright enough and the stars are not pure in his sight — how much less a human being, who is a maggot, a worm. That is all Bildad has to say. The speech simply stops.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The brevity is the message. In the first cycle, Bildad spoke 22 verses (chapter 8). In the second, 21 verses (chapter 18). Now he manages only 6. The friends' arguments are collapsing under their own weight. Bildad cannot muster a third full speech because Job's challenges have dismantled the framework piece by piece. What remains is a theological residue — God is big, humans are small, therefore shut up. The argument has real content (divine transcendence is a genuine theological category), but it has been stripped of all pastoral nuance. Bildad's cosmology is beautiful — the image of God making peace in his heights, his innumerable armies, his light that illuminates everything — but it functions here as a weapon to crush Job into silence rather than to invite wonder. The most telling detail is what is missing: Bildad offers no accusation, no specific charge, no call to repentance. He has abandoned the attempt to diagnose Job's sin and retreated to the one claim he can still make: God is too great for any human to question.*

Translation Friction: *Bildad's theology is not wrong in itself — the transcendence of God, the finitude of humanity, the relative impurity of all created things before the divine holiness — these are mainstream biblical themes (see Isaiah 6, Psalm 8, Psalm 144). The problem is what Bildad does with them. He deploys transcendence as a conversation-stopper: if no human can be righteous before God, then Job's protest is meaningless, and the question of justice in Job's particular case is dissolved into the general unworthiness of humanity. This is a theological dodge. Job is not asking whether humans in general are worthy of God's attention — he is asking why he, a specific righteous man, has been destroyed. Bildad's move from 'God is transcendent' to 'therefore your complaint is invalid' is a logical fallacy, and the book knows it. God's own speech in chapters 38-41 will affirm divine transcendence but will not use it to dismiss Job's suffering.*

Connections: *Bildad's assertion that even the moon and stars are impure before God connects to Eliphaz's earlier claim that God 'charges his angels with error' (4:18) and 'the heavens are not pure in his sight' (15:15). The 'maggot and worm' language (verse 6) echoes Psalm 22:6 ('I am a worm, not a man'), which is a psalm of lament — an ironic connection, since Bildad uses the image to silence lament while the psalmist uses it to fuel lament. Zophar has no third speech at all — his silence is even more telling than Bildad's brevity. The third cycle of speeches (chapters 22-27) is widely regarded as textually disordered, with scholars debating which portions belong to which speaker. Bildad's truncated speech is one piece of evidence for this disruption.*

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

2 Dominion and dread belong to him;
he makes peace in his heights.

3 Can his armies be numbered?
On whom does his light not rise?

4 How then can a mortal be righteous before God?
How can one born of woman be pure?

5 Look — even the moon does not shine bright enough,
and the stars are not pure in his eyes.

6 How much less a mortal — a maggot!
A human being — a worm!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Bildad ha-Shuchi ('the Shuhite') speaks for the third and final time. This is the last speech by any of the three friends in the dialogue cycle. After this, only Elihu will speak before God himself answers from the storm.
2. The hamshal ('dominion') and fachad ('dread') paired together capture the twofold nature of divine rule: legitimate authority and overwhelming power. The oseh shalom ('making peace') in the heights has been read as a reference to God restraining cosmic forces — the heavenly beings, the stars, the armies of heaven. Some interpreters connect this to mythological combat traditions where God subdues primordial chaos. The phrase echoes Isaiah 57:19 where God 'creates the fruit of the lips: peace, peace.'
3. The gedudav ('his troops, his raiding bands, his armies') are innumerable — ha-yesh mispar ('is there a number?'). The orehhu ('his light') lo yaqum al mi ('does not arise upon whom?') — God's light reaches everyone and everything. The double rhetorical question establishes God's military omnipotence and optical omnipresence: his forces are infinite, his illumination is total. No one can fight him and no one can hide from him.
4. The mah yitsddaq enosh im El ('how can a mortal be righteous with God') is Bildad's central theological question. The verb tsadaq ('to be righteous, to be in the right') is a legal term — Bildad is asking how any human could win a case against God. The mah yizzkeh yelud ishshab ('how can one born of woman be clean/pure') adds ritual purity to legal righteousness — born of woman implies born into the contamination of mortality itself. This echoes Eliphaz's question in 4:17 and 15:14, making it a shared axiom of the friends' theology.
5. Bildad builds an a fortiori argument (from greater to lesser): hen ad yareach ('behold, even the moon') ve-lo ya'ahil ('does not shine brightly, does not give sufficient light') — even the moon falls short before God. The kokhavim lo zakku be-einav ('the stars are not pure in his eyes') — the most luminous objects in the night sky are impure by God's standard. If celestial bodies fail the test of divine purity, the argument goes, how could a terrestrial creature hope to pass?

6. The rimmah ('maggot') and tole'ah ('worm') are creatures of decay — they appear on corpses, in rotting food, in refuse. By identifying humanity with these creatures, Bildad does not merely assert human smallness (as Psalm 8 does with its question 'what is man that you are mindful of him?') but human repulsiveness. The parallel with Psalm 22:6 ('I am a worm and not a man') is instructive: the psalmist uses worm-language to express suffering and cry out for help; Bildad uses it to shut down the conversation. Same image, opposite function. Isaiah 41:14 ('fear not, you worm Jacob') will reclaim the worm as an object of divine compassion — God does not despise the worm but redeems it.

26

Summary: *Job responds to Bildad's meager six verses with biting sarcasm and then delivers a cosmological poem that dwarfs anything the friends have said about God's power. He opens with mockery: What a help you are to the powerless! What great wisdom you have shared! Then Job launches into his own hymn to divine sovereignty — but where Bildad reduced this theme to a platitude, Job fills it with cosmic terror and wonder. God stretches the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing. He wraps the waters in clouds that do not burst. He covers the face of the full moon with cloud. He has drawn a circle on the surface of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble and are stunned at his rebuke. By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab. By his wind the heavens were cleared; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent. And then the devastating conclusion: these are but the fringes of his ways — a mere whisper of what we hear of him. Who can comprehend the thunder of his power?*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This poem is one of the greatest cosmological passages in the Hebrew Bible, rivaled only by God's own speech in chapters 38-41 and by Psalm 104. What makes it remarkable is its position: Job, the sufferer covered in sores sitting on an ash heap, outperforms all three friends in theological imagination. Bildad said God makes peace in his heights (25:2) and left it at that. Job takes the same theme and unfolds it across the entire created order — from Sheol beneath the waters (verse 5) to the pillars of heaven (verse 11), from the primordial combat with Rahab and the fleeing serpent (verses 12-13) to the boundary circle drawn between light and darkness (verse 10). And then Job does something Bildad never could: he acknowledges that even this magnificent catalog is incomplete. 'These are the fringes of his ways' (verse 14). Job knows more about God's power than Bildad does — and he also knows how much more there is to know. His theology is bigger, not because he has more answers but because he has a larger sense of the mystery.*

Translation Friction: *The attribution of this speech is debated. Some scholars assign verses 5-14 to Bildad (as a continuation of his truncated speech in chapter 25) or to Zophar (as his missing third speech). The argument is that the hymnic praise of God's power sounds more like the friends' theology than Job's. However, the text as received assigns the entire chapter to Job, and the sarcastic opening (verses 2-4) clearly comes from Job. The most natural reading is that Job is demonstrating he can do the friends' theology better than they can — and then transcend it. Job never denies God's power; he has always affirmed it (see 9:4-13, 12:13-25). What he denies is that divine power settles the question of divine justice.*

Connections: *The Rahab reference (verse 12) connects to Job 9:13, Isaiah 51:9, and Psalm 89:10 — Rahab is the primordial sea monster representing chaos, which God defeated at creation. The 'fleeing serpent' (nachash bariach, verse 13) appears in Isaiah 27:1 ('Leviathan the fleeing serpent'). God hanging the earth on nothing (verse 7) is a remarkable cosmological statement that differs from the more common ancient Near Eastern image of the earth resting on pillars or on the back of a great creature. The 'circle on the face of the waters' (verse 10) connects to Proverbs 8:27 where Wisdom was present when God 'drew a circle on the face of the deep.' The concluding whisper metaphor (verse 14) anticipates the 'still small voice' of 1 Kings 19:12 — God's accessible revelation is only a whisper of the full reality.*

1 Then Job answered and said:

2 What a help you are to the powerless!
What a savior to the arm without strength!

3 What counsel you have given the ignorant!
What abundant insight you have shared!

4 Who are you even talking to?
Whose breath inspired these words of yours?

5 The shades tremble beneath the waters —
the dead and all who dwell with them.

6 Sheol is naked before him;
Abaddon has no covering.

7 He stretches the north over the void
and hangs the earth on nothing.

8 He wraps the waters in his clouds,
and the cloud does not tear beneath their weight.

9 He covers the face of the full moon,
spreading his cloud across it.

10 He has drawn a circle on the face of the waters
at the boundary where light meets darkness.

11 The pillars of heaven tremble;
they are stunned at his rebuke.

12 By his power he stilled the sea;
by his understanding he shattered Rahab.

13 By his wind the skies were cleared;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

14 These are but the fringes of his ways —
a mere whisper of what we hear of him.
The thunder of his power — who can comprehend it?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Job responds to Bildad's third speech. The brevity of Bildad's six verses invites the sarcasm that follows.
2. Pure sarcasm. The mah azarta le-lo koach ('how you have helped the one without power') and hosha'ta zero'a lo oz ('you have saved the arm without strength') drip with irony. Job is the powerless one, and Bildad's six verses of cosmic platitude have helped him not at all. The rhetorical questions expect the answer: you have helped no one.
3. The ya'atsta le-lo chokhmah ('you have counseled the one without wisdom') continues the sarcasm — Job mockingly pretends to be the ignorant pupil Bildad imagines. The tushiyyah la-rov hoda'ta ('and sound wisdom you have made known in abundance') is devastating: Bildad's entire speech was six verses of reheated theology. The word tushiyyah ('sound wisdom, effective counsel, practical insight') is used with heavy irony — there was nothing practical or insightful about Bildad's speech.
4. The et mi higgadta millin ('to whom have you declared words') is a taunt: who is your audience? Job implies that Bildad's speech was not addressed to anyone's actual situation. The nishmat mi yats'ah mimmekka ('and whose breath/spirit came forth from you') questions the source of Bildad's inspiration — the implied answer is: not God's spirit, because what you said was useless.
5. The poem begins with a descent to the underworld. The repha'im ('shades, the dead, the departed spirits') yecholalu ('tremble, writhe, are in anguish') mi-ttachat mayim ('from beneath the waters'). In ancient Israelite cosmology, the underworld (Sheol) lay beneath the cosmic waters. Even the dead, in the deepest conceivable place, tremble before God. The shokheneihem ('their inhabitants, those who dwell with them') broadens the scope to include everything in the realm of death.

6. The she'ol ('the grave, the underworld') is arom ('naked, exposed') negdo ('before him, in his sight'). The Abaddon ('destruction, the place of ruin') — a name for the deepest region of the underworld — ein kesut ('has no covering'). God sees through the earth, through the waters, through the floor of the ocean, into the realm of the dead itself. Nothing is hidden from his gaze — not even the domain of death. The pairing of She'ol and Abaddon recurs in Proverbs 15:11 and 27:20.

7. The phrase al beli mah ('upon nothing') is philosophically remarkable. Where most ancient cosmologies required a physical substrate — pillars, foundations, a cosmic ocean — Job asserts that the earth hangs on pure emptiness. The tsafon ('north') has mythological resonance: in Canaanite religion, Mount Zaphon was the dwelling of Baal. By saying God stretches it over the void, Job may be asserting God's sovereignty over what other religions considered sacred geography. The tohu recalls the pre-creation chaos of Genesis 1:2.

8. The tsorer mayim be-avav ('he binds up, wraps, ties the waters in his thick clouds') — God packages vast quantities of water in vapor and the fabric holds. The ve-lo nivqa anan tachtam ('and the cloud is not torn/split beneath them') — the cloud should rupture under the tonnage of water it carries, but it does not. The miracle is not the rain but the restraint: the water stays suspended until God releases it. The verb tsarar ('to bind, wrap, tie up') is used for bundling goods — God bundles the ocean in mist.

9. A textually difficult verse. The me'achaz penei kisseh ('he grasps/covers the face of the throne') — kisseh may be read as kisse' ('throne') or as keseh ('full moon,' from the root kasah, 'to cover'). Many scholars read this as 'full moon' based on Psalm 81:3 where keseh refers to the full moon. If 'throne,' God conceals his heavenly throne behind clouds; if 'full moon,' God veils even the brightest night luminary. The parshez alav anano ('he spreads his cloud over it') — either way, God controls what is visible and what is hidden.

10. The choq chag al penei mayim ('a decree/boundary — a circle — on the face of the waters') — the choq is both a 'decree' and a 'boundary line,' and chag means 'circle, circumference.' God inscribed a circular boundary on the ocean's surface. The ad takhlith or im choshekh ('until the limit of light with darkness') — this circle marks the horizon where light and darkness meet, the visible edge of the world where sky touches sea. The image connects to Proverbs 8:27 where Wisdom was present when God 'inscribed a circle on the face of the deep.'

11. The ammudei shamayim ('the pillars of heaven') yerofafu ('shake, tremble, sway') — the cosmic supports that hold up the sky are not stable in themselves but tremble before God. The yitmahu ('they are astonished, stunned, dazed') mi-gga'arato ('at his rebuke, at his roar'). A mere rebuke from God makes the architecture of the cosmos shake. The pillars are mythological — the mountains or structures imagined as supporting the vault of the sky — but the theological point is clear: even the universe's foundations are subject to God's voice.

12. The be-khocho raga ha-yam ('by his power he stilled/stirred up the sea') — the verb raga can mean both 'to stir up' and 'to still,' creating deliberate ambiguity. God both agitates and calms the cosmic ocean. The u-vi-tevunato machats Rahav ('and by his understanding he shattered Rahab') — Rahab is the primordial sea monster, the embodiment of chaos (see Job 9:13, Isaiah 51:9, Psalm 89:10). God does not defeat Rahab by brute force alone but by tevunah ('understanding, discernment') — creation is an act of intelligence, not merely power.

13. The be-rucho shamayim shifrah ('by his wind/spirit the heavens were made fair/clear') — ruach means both 'wind' and 'spirit,' so this is both meteorological (the wind clears the sky after a storm) and theological (God's spirit adorns the heavens with beauty). The cholelah yado nachash bariach ('his hand pierced/writhed the fleeing serpent') — the verb chalal can mean 'to pierce, wound' or 'to writhe in pain,' and nachash bariach is 'the fleeing serpent' or 'the twisting serpent.' This connects to Isaiah 27:1 where God punishes 'Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent.' The defeat of the primordial serpent is the final act of creation's combat.

14. The qetsot ('edges, extremities, fringes') from the root qatseh ('end, edge, border') — Job's entire cosmic catalog is the margin, not the center. The shemets ('whisper') occurs only here and in Job 4:12 (where Eliphaz heard a 'whisper' in his night vision). The contrast between shemets ('whisper') and ra'am ('thunder') is the organizing metaphor: human perception of God is a faint sound; the reality is deafening. The verb hitbonen ('to understand, to discern, to contemplate') is the reflexive form of binah ('understanding') — who can turn the full thunder of God's power into comprehension?

27

Summary: *Job continues speaking — the text says he 'took up his discourse again,' an unusual formula that signals a shift in mode. Job swears a solemn oath by the living God (the very God he accuses of denying him justice) that he will never concede the friends' argument. As long as breath is in him, his lips will not speak falsehood and his tongue will not utter deceit. He will not say the friends are right. Until he dies he will not abandon his integrity. His righteousness he grasps and will not release; his heart does not reproach him for any of his days. Then Job turns to describe the fate of the wicked — language that sounds strikingly like the friends' own speeches. The enemy who rises against Job should be treated as the wicked. What is the hope of the godless when God takes his life? Will God hear his cry in distress? The wicked man's children are destined for the sword; his offspring will not have enough bread. Plague buries his survivors; his widows do not weep. Though he heaps up silver like dust and piles garments like clay, the righteous will wear what he prepared and the innocent will divide his silver. His house is fragile as a moth's cocoon, like a watchman's temporary shelter. He goes to bed rich and wakes to nothing. Terrors overtake him like a flood; a storm wind snatches him away in the night. The east wind carries him off without pity.*

He flees from its power in headlong flight. It claps its hands at him and hisses him out of his place.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The oath in verses 2-6 is one of the most psychologically complex moments in the book. Job swears by the life of God — chai El — the standard Israelite oath formula. But he immediately qualifies: this is the God who has denied him justice, the Almighty who has made his soul bitter. Job swears by a God he is suing. He invokes as his witness the defendant in his own case. This is not contradiction but the deepest kind of faith: Job has no other God to swear by. Even in his accusation, God is the only ground of truth. The integrity declaration (verses 3-6) is Job's most concentrated assertion of innocence. He stakes everything on it: his breath, his lips, his tongue, his heart. The word tummah ('integrity') in verse 5 is the same word God used to describe Job in the prologue (2:3 — 'he still holds fast to his integrity'). Job does not know that God said this about him, but he is living it out.*

Translation Friction: *Verses 13-23 present a major interpretive problem. The description of the wicked man's fate sounds exactly like what the friends have been arguing throughout the dialogue — the very theology Job has been dismantling. Several solutions have been proposed: (1) Job is quoting the friends' position in order to refute it; (2) the passage originally belonged to Zophar's missing third speech and was displaced in transmission; (3) Job is appropriating the friends' language but redirecting it — he agrees that the wicked suffer but denies that he is wicked; (4) Job is describing what should happen to anyone who falsely accuses him (verse 7: 'let my enemy be as the wicked'). The most satisfying reading may be option 3 or 4: Job never denied that the wicked face judgment. His complaint was never that God does not punish the wicked but that God has treated him as if he were wicked when he is not.*

Connections: *The oath formula 'as God lives' (chai El) is used throughout the Hebrew Bible (Judges 8:19, 1 Samuel 14:39, 2 Samuel 4:9) and carries the full weight of divine witness — to swear falsely by God's life is to invite divine destruction. Job's integrity declaration connects to Psalm 26:1 ('vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity'). The wind carrying away the wicked (verses 20-21) echoes Psalm 1:4 ('the wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away'). The image of the storm clapping its hands (verse 23) is a personification that recurs in Isaiah 55:12 where the trees clap their hands — but here it is hostile, mocking, a cosmic jeer.*

1 And Job again took up his discourse and said:

2 As God lives — who has denied me justice —
and the Almighty — who has made my soul bitter —

3 for as long as my breath is in me
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils —

4 my lips will never speak falsehood,
and my tongue will never utter deceit.

5 Far be it from me to say you are right!
Until I die I will not surrender my integrity.

6 My righteousness I grip and will not release.
My heart does not reproach me for any of my days.

7 Let my enemy be treated as the wicked,
and the one who rises against me as the unrighteous.

8 For what hope does the godless have when he is cut off,
when God takes away his life?

9 Will God hear his cry
when distress comes upon him?

10 Does he delight in the Almighty?
Does he call on God at all times?

11 I will teach you about the hand of God;
what the Almighty does, I will not hide.

12 You have all seen this yourselves —
so why do you keep spouting emptiness?

13 This is the portion God assigns to the wicked,
the inheritance tyrants receive from the Almighty:

14 If his children multiply, the sword awaits them;
his offspring will not have enough bread.

15 Those who survive him are buried by plague;
his widows do not weep.

16 Though he heaps up silver like dust
and piles garments high as clay —

17 He prepares it — but the righteous will wear it;
the innocent will divide his silver.

18 He builds his house like a moth's cocoon,
like a shelter a watchman throws together.

19 He goes to bed rich but will not do so again;
he opens his eyes — and everything is gone.

20 Terrors overtake him like a flood;
a storm wind steals him away in the night.

21 The east wind lifts him up and he is gone;
it sweeps him from his place.

22 It hurls itself at him without pity;
he flees headlong from its power.

23 It claps its hands at him
and hisses him out of his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The formula va-yosef Iyyov se'et meshalo ('and Job again lifted up his discourse/parable') is different from the usual 'answered and said.' The mashal ('discourse, proverb, parable, poem') signals a shift to a more formal, deliberate mode of speech. Job is not merely responding to Bildad — he is making a solemn declaration.

2. The chai El ('as God lives') is the most solemn oath formula in Israelite speech. But Job immediately subverts the convention: this living God hesir mishpati ('has removed/denied my justice') and Shaddai hemar nafshi ('has made my soul bitter'). The juxtaposition is breathtaking — Job swears by the very God he accuses. He has no other deity to swear by, so he invokes the one who is both his judge and his adversary. The verb hemar ('made bitter') from the root marar echoes Naomi's words in Ruth 1:20: 'the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.'

3. The kol od nishmati bi ('all while my breath is in me') establishes the duration of the oath: it lasts as long as Job lives. The ruach Eloah be-appi ('and the spirit/breath of God is in my nostrils') echoes Genesis 2:7 where God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils. The very breath that sustains

Job's life comes from the God he is accusing — another layer of the paradox. Job will maintain his oath for as long as God keeps him alive.

4. The im tedabbernah sefatai avlah ('if my lips speak wrongfulness/injustice') — the im ('if') in an oath context functions as a strong negative: 'my lips will certainly not speak injustice.' The uleshoni im yehgeh remiyyah ('and my tongue — if it mutters deceit') — same construction. Job pledges total truthfulness. The avlah ('wrongfulness, injustice, falsehood') is the same word used for perverted justice — Job would be committing the same crime he accuses God of if he were to lie.

5. The chalilah li ('far be it from me, may it be profanity for me') im atsdiq etkhem ('if I declare you righteous, if I vindicate you') — Job refuses to validate the friends' theology. To do so would be to lie about his own experience. The ad egva ('until I expire, until I die') lo asir tummati mimmenni ('I will not remove my integrity from me'). The tummah ('integrity, completeness, wholeness') is the same word God used in 2:3: 'he still holds fast his tummah.' Job grasps his integrity as a man grasps a weapon — he will not let go.

6. The be-tsidqati hechezaqti ('in my righteousness I have held fast') ve-lo arpeha ('and I will not let it go, I will not relax my grip') — the verb chazaq ('to be strong, to grip, to seize') and rapah ('to let go, to relax') form a pair: Job's fist is clenched around his righteousness and will not open. The lo yecheraf levavi mi-yyamai ('my heart does not reproach me from my days') — Job's conscience is clear. Not one of his days accuses him. This is the final, comprehensive claim of innocence.

7. A pivot verse. The yehi khe-rasha oyevi ('let my enemy be as the wicked') — Job imprecates his opponents. If anyone falsely accuses him, let that person receive the fate of the wicked. The u-mitqomemi khe-avval ('and the one who rises against me as the unjust') — the mitqomem ('the one who rises up against') could refer to the friends, to unnamed opponents, or to anyone who persecutes the innocent. This verse frames the following description of the wicked man's fate (verses 8-23) as a curse on those who have wronged Job.

8. The mah tiqvat chanef ('what is the hope of the godless/hypocrite') ki yivtsa ('when he cuts off, when he gains by violence') — the chanef is someone who is profane, polluted, or hypocritical. The ki yeshel Eloah nafsho ('when God draws out his soul') — God extracts the life of the godless. The verb shalah ('to draw out, pull out') suggests God reaching in and pulling the soul from the body.

9. The ha-tsa'aqato yishma El ('will God hear his cry') — the tsa'aqah is the cry of distress, the same word used for Israel's cry in Egypt (Exodus 3:7). But the godless man's cry goes unheard because ki tavo alav tsarah ('when trouble comes upon him') he has no relationship with God to sustain the appeal. The irony for Job is that he claims God does not hear his cry either — but Job believes he has the right to be heard.

10. The im al Shaddai yit'annag ('does he take delight in the Almighty') — the verb anag ('to delight, to take pleasure') describes genuine relational enjoyment, not mere ritual. The yiqra Eloah be-khol et ('does he call upon God at every time') — consistent prayer, not crisis-only religion. Job implies that the godless have no ongoing relationship with God — they do not delight in him or pray to him — so their crisis prayers fall on deaf ears.

11. Job reverses the pedagogical dynamic: oreh etkhem ('I will teach you, I will instruct you') be-yad El ('by/about the hand of God'). Throughout the dialogue the friends have been lecturing Job; now Job becomes the teacher. The asher im Shaddai lo akhached ('what is with the Almighty I will not conceal') — Job claims direct knowledge of God's ways, not secondhand tradition. He will speak openly about divine action.

12. The hen attem kullekhem chazitem ('behold, all of you — you have seen this') — the friends have observed the same reality Job describes but have drawn the wrong conclusions. The ve-lammah zeh hevel tehbalu ('and why this — vanity you become vain, emptiness you spout emptily') — the hevel ('vapor, emptiness, futility') echoes Ecclesiastes. The friends' theology is not just wrong but empty — vapor pretending to be substance. The verb haval in the hiphil means 'to become empty, to act vainly.'

13. This verse nearly echoes Zophar's conclusion in 20:29 ('this is the portion of a wicked man from God'). Job uses the same formula: zeh cheleq adam rasha im El ('this is the portion of a wicked person with God'). The nachalat aritsim ('the inheritance of tyrants/oppressors') mi-Shaddai yiqqachu ('from the Almighty they receive'). Whether Job is quoting the friends, repurposing their language, or offering his own version of retribution theology, the vocabulary is deliberately borrowed.

14. The im yirbu banav lemo charev ('if his sons multiply, it is for the sword') — the more children, the more targets. Abundance is a setup for slaughter. The ve-tse'etsa'av lo yisbe'u lachem ('and his descendants will not be satisfied with bread') — starvation follows the sword. The double curse of violent death and hunger falls on the next generation. Job describes inherited consequences — the wicked man's sin punishes his lineage.

15. The seridav ('his survivors') ba-mavet yiqqaveru ('by death/plague they are buried') — the mavet here likely means pestilence or plague rather than 'death' in the abstract sense. Those who escape the sword and famine die of disease. The ve-almenotav lo tivkeinah ('and his widows do not weep') — the widows' refusal to mourn is the ultimate verdict on the dead man. He was so hated that his own wives feel no grief. The plural 'widows' may suggest polygamy or serial marriages.

16. The im yitsbor ke-afar kasef ('if he heaps up like dust silver') — silver accumulated in the quantities of dust, meaning limitless wealth. The ve-kha-chomer yakhin malbush ('and like clay he prepares garments') — fine clothing stacked in the volume of clay. Both images convey absurd abundance: wealth as common as dirt, wardrobes as plentiful as mud. The irony is that these similes use the cheapest substances (dust, clay) to describe the most expensive goods.

17. The reversal: yakhin ('he prepares') ve-tsaddiq yilbash ('but the righteous will wear it'). The wicked man's wardrobe becomes the righteous man's clothing. The ve-khesef naqi yachaloq ('and silver the innocent will divide') — the wicked man's treasury is redistributed to the innocent. This is retribution theology in its most satisfying form: stolen wealth returns to its rightful owners. The tsaddiq ('righteous') and naqi ('innocent, clean') are precisely the qualities Job claims for himself.

18. The banah kha-ash beito ('he builds like a moth his house') — the moth's cocoon is fragile, temporary, easily torn. The ukhe-sukkah asah notser ('and like a booth a watchman makes') — the sukkah is a temporary harvest shelter, a lean-to of branches built for a few weeks and then abandoned. Both images stress impermanence: the wicked man's grand construction is as flimsy as insect silk and as temporary as a seasonal hut.

19. The ashir yishkav ('the rich man lies down') ve-lo ye'asef ('and he is not gathered/he does so no more') — the verb asaf can mean 'to gather, to be taken in, to be added to.' The ambiguity may suggest 'he will not be gathered to his fathers' (will have no proper burial) or 'he will not do so again' (this is his last night of wealth). The einav paqach ve-einennu ('he opens his eyes and he is not') — the vanishing act is complete. He wakes to find himself erased.

20. The tassigehu kha-mmayim ballahot ('terrors overtake him like waters') — the ballahot ('terrors, sudden destruction') arrive with the force and speed of a flash flood. The lailah genavatto sufah ('in the night a storm steals him') — the sufah ('storm wind, whirlwind') is a thief that operates under cover of darkness. The wicked man's destruction is both natural disaster and burglary: overwhelming and stealthy at once.

21. The yissa'ehu qadim ('the east wind carries him away') ve-yelakh ('and he goes') — the qadim ('east wind') is the hot, destructive desert wind that blows from the Arabian wilderness. It withers crops and brings misery (Hosea 13:15, Ezekiel 17:10). The vi-se'arehu mi-mmeqomo ('and it storms him from his place') — the verb sa'ar ('to storm, to sweep away') turns the wind into a violent relocation. The wicked man is torn from his place like a tent ripped from its stakes.

22. The ve-yashlekh alav ('and it hurls/casts upon him') ve-lo yachmol ('and it does not spare, does not pity') — the wind (or God, as the implied subject) shows no mercy. The mi-yyado baroach yivrach ('from his hand, fleeing he flees') — the doubled verb form (baroach yivrach) emphasizes the desperation of the flight. He runs and runs but cannot escape the pursuing wind.

23. The yisfoq aleimo kappeimo ('it claps its hands over him') — the subject may be the wind, or people, or the cosmos itself. The clapping of hands is a gesture of mockery and derision (Lamentations 2:15, Nahum 3:19). The ve-yishroq alav mi-mmeqomo ('and it hisses/whistles at him from his place') — the hissing is a sound of contempt and horror. The wicked man exits the stage to the sound of jeering — the universe itself mocks him. This is the most visceral image of cosmic contempt in the dialogue, and it brings Job's discourse on the fate of the wicked to a harsh and definitive close.

28

Summary: *The Wisdom Poem — one of the supreme achievements of Hebrew poetry and among the great philosophical poems of world literature. The chapter stands apart from the dialogue, a self-contained meditation on a single question: Where can wisdom be found? The poem opens with an extended description of human mining — the astonishing technical skill with which humans extract silver, gold, iron, and copper from the earth. Miners tunnel into mountains, hang suspended on ropes in shafts no bird of prey has seen, cut channels through rock, and overturn mountains at their roots. Humanity can find anything hidden in the earth. But wisdom? Wisdom cannot be found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me.' The sea says, 'It is not with me.' Wisdom cannot be purchased with gold or silver, with onyx or sapphire, with coral or crystal. It cannot be valued against the gold of Ophir. Its price exceeds rubies. Where then does wisdom come from? Where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.' God alone understands the way to it. God alone knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he gave weight to the wind and measured the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderbolt — then he saw wisdom and declared it, established it and searched it out. And to humanity he said: The fear of the Lord — that is wisdom. To turn from evil — that is understanding.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the great poems of the Hebrew Bible, standing alongside the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15), the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), David's Lament (2 Samuel 1), and Psalm 104 as a monument of ancient literary art. Its structure is architectural: the mining section (verses 1-11) establishes human technical mastery; the refrain 'Where can wisdom be found?' (verses 12, 20) punctuates the transitions; the gem catalog (verses 15-19) demonstrates that wealth cannot purchase what matters most; the testimony of the deep, the sea, Abaddon, and Death (verses 14, 22) shows that wisdom is not located in any realm of existence; and the climactic revelation (verses 23-28) locates wisdom exclusively in God, who perceived it at the moment of creation. The final verse delivers the poem's answer with devastating simplicity: yirat Adonai — the fear of the Lord — that is chokmah (wisdom), and turning from evil is binah (understanding). After twenty-seven chapters of theological argument, the poem suggests that wisdom is not a debating skill but a posture of reverence and moral practice. None of the speakers in the dialogue — not the friends, not Job — have fully embodied this definition.*

Translation Friction: *The attribution of chapter 28 is one of the most debated questions in Job scholarship. The poem does not fit naturally as Job's speech: it is calm, meditative, and resolved where Job has been anguished and accusatory. It does not fit as any friend's speech either. Some scholars treat it as an independent wisdom poem inserted by a later editor; others see it as the narrator's own voice, a theological interlude between the dialogue (chapters 3-27) and Job's final self-defense (chapters 29-31). Still others argue that Job himself speaks it as a moment of contemplative clarity between the heat of debate and his final summation. Wherever it came from, its placement is purposeful: after the dialogue has exhausted itself, after the friends have fallen silent and Job has maintained his integrity, the poem steps back and asks the question none of the speakers thought to ask — not 'Who is right?' but 'Where is wisdom?' The answer — that wisdom belongs to God alone and is accessible to humans only through reverent awe and moral action — reframes the entire debate. The friends claimed to possess wisdom; Job claimed the right to challenge God's wisdom; the poem gently suggests that wisdom is not something any human possesses but something God alone comprehends.*

Connections: *The Wisdom Poem is the closest parallel in Job to Proverbs 8, where personified Wisdom speaks of being present at creation: 'When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep... I was beside him like a master craftsman' (Proverbs 8:27-30). Both texts locate wisdom at the moment of creation, but Job 28 emphasizes wisdom's hiddenness while Proverbs 8 emphasizes its availability. The mining imagery (verses 1-11) has no parallel elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and provides invaluable evidence of ancient mining technology. The concluding formula 'the fear of the Lord is wisdom' (verse 28) connects to Proverbs 1:7 ('the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge'), Proverbs 9:10 ('the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom'), Psalm 111:10 ('the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom'), and Ecclesiastes 12:13 ('fear God and keep his commandments'). The poem anticipates God's speech in chapters 38-41, which will demonstrate precisely what verse 24 claims: God sees to the ends of the earth and knows everything under heaven.*

1 There is a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.

2 Iron is taken from the earth;
copper is smelted from ore.

3 He sets an end to darkness
and searches to the farthest limit —
the stone of deep gloom and death-shadow.

4 He breaks open a shaft far from where people live,
forgotten by the foot of travelers.
They hang suspended, swaying far from the world above.

5 The earth — bread comes from its surface,
but beneath it is overturned as by fire.

6 Its stones hold sapphire,
and its dust contains gold.

7 There is a path no bird of prey has known,
no falcon's eye has glimpsed it.

8 The proud beasts have not trodden it;
no lion has passed along it.

9 He puts his hand to the flint;
he overturns mountains at their roots.

10 He cuts channels through the rock;
his eye spots every precious thing.

11 He dams up the sources of rivers;
what is hidden he brings to light.

12 But wisdom — where can it be found?
And where is the place of understanding?

13 No mortal knows its value,
and it is not found in the land of the living.

14 The deep says, 'It is not in me.'
The sea says, 'It is not with me.'

15 It cannot be bought with fine gold;
silver cannot be weighed out as its price.

16 It cannot be valued against the gold of Ophir,
or with precious onyx, or sapphire.

17 Gold and glass cannot match it;
it cannot be exchanged for vessels of fine gold.

18 Coral and crystal need not be mentioned;
the price of wisdom exceeds rubies.

19 The topaz of Cush cannot compare to it;
it cannot be valued with pure gold.

20 But wisdom — where does it come from?
And where is the place of understanding?

21 It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing,
concealed from the birds of the air.

22 Abaddon and Death say,
'With our ears we have heard a rumor of it.'

23 God understands the way to it;
he alone knows its place.

24 For he looks to the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.

25 When he gave the wind its weight
and measured out the waters by volume —

26 when he set a decree for the rain
and a path for the thunderbolt —

27then he saw wisdom and declared it;
he established it and searched it through.

28And to humanity he said:
'The fear of the Lord — that is wisdom.
To turn from evil — that is understanding.'

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The poem opens not with a theological claim but with a technological observation. The ki yesh la-kkesef motsa ('surely there is for silver a source/outlet') — the motsa ('source, place of going out') refers to the mine shaft where silver ore is extracted. The u-maqom la-zzahav yazoqqu ('and a place for gold they refine') — the verb zaqaq ('to refine, to purify, to strain') describes the smelting process that separates pure gold from ore. The poem begins by admiring human ingenuity: we know where to find precious metals and how to extract them.

2. The barzel me-afar yuqqach ('iron from dust/earth is taken') — iron ore extracted from the ground. The ve-even yatsuq nechusah ('and stone is poured out as copper') — the even ('stone, rock') is the raw ore, and yatsuq ('is poured, is cast') describes the smelting process where rock is heated until molten copper flows out. The four metals — silver, gold, iron, copper — represent the full range of metallurgical knowledge in the ancient world.

3. The miner qets sam la-choshekh ('sets an end to darkness') — he brings a lamp into the mine shaft and pushes back the underground darkness. The u-le-khol takhlith hu choqer ('and to every limit he searches') — the miner explores to the uttermost boundary. The even ofel ve-tsalmavet ('the stone of deep darkness and death-shadow') — the deepest rock, wrapped in the darkness associated with death itself, is not beyond human reach. The tsalmavet ('shadow of death, deep darkness') is the same word used for the darkest valley in Psalm 23:4.

4. One of the most textually difficult verses in the chapter. The parats nachal me-im gar ('he breaks open a shaft/channel away from the sojourner') — the miner opens a vertical shaft in remote, uninhabited terrain. The ha-nnishkachim minni ragel ('the forgotten ones from foot') — these mine shafts are so remote that no foot passes near them. The dallu me-enosh na'u ('they dangle away from people, they sway') — the miners are suspended on ropes in the shaft, swaying in mid-air, cut off from the human world above. The image is both technical and haunting: humans dangling in darkness in the bowels of the earth.

5. A contrast between surface and depth. The erets mimmenah yetse lachem ('earth, from it comes bread/food') — the surface yields grain for human sustenance. The ve-tachteiah nehpakh kemo esh ('and its underside is turned over like fire') — beneath the cultivated surface, the miners are blasting and excavating, transforming the rock by fire (smelting) or fire-setting (an ancient mining technique where rock faces were heated and then rapidly cooled with water to crack them). The earth has two faces: provider above, furnace below.

6. The meqom sappir avaneiha ('the place of sapphire are its stones') — the rocks underground contain sappir, which may refer to sapphire or more likely lapis lazuli, the blue stone highly valued in the ancient Near East. The ve-afrot zahav lo ('and dust of gold belongs to it') — even the dirt of the mine contains gold particles. The earth's hidden interior is treasure — the miner knows this and exploits it. The question the poem will pose is: where is the mine for wisdom?

7. The nativ lo yeda'o ayit ('a path not known by the bird of prey') — the mine shaft descends into places that even the sharpest-eyed creatures have never seen. The ve-lo shezafattu ein ayyah ('and the eye of the falcon has not caught sight of it') — the ayyah (hawk or falcon) was proverbially sharp-sighted. The poet marvels: human miners go where even the keenest predator cannot follow. Human technical ability surpasses nature's own instruments of perception.

8. The lo hidrikuhu benei shachats ('the sons of pride have not trodden it') — benei shachats ('sons of pride/fierceness') likely refers to proud, fierce animals, possibly lions or other apex predators. The lo adah alav shachal ('the lion has not walked upon it') — the shachal is a mature lion. The mine shaft is a place where neither the most keen-sighted bird above nor the most powerful beast on the ground has ventured. Only the human miner reaches it.

9. The ba-challamish shalach yado ('against the flint he sends his hand') — the challamish ('flint, hardest rock') yields to human labor. The hafakh mi-sshoresh harim ('he overturns from the root mountains') — the miner digs so deep and disrupts so much stone that entire mountains are undermined and toppled. The image is of humanity reshaping the landscape through brute persistence — moving mountains not by faith but by pick and shovel.

10. The ba-ttsurot ye'orim biqqa ('in the rocks channels he has cut') — the miner carves waterways through solid stone, likely for drainage or hydraulic mining. The ve-khol yeqar ra'atah eino ('and every precious thing his eye has seen') — the miner's trained eye identifies every vein of ore, every glint of gem. Human perception, combined with human labor, can find anything that exists in the physical world. The poem is building to its turn: but can this skill find wisdom?

11. The mi-bbekhi neharot chibbesh ('from the weeping/seeping of rivers he binds up') — the miner stops underground water from flooding the mine shafts. The bekhi ('weeping') beautifully describes the seeping of water through rock. The ve-ta'alumah yotsi or ('and the hidden thing he brings out to light') — the ta'alumah ('hidden thing, secret') is dragged from darkness into daylight. This is the climax of the mining section and the setup for the poem's great question: humanity can bring anything hidden to light — except wisdom.

12. This is the poem's refrain, repeated at verse 20. The chokmah ('wisdom') is the ordering intelligence behind creation — the same wisdom celebrated in Proverbs 8:22-31 as present with God before the world was made. The binah ('understanding, discernment') is the capacity to perceive and apply wisdom. Together they represent what the mining metaphor has been building toward: there is something more precious than any gem, more hidden than any ore, and no human technology can extract it.

13. The lo yada enosh erkhah ('a mortal does not know its worth/arrangement') — the erekh ('value, arrangement, order') of wisdom is beyond human assessment. We cannot even appraise it, let alone acquire it. The ve-lo timmatse be-erets ha-chayyim ('and it is not found in the land of the living') — the erets ha-chayyim ('land of the living') is the inhabited world, the surface of the earth where humans dwell. Wisdom is not located in human territory. The miner who can find anything in the earth cannot find this.

14. The tehom amar lo vi hi ('the deep says: not in me is it') — the tehom is the primordial deep, the cosmic abyss beneath the earth (Genesis 1:2, 7:11). Even the deep — which contains treasures no miner has reached — does not contain wisdom. The ve-yam amar ein immadi ('and the sea says: it is not with me') — the sea, the other great domain of hidden things, also disclaims possession. The personification gives these cosmic realms voices, and they use those voices to confess ignorance. If the deep and the sea do not have wisdom, it is nowhere in the physical world.

15. The catalog of precious materials begins. The lo yuttan segor tachteiha ('it cannot be given — refined gold — in exchange for it') — segor is a rare term for the purest, most refined gold. The ve-lo yishshaqel kesef mechirah ('and silver cannot be weighed as its price') — the verb shaqal ('to weigh') is the standard commercial term; silver was weighed on scales for transactions. Wisdom is not for sale at any price. The commerce metaphor inverts the mining metaphor: you can dig up gold, but you cannot spend gold to acquire wisdom.

16. The lo tesulleh be-khetem Ofir ('it cannot be weighed/valued with the gold of Ophir') — Ophir was the legendary source of the finest gold, associated with Solomon's maritime trade (1 Kings 9:28, 10:11). The be-shoham yaqar ('with precious onyx') and sappir ('sapphire/lapis lazuli') add gemstones to the failed currency. The poem is building a list of the most expensive materials in the ancient world and declaring each one insufficient. Wisdom outprices them all.

17. The lo ya'arkenah zahav u-zekhikhit ('gold and glass cannot be arranged/compared to it') — the zekhikhit ('glass, crystal') was extremely rare and valuable in the ancient Near East, more precious than most people today realize. The u-temuratah keli paz ('and its exchange is not vessels of refined gold') — paz is gold of the highest purity, and even vessels made from it cannot serve as currency for wisdom. The list keeps escalating, and wisdom keeps exceeding every comparison.

18. The ra'mot ('coral' or 'high things') and gavish ('crystal, rock crystal, or alabaster') lo yizzakher ('are not even worth mentioning') — they are too cheap to enter the discussion. The u-meshekh chokmah mi-ppeninim ('and the acquisition of wisdom is beyond pearls/rubies/corals') — the peninim are mentioned in Proverbs 3:15 and 31:10 as the standard of supreme value. Wisdom exceeds even this standard. The catalog is now complete: gold, silver, onyx, sapphire, glass, fine gold, coral, crystal, rubies — none of them suffice.

19. The final gem: lo ya'arkenah pitdat Kush ('the topaz of Cush/Ethiopia cannot be arranged alongside it'). The pitdah ('topaz' or 'chrysolite') from Kush (the region south of Egypt, modern Sudan/Ethiopia) was considered among the most exotic and valuable gems in the ancient world. The be-khetem tahor lo tesulleh ('with pure gold it cannot be valued') — the poem returns to gold one last time, now qualified as tahor ('pure, clean, refined to perfection'). Even the purest gold on earth cannot serve as a price tag for wisdom.

20. The refrain's slight variation from verse 12 (tavo for timmatse) may suggest a shift from 'can humans find it?' to 'does it come to anyone at all?' The structural placement after the gem catalog means the reader has now tried two approaches — mining (technical skill) and commerce (wealth) — and both have failed. The question is genuinely open: is wisdom accessible at all?

21. The ve-ne'elmah me-einei khol chai ('and it is hidden from the eyes of every living thing') — ne'elmah ('is hidden, concealed') from the root alam ('to hide, to be concealed'). Every living creature — human, animal, bird — lacks the capacity to perceive wisdom. The u-me-of ha-shamayim nistarah ('and from the birds of the heavens it is concealed') — the birds that soar highest and see farthest (recalled from verse 7) still cannot spot wisdom from their vantage point. No perspective — not the miner's depth, not the bird's height — reveals it.

22. The search reaches the underworld. Abaddon va-mavet amru ('Abaddon and Death say') — personified Destruction and Death are questioned about wisdom's location. Their answer: be-oznenu shama'nu shim'ah ('with our ears we have heard its report/rumor'). They do not possess wisdom and have not seen it — they have only heard a distant rumor. Even the realm of the dead, the final frontier, has only secondhand knowledge. The shim'ah ('report, rumor, something heard') suggests that wisdom's existence is known everywhere but its location is known nowhere — except to God.

23. The answer begins. Elohim hevin darkhah ('God understands its way/path') — the verb hevin ('understands, discerns') from the root bin (the same root as binah, 'understanding'). God possesses the very faculty the poem has been asking about. The ve-hu yada et meqomah ('and he knows its place') — the meqom ('place') that the poem has been searching for since verse 12 is known to God. The emphatic hu ('he, he alone') establishes exclusivity: no other being — not humans, not birds, not the deep, not Death — knows where wisdom lives. Only God.

24. The ki hu li-qetsot ha-arets yabbit ('for he looks to the ends/extremities of the earth') — God's vision reaches the remotest boundaries. The tachat kol ha-shamayim yir'eh ('under all the heavens he sees') — nothing beneath the sky escapes his sight. The reason God alone knows wisdom's location is that God alone has comprehensive vision. The miner sees into the mine shaft; the bird sees from the sky; God sees everything, everywhere, simultaneously. This verse anticipates God's speech in 38:18: 'Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?'

25. God's creative activity is described in terms of precision engineering. The la'asot la-ruach mishqal ('to make for the wind a weight') — God assigned weight to the wind. The idea that wind has weight is scientifically accurate (air pressure was not formally understood until Torricelli in the 17th century, but the poet intuits it). The u-mayim tikken be-middah ('and waters he established by measure') — God calibrated the exact volume of the

world's water. Creation is an act of weighing and measuring — the cosmos is engineered, not haphazard.

26. The ba'asoto la-mmatar choq ('when he made for the rain a decree/statute') — the rain operates under divine legislation; it falls according to rules God established. The ve-derekh la-chaziz qolot ('and a way/path for the thunderbolt') — chaziz qolot is literally 'flash of thunders,' meaning lightning. God laid down a specific path for each lightning bolt. The meteorological imagery portrays creation as the establishment of laws — physical laws are divine decrees.

27. Four verbs describe God's relationship to wisdom at the moment of creation. The az ra'ah ('then he saw it') — God perceived wisdom visually. The va-yesapperah ('and he declared/recounted it') — God articulated wisdom, gave it expression. The hekhihnah ('he established it') — God set wisdom in place as a foundational structure. The ve-gam chaqqarah ('and also he searched it out, investigated it thoroughly') — even God explored wisdom fully. The four verbs move from perception (saw) to proclamation (declared) to installation (established) to thorough investigation (searched out). Wisdom was not something God merely possessed — it was something God actively engaged with in the act of creation.

28. The yirat Adonai ('fear of the Lord') is the foundational concept of Israelite wisdom literature (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, Psalm 111:10, Ecclesiastes 12:13). The yir'ah ('fear, awe, reverence') is not anxiety or dread but the appropriate creaturely response to the Creator's overwhelming reality. Adonai here replaces the divine name YHWH — the only occurrence of Adonai in the Wisdom Poem, marking the climactic revelation. The sur me-ra ('turning from evil') is practical ethics: wisdom is not abstract contemplation but moral action. The combination of yirat Adonai and sur me-ra echoes Job 1:1 exactly: ire Elohim ve-sar me-ra ('one who feared God and turned from evil'). The poem's definition of wisdom is a portrait of Job himself.

29

Summary: *Job pauses from answering his friends and begins a monologue addressed to God and to the cosmos. In chapter 29 he looks backward, describing his former life in lavish detail: God watched over him, his lamp shone on his head, he walked through darkness by divine light, his children surrounded him, the rock poured out streams of oil. He sat as the chief man of his city, and when he spoke the elders fell silent. The young men hid themselves in respect; the nobles pressed their lips together. He rescued the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the blind, the lame, the stranger. He put on righteousness like a garment and wore justice like a turban. He expected to die in his nest, to multiply his days like sand. This is not nostalgia — it is evidence. Job is building a legal case. Before the suffering, the covenant was working. God blessed, the community honored, the vulnerable were protected. If the covenant was functioning, then the suffering that followed cannot be punishment for hidden sin.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Job's self-portrait in chapter 29 is one of the most detailed descriptions of a righteous life in the Hebrew Bible. It parallels the ideal king of Psalm 72 and the valiant woman of Proverbs 31 — yet Job is neither a king nor a woman but a private citizen whose righteousness operated in the public square. His description of the city gate (verses 7-10) places him at the center of civic life, where legal disputes were settled and community standards were enforced. The imagery of light dominates: God's lamp on his head (v3), walking through darkness by God's light (v3), the days of his harvest or autumn (v4). The Hebrew word sod in verse 4 — often translated 'secret' — means the intimate counsel of God, the same word used in Psalm 25:14 ('the secret of the LORD is with those who fear him'). Job is claiming he once had access to God's inner circle. The chapter ends with a remarkable metaphor: Job sat among his people like a king among his troops, like one who comforts mourners (v25). He was the source of consolation for others — now he is the one who needs comforting, and no one can provide it.*

Translation Friction: *Job's glowing self-description raises the question of whether he is idealizing his past or reporting accurately. His friends might hear this as arrogance. But the narrator of chapters 1-2 has already confirmed Job's righteousness — the reader knows his self-assessment is not self-deception. The tension is that Job's former blessed life makes his current suffering more inexplicable, not less. If he had been secretly wicked, the suffering would make sense within the retribution framework. Instead, Job's very goodness is the foundation of his complaint. The Hebrew of verse 18 is difficult: 'I shall die in my nest' uses the word qen (nest), but 'I shall multiply my days like the chol' — chol can mean 'sand' or 'phoenix.' The phoenix reading (which appears in some rabbinic sources) would add a resurrection motif: Job expected to be renewed like the mythical bird that dies and rises again.*

Connections: *Job's description of himself as one who was 'eyes to the blind and feet to the lame' (v15) anticipates Jesus's response to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:5: 'the blind receive sight, the lame walk.' Job's social ethic — rescuing the fatherless, defending the stranger, breaking the jaw of the wicked (v17) — parallels the prophetic demands of Isaiah 1:17 and Micah 6:8. The image of wearing righteousness as a garment (v14) appears again*

in Isaiah 61:10 and Ephesians 6:14. Job's lament that he expected to die in his nest connects to the wisdom tradition's promise that the righteous will have long life and peaceful death (Proverbs 3:16). The entire chapter functions as the 'before' portrait that makes chapters 30-31 devastating by contrast.

1 And Job took up his discourse again and said:

2 If only I could return to the months gone by,
to the days when God watched over me —

3 when his lamp blazed above my head,
when by his light I walked through darkness,

4 as I was in the days of my prime,
when God's intimate counsel rested on my tent,

5 when the Almighty was still with me,
when my children surrounded me,

6 when my path was bathed in cream,
and the rock poured out streams of oil beside me —

7 When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I took my seat in the public square,

8 the young men saw me and stepped aside;
the elders rose and stood.

9 Nobles held back their words
and placed a hand over their mouths.

10 The voices of leaders fell silent;
their tongues clung to the roofs of their mouths.

11 Every ear that heard me called me blessed;
every eye that saw me spoke as my witness,

12 because I rescued the poor who cried out,
the fatherless who had no one to help,

13 The blessing of the one about to perish came upon me,
and I made the widow's heart sing.

14 I wore righteousness, and it clothed me;
justice was my robe and my turban.

15 I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.

16 I was a father to the destitute,
and the case of the stranger I investigated thoroughly.

17 I broke the fangs of the wicked
and tore the prey from his teeth.

18 I thought, I will die in my own nest,
and I will multiply my days like the sand —

19 my roots spread open to the water,
and dew rested all night on my branches.

20 My honor was always fresh within me,
and my bow renewed itself in my hand.

21 People listened to me and waited;
they kept silent for my counsel.

22 After I spoke, no one spoke again;
my words dropped gently on them.

23 They waited for me as for rain;
they opened their mouths wide as for the spring showers.

24 When I smiled at them, they could hardly believe it;
the light of my face they would not let fall.

25 I chose the direction for them and sat as their head;
I lived among them like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts the mourning.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase se'et mashalo ('took up his parable/discourse') signals a formal speech, not casual conversation. The word mashal can mean proverb, parable, or discourse — here it introduces a sustained poetic monologue that will run through chapter 31.
2. Mi yittaneni ('who will give me') is the standard Hebrew formula for an unrealizable wish — 'if only.' The phrase yarche-qedem ('months of old') sets the temporal frame: Job is reaching back into a past that feels impossibly distant. Eloah yishmereni ('God guarded me') uses the same verb applied to a watchman or shepherd guarding a flock.
3. The ner (lamp) on Job's head is a metaphor for divine favor and guidance — the same image appears in Psalm 18:28 ('you light my lamp'). Walking through choshekh (darkness) by God's light suggests that even in difficult seasons, God's presence made the way navigable. The lamp is God's, not Job's — the source of illumination was always external.
4. Sod Eloah ('counsel of God') is the theological center of this verse. In the wisdom tradition, access to God's sod is the highest form of relationship — it means being brought into God's deliberative circle. Job once had this access; now God hides his face. The loss is not merely of blessings but of intimacy.
5. Shaddai immadi ('the Almighty was with me') uses the divine name that dominates Job's poetry. The ne'arai ('my young ones, my children') surrounding him evokes the completeness of family life — the same children whose death is reported in chapter 1. The word 'still' (od) carries enormous weight: it implies a time before God withdrew.
6. The imagery is hyperbolic: rachots halikhai be-chemah ('bathing my steps in cream/curds') and the tsur (rock) pouring out streams of shemen (oil) describe agricultural abundance so extreme it reads as mythic. Similar imagery appears in Deuteronomy 32:13 ('he made him suck honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock'). The point is that creation itself participated in blessing Job.
7. The sha'ar (gate) was the civic center of an ancient Near Eastern city — the place where legal cases were heard, business was conducted, and community leaders gathered. Job's seat (moshav) in the rechov (broad plaza) indicates his status as a leading citizen and judge. This is the beginning of a detailed social portrait that runs through verse 25.
8. The ne'arim (young men) hiding and the yeshishim (aged men) rising describe a society structured by honor and deference. The young hide not from fear but from respect — they make way for Job. The elders stand, which in the ancient world was a mark of extraordinary honor given to a peer or superior. Job's entrance transforms the posture of the entire assembly.
9. The sarim (princes, officials, nobles) restraining their speech and covering their mouths is a gesture of deference — they yield the floor to Job. The hand on the mouth appears again in 40:4 when Job finally responds to God's whirlwind speech. Here, others silence themselves before Job; later, Job will silence himself before God.

10. The negidim (leaders, rulers) are literally 'those who are in front.' Their tongues clinging to their palate is a vivid image of enforced silence — they could not and would not speak over Job. The escalation from young men to elders to nobles to leaders shows the totality of Job's social authority.

11. The ear and the eye function as synecdoche — the whole person represented by the organs of perception. The verb te'ashereni ('declared me blessed, fortunate') is related to the word ashre ('blessed') that opens the Psalter. The verb te'ideni ('testified for me, bore witness') is legal language — those who observed Job's life would testify on his behalf.

12. The ki ('because') is crucial — it explains why Job received honor. His status was not inherited or purchased but earned through justice. The ani (poor, afflicted) and yatom (fatherless, orphan) are the two most vulnerable categories in Israelite social law. Job's rescue of them mirrors the divine role described in Psalm 68:5 ('father of the fatherless').

13. The oved ('the perishing one, the one about to be destroyed') is someone on the brink of ruin — and their birkat (blessing) rests on Job. The almanah (widow) whose heart Job causes to sing (arnin) represents the most economically vulnerable person in the ancient world. Job's social ethic operates at the margins, not just among the powerful.

14. Tsedeq (righteousness) and mishpat (justice) form the classic biblical word pair that defines right relationship with God and neighbor. Job does not merely practice righteousness — he wears it. The me'il is the same garment type as the priestly robe of Exodus 28:31 and Samuel's robe in 1 Samuel 2:19. The tsanif (turban) appears in Isaiah 62:3 as a royal diadem.

15. Job did not merely help the blind and lame — he became their eyes and feet. The metaphor goes beyond charity to identification: Job supplied what they lacked by giving of himself. This language anticipates the messianic signs of Isaiah 35:5-6 ('the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the lame shall leap like a deer') and Jesus's summary of his ministry in Matthew 11:5.

16. Av anokhi la-evyonim ('I was a father to the needy') places Job in the divine role — God is repeatedly called father of the fatherless. The second line describes judicial diligence: riv lo yadati echqerehu ('a case I did not know, I searched it out'). Job did not judge only cases brought to him; he actively investigated injustice, even for people he did not know.

17. The imagery shifts from pastoral care to violent confrontation. The metale'ot (jaw teeth, fangs) of the avval (wicked, unjust one) portray the oppressor as a predatory animal. Job ashlikk taref ('hurled the prey from his teeth') — he physically intervened to rescue victims from exploitation. This is not passive righteousness but aggressive justice.

18. Im qinni ('with my nest') uses the word for a bird's nest, evoking security, family, and home. The verb egva ('I will expire, breathe my last') is a gentle word for dying — natural death rather than violent end. The ambiguity of chol (sand or phoenix) has generated extensive discussion. The Septuagint translates it as 'palm tree' (long-lived), some rabbinic commentators read 'phoenix.' The simplest reading is 'sand' — innumerable days.

19. Job compares himself to a well-watered tree — the same image used for the righteous person in Psalm 1:3 and Jeremiah 17:8. The shorshi (my root) reaching water and the tal (dew) settling on his qatsir (branch, harvest) describe a life of perpetual vitality. This is the opposite of the wicked person's fate in Job 18:16 ('his roots dry up below').

20. Kevodi chadash ('my glory was new/fresh') suggests a reputation that never grew stale or faded. The qeshti (my bow) is a symbol of strength and virility. The verb tachalif ('it renewed itself, was replaced fresh') implies that Job's power was not diminishing with age but continually refreshed — a sign of ongoing divine favor.

21. The three verbs — sham'u (listened), yichelu (waited, hoped), yiddemu (were silent) — describe an audience hanging on Job's words. The atsati (my counsel) is the wisdom Job offered in the public square. This verse resumes the social portrait from verses 7-10 after the nature imagery of 18-20.

22. Lo yishnu ('they did not repeat, did not speak again') means Job's word was final — no one contradicted or added to it. The verb tittof (dropped, dripped) uses rain imagery: Job's millah (word, speech) fell on them like gentle rain. The same verb appears in Deuteronomy 32:2 ('my teaching shall drop as the rain'). Job's speech was experienced as nourishing, not domineering.

23. The comparison intensifies: people waited for Job's speech ka-matar (like rain) — essential, life-giving, eagerly anticipated. The malqosh (late rain, spring rain) was the crucial rainfall that came just before harvest and determined whether crops would mature. Opening the mouth wide for it is the posture of desperate thirst being satisfied. Job's words were not merely respected but needed.

24. The verb eschaq ('I laughed, smiled') describes a gesture of approval. When Job smiled at someone, they could scarcely believe their good fortune — lo ya'aminu ('they did not believe it'). The or panai ('light of my face') is the same expression used of God's face in the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:25). No one would cause that light to fall or diminish — they treasured every sign of Job's favor.

25. The combination of authority (choosing the way, sitting as head, dwelling as king) with tenderness (comforting mourners) makes this verse one of the most complete portraits of leadership in the Hebrew Bible. The gedud (troop, raiding band) suggests that Job's leadership operated in crisis situations, not just in peacetime governance. The chapter closes on the word yenachem ('he comforts') — the very thing Job's friends have failed to provide.

30

Summary: *The pivot word 'but now' (ve-attah) marks the devastating shift from Job's remembered glory in chapter 29 to his present humiliation. Men younger than Job — men whose fathers Job would not have placed with the dogs guarding his flock — now mock him openly. These are social outcasts, gaunt with hunger, gnawing roots in the wasteland, driven from human community. Yet even they spit at Job and treat him with contempt. God has loosened Job's bowstring and afflicted him; mockers assault him, they tear up his path, they advance like troops through a breach. Terrors overwhelm him; his dignity is blown away like wind; his prosperity vanishes like a cloud. Now his soul is poured out, pain seizes his bones at night, his garment is disfigured by disease, God has thrown him into the mud. Job cries to God but receives no answer — he stands in the assembly and screams for help. He has become a brother to jackals and a companion to ostriches. His skin blackens and peels; his bones burn with fever. His harp is tuned to mourning, his flute to the sound of weeping.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The rhetorical structure of chapter 30 is built on devastation by contrast. Every element of honor from chapter 29 is systematically demolished. Where elders once stood at Job's approach (29:8), now the dregs of society spit in his face (30:10). Where Job once wore righteousness as a robe (29:14), now disease disfigures his garment (30:18). Where Job once comforted mourners (29:25), now he cries out and no one comforts him. The 'but now' (ve-attah) that opens the chapter (vv. 1, 9, 16) creates a three-panel structure of degradation: social humiliation (1-15), divine assault (16-23), and existential despair (24-31). The description of the outcasts in verses 1-8 is the most detailed portrait of extreme poverty in the Hebrew Bible — people reduced to eating roots, living in wadis, braying like donkeys among the bushes. These are not the conventional poor whom Job once helped; they are the expelled, the nameless. That even they look down on Job measures the depth of his fall.*

Translation Friction: *Job's contemptuous description of his mockers (vv. 1-8) creates an uncomfortable tension with his earlier claim to have been 'father to the destitute' (29:16). Was Job's compassion limited to the respectable poor? The text may be revealing an honest human limitation: even a righteous person can harbor class prejudice. Alternatively, Job may be describing these people not with contempt but with accuracy — they are genuinely degraded human beings, and the point is that even the most degraded now stand above him. The theological weight falls on verses 20-23, where Job accuses God directly: 'I cry to you and you do not answer me... you have turned cruel to me.' This is not complaint about suffering but accusation of divine cruelty — a charge the book never fully resolves through human argument but only through theophany.*

Connections: *Job's cry 'I cry to you and you do not answer' (v20) echoes through the psalms of lament (Psalm 22:2, 88:1-2) and anticipates Jesus's cry of dereliction from the cross (Matthew 27:46). The image of being thrown into the mud (v19) anticipates Jeremiah's experience of being lowered into a cistern of mire (Jeremiah 38:6). Job becoming 'a brother to jackals' (v29) parallels Micah 1:8 where the prophet makes lamentation 'like the jackals.' The transformation of the harp to mourning and the flute to weeping (v31) reverses the celebration imagery of Isaiah 24:8-9 and anticipates the exiles hanging their harps on willows in Psalm 137:2. The entire chapter is the anti-psalm: where psalms of thanksgiving move from lament to praise, Job 30 moves from praise (ch. 29) to lament with no resolution.*

[1]But now they laugh at me —
men younger than I,
whose fathers I would not have placed
among the dogs that guard my flock.

[2]The strength of their hands — what use was it to me?
All vigor had perished from them.

3 Gaunt with want and hunger,
they gnawed the dry ground —
the dark wasteland of desolation and ruin.

4 They pluck salt-herb among the shrubs,
and broom-root is their bread.

5 They are driven out from the community;
people shout after them as after a thief.

6 They live in the gullies of the wadis,
in holes in the ground and among the rocks.

7 They bray among the bushes;
they huddle together beneath the nettles.

8 Sons of the senseless, sons of the nameless —
whipped out of the land.

9 But now I have become their mocking song;
I have become their byword.

10 They despise me and keep their distance;
they do not hold back from spitting in my face.

11 Because God has loosened my bowstring and humbled me,
they have cast off all restraint before me.

12 At my right the rabble rise;
they drive me from my path
and build their siege ramps against me.

13 They tear up my path;
they profit from my ruin —
no one restrains them.

14 They pour through like a wide breach;
amid the crash of ruin they roll over me.

15 Terrors are turned loose against me;
my dignity is chased away like wind,
and my well-being passes like a cloud.

16 But now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have seized me.

17 At night my bones are pierced through;
my gnawing pains never rest.

18 With great force my garment is disfigured;
it grips me tight like the collar of my tunic.

19 He has thrown me into the mud,
and I have become like dust and ashes.

20 I cry out to you, and you do not answer me;
I stand before you, and you only stare at me.

21 You have turned cruel against me;
with the full force of your hand you attack me.

22 You lift me up on the wind and drive me before it;
you dissolve me in the storm.

23 I know you will return me to death,
to the house appointed for every living thing.

24 Surely a drowning man reaches out his hand;
surely in his disaster he cries for help.

25 Did I not weep for the one whose days were hard?
Was my soul not grieved for the poor?

26 I hoped for good, but evil came;
I waited for light, but darkness arrived.

27 My insides churn without rest;
days of affliction confront me.

28 I go about blackened, but not by the sun;
I rise in the assembly and cry for help.

29 I have become a brother to jackals,
a companion to ostriches.

30 My skin turns black and peels from me;
my bones burn with fever.

31 My harp is tuned to mourning,
and my flute to the sound of weeping.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Ve-attah ('but now') is the hinge word of the entire monologue — it marks the break between past honor and present degradation. The tse'irim (younger men) mocking Job inverts the deference of 29:8. Job's comment about their fathers and the dogs is not casual insult but a precise social measurement: these men's fathers were so unreliable that Job would not have trusted them with the lowest task on his estate.
2. The kelach ('vigor, mature strength') that has perished from these men may refer to premature aging from deprivation. Job is describing people so broken by poverty that even their physical labor was worthless. The rhetorical question lammah li ('what is it to me?') emphasizes their uselessness.
3. The verse piles up terms of deprivation: cheser (want, lack), kafan (famine, hunger), galmud (barren, stripped bare). The verb ha-orqim ('gnawing, fleeing to') combined with tsiyah (dry land, parched ground) creates an image of people so desperate they chew the dust of the wilderness. The phrase emesh sho'ah u-mesho'ah ('yesterday's desolation and destruction') suggests an already-ruined landscape.
4. The malluach (salt-plant, salt-herb) is a bitter, barely edible plant growing in arid regions. The retamim (broom plant) has roots that are fibrous and nearly inedible. These are starvation foods — the last resort of people who have exhausted all normal sources of sustenance. The word lachmam ('their bread, their food') emphasizes that this is not a supplement but their only sustenance.

5. The verb yegorashu ('they are driven out') is the same verb used for expulsion from Eden (Genesis 3:24) and Cain's banishment (Genesis 4:14). These outcasts are expelled from gev (the midst, the community). The comparison to a thief (gannav) means they are hounded and pursued even after being cast out — society treats them as criminals, not merely as unfortunates.

6. The aruts nechalim ('ravines of the wadis') are the eroded channels of seasonal streams — dangerous during flash floods, desolate the rest of the year. The chorei afar ('holes of dust/earth') and kefim ('rocks, crags') describe subhuman dwelling conditions. These are not homes but hiding places.

7. The verb yinhaqu ('they bray') is the sound a wild donkey makes — these people have been reduced to animal noises and animal behavior. The charul (nettles, thorny weeds) provides their only shelter. The verb yesuppachu ('they are gathered together, they huddle') suggests clinging to one another for warmth or safety in their miserable refuge.

8. Bene naval ('sons of the fool/senseless one') and bene veli-shem ('sons of no-name') are social designations: these are people with no lineage, no reputation, no place in the social registry. The verb nikke'u ('they were beaten, struck, driven out') combined with min ha-arets ('from the land') describes total social erasure — they have been flogged out of civilization itself.

9. The second ve-attah ('but now') opens the second panel of degradation. The neginatam ('their song, their taunt-song') means Job is the subject of their crude entertainment. The millah ('word, byword') means his name has become a proverb for misfortune. The man who once silenced nobles with his speech (29:9-10) is now the punchline of the lowest people on earth.

10. The verb ti'avuni ('they find me abhorrent, they abhor me') expresses visceral disgust. The paradox is sharp: they distance themselves from Job in revulsion but come close enough to spit (roq) at his face. Spitting in the face was the supreme insult in the ancient Near East (Numbers 12:14, Deuteronomy 25:9). The man whose face once radiated light (29:24) now has spit on it.

11. The yitro (his cord, his bowstring) that God has loosened refers back to Job's bow that was renewed in his hand (29:20). God has unstrung Job's weapon — removed his power. The resen (bridle, restraint) that others have cast off means that with Job's power gone, social restraints have dissolved. People who would never have dared insult him now do so freely because God has removed his protection.

12. The pirchach (brood, rabble — a contemptuous term for young upstarts) rise on Job's right side, which was traditionally the place of the defender or advocate in a legal setting. They push away his feet (metaphor for undermining his standing) and build orchot eidam ('roads/ramps of their destruction') — siege imagery suggesting a military assault on Job's remaining dignity.

13. The verb natsu ('they tore up, broke apart') applied to netivati ('my path') means they have destroyed Job's way forward. The havvati ('my destruction, my calamity') becomes their gain — yo'ilu ('they profit, they benefit'). The final phrase lo ozer lamo ('no helper for them' or 'they have no one restraining them') is ambiguous: it may mean no one stops them, or that even they — these wretched people — have no allies, yet they still prevail over Job.

14. The perets rachav ('wide breach') is a military image — a gap smashed through a city wall through which attackers pour. The verb hitgalgalu ('they rolled, tumbled') describes the chaotic rush of an army flooding through a broken wall. Job is a besieged city whose defenses have been breached, and the attackers are trampling everything inside.

15. The ballahot (terrors) are personified — they are turned (hahpakh) against Job like an army redirected. His nedivati ('my nobility, my generous spirit, my dignity') is pursued ka-ruach ('like wind') — it is insubstantial, uncatchable, gone. His yeshu'ati ('my salvation, my well-being, my prosperity') passes ke-av ('like a cloud') — visible for a moment, then dissolved. Wind and cloud: both images of what cannot be held.

16. The third ve-attah ('but now') opens the final and most personal panel. The verb tishtappekh ('is poured out') describes Job's nephesh (self, soul, life-force) as a liquid being emptied — the same image in Psalm 42:4 ('I pour out my soul within me') and Lamentations 2:12 (children's lives poured out). The yeme-oni ('days of affliction') have seized Job — they grip him and will not release.

17. The laylah (night) — once the time when dew rested on Job's branches (29:19) — is now the time of agony. His atsamai (bones) are niqqar ('pierced, bored through'), describing deep skeletal pain. The orqai ('my gnawing pains' or 'my sinews') lo yishkavun ('do not lie down, do not rest') — the pain is relentless, it does not sleep even when Job tries to.

18. The verb yitchappes ('is changed, is disfigured, is disguised') applied to levushi ('my garment') likely means Job's clothing is stiffened and distorted by the discharge from his sores. Where he once wore righteousness as a robe (29:14), now disease reshapes his clothing. The kefi kuttanti ('like the mouth/collar of my tunic') binding him suggests the garment has become a second skin of suffering, constricting rather than covering.

19. The subject of horani ('he has thrown me, he has cast me') is God — implicit but unmistakable. The chomer (mud, clay, mire) is the substance from which humans were formed (Job 10:9), but here it is a place of degradation, not creation. The afar va-efer ('dust and ashes') is the same phrase Abraham uses in Genesis 18:27 to describe human insignificance before God, and it appears in Job 42:6 at the book's resolution.

20. The verb shava (cry, scream for help) is among the most urgent in Hebrew prayer vocabulary — it is the cry of the oppressed in Exodus 2:23. God answered that cry; God does not answer this one. The verb hitbonen ('to gaze, to consider carefully') implies God is watching Job with full awareness but choosing not to intervene. This is not a hidden God but a God who is present, watching, and silent.

21. The verb tehapekh ('you turn, you change') combined with le-akhzar ('to cruelty, into a cruel one') is Job's most direct accusation: God has changed character. The b'otsom yadkha ('with the might of your hand') is the same language used for God's mighty acts of salvation in the exodus (Exodus 6:1). The hand that once rescued Israel now persecutes Job. The verb tistmeni ('you oppose me, you bear a grudge against me') suggests sustained hostility, not a single act.

22. God lifts Job into the ruach (wind) — not gently but to be battered. The verb tarkiveni ('you cause me to ride') uses riding imagery but without any sense of control or mastery — Job is mounted on the storm against his will. The verb temogegeni ('you dissolve me, you melt me') describes the disintegration of his tushiyyah ('substance, sound wisdom, essential being'). Job is being unmade.

23. The mavet (death) is Job's destination, and God is the one driving him there — teshiveni ('you will return me, you will bring me back'). The beit mo'ed le-khol chai ('house of meeting/appointment for all the living') is Sheol, the grave, described not as punishment but as universal appointment. Every living creature has this destination. The word mo'ed ('appointed time, meeting place') gives death the character of a scheduled event — God has set the date.

24. This verse is notoriously difficult in Hebrew. The general sense appears to be: does not a person in a heap of ruins (be'i) reach out his hand? Does not someone in catastrophe (pid) cry out (shua')? Job is defending his right to cry out — if even a person buried in rubble stretches out a hand for rescue, how much more is Job justified in crying to God from the rubble of his life.

25. Job now turns to his record of compassion as evidence. He wept for the qesheh-yom ('the hard of day,' the person experiencing difficult times) and his nephesh was agmah ('grieved, distressed') for the evyon (the destitute). This verse connects backward to 29:12-17 (Job's social ethic) and forward to the logic of chapter 31: if Job practiced compassion, he should receive compassion.

26. The antithetical parallelism is perfect: tov/ra (good/evil) and or/ofel (light/deep darkness). The verbs qivviti ('I hoped, I waited expectantly') and ayachalah ('I waited with longing') describe patient, expectant trust — the kind of trust the retribution theology promises will be rewarded. Instead, the opposite arrived. This is the sharpest statement of the book's central problem: righteous expectation met by inexplicable reversal.

27. The me'ai (my intestines, my inner organs) ruttachu ('are boiled, are in turmoil') — in Hebrew physiology, the intestines are the seat of deep emotion, roughly equivalent to 'my gut is in an uproar.' The verb lo damu ('they do not rest, they are not quiet') emphasizes relentlessness. The yeme-oni ('days of affliction') qiddamuni ('confronted me, came to meet me') — affliction came out to ambush Job on the road.

28. Qoder ('blackened, dark, mourning') describes Job's skin condition — he is darkened, but not from sunburn (belo chammah, 'without the sun'). The darkening is from disease. He rises in the qahal (assembly, congregation) and screams (ashawe'a) — the same verb from verse 20. The man who once presided over the assembly in honor (29:7-10) now stands in it screaming in desperation, and no one responds.

29. The tannim (jackals) and benot ya'anah (daughters of the ostrich, or ostriches) are animals of the wilderness and of ruins — they inhabit destroyed cities (Isaiah 13:21-22, 34:13). By calling them 'brother' (ach) and 'companion' (re'a), Job says his only kinship now is with desolation creatures. The man who once sat among elders and nobles now keeps company with scavengers of the wasteland.

30. The ori (my skin) shachor ('is black, is darkened') connects to 'blackened' in verse 28. The verb me'alai ('from upon me') suggests the skin is peeling away. The atsamai (my bones) charah ('burned, were hot') from chorev ('heat, dryness, fever') describes the sensation of internal burning — the disease attacks both surface (skin) and core (bones).

31. The kinnor (lyre, harp) is Israel's quintessential instrument of joy and worship. The ugav (pipe, flute) is associated with pastoral and festive settings. Le-evel ('to mourning') and le-qol bokhim ('to the voice of weeping') transform instruments of celebration into instruments of lament. The verse deliberately echoes Psalm 137:2 in reverse: there the exiles hang up their harps because they cannot sing; here Job's harp still plays, but it can only mourn.

31

Summary: *Job delivers the longest self-imprecation in the Hebrew Bible — a series of sixteen 'if I have...' clauses, each paired with a curse he invites upon himself if the charge is true. This is not boasting but a legal oath of clearance, the ancient equivalent of swearing before a court with one's life on the line. Job swears he made a covenant with his eyes not to gaze on a young woman (v1); that he has not walked in falsehood or deceit (v5); that he has not committed adultery (v9); that he has not denied justice to his servants (v13); that he has not withheld food from the poor, clothing from the naked, or protection from the fatherless (vv16-21); that he has not trusted in gold or worshiped the sun and moon (vv24-28); that he has not rejoiced at his enemy's ruin or cursed anyone (vv29-30); that the members of his household never went unsatisfied (v31); that he never hid his sin out of fear of the crowd (v33); and that his land has never cried out against him for injustice (vv38-39). After each charge he names the punishment he accepts if guilty: may my arm fall from its socket, may my wife grind for another man, may thorns grow instead of wheat. The oath climaxes with Job's demand for a hearing: 'Here is my signature — let the Almighty answer me! Let the indictment my accuser has written be placed on my shoulder; I would wear it like a crown' (vv35-37). This is the most audacious speech in the book. Job rests his case. His words are ended.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Job 31 functions as a negative confession — a catalog of sins Job swears he has not committed. The form has parallels in Egyptian religion (the Declaration of Innocence in the Book of the Dead, chapter 125), where the deceased lists sins they have not committed before the divine tribunal. But Job's oath is unique in the ancient world for several reasons. First, it covers not only actions but intentions — he made a covenant with his eyes (v1), meaning he governed his inner desires, not just his outward behavior. Second, it includes social ethics that go far beyond ritual purity: treatment of servants, the poor, the orphan, the stranger, even the land itself. Third, it culminates not in a plea for mercy but in a demand for a hearing. Job does not ask God to forgive him; he insists that God answer the charges or admit there are none. The tav (mark, signature) of verse 35 is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet — Job signs his name at the end of his defense, and the next voice to speak must be God's. The oath covers sexual ethics (1-4, 9-12), honesty (5-8), social justice (13-23), idolatry (24-28), vindictiveness (29-30), hospitality (31-32), hypocrisy (33-34), and ecological responsibility (38-40). It is the most comprehensive ethical code articulated by a single individual in the Old Testament.*

Translation Friction: *Job's claim to have 'made a covenant with my eyes' (v1) introduces a level of moral self-discipline that anticipates Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:28 about lust as adultery of the heart. The Hebrew Bible rarely legislates inner desire this explicitly — the tenth commandment ('you shall not covet') is the closest parallel. Job's assertion that he has kept even his gaze under covenant discipline raises the question: is such control possible, or is Job overstating his righteousness? The book's narrator has already confirmed Job's integrity (1:1, 1:8, 2:3), so the text endorses his claim. The self-imprecations are not hypothetical — in the ancient world, calling a curse upon yourself was deadly serious. If Job is lying, he has invited destruction upon himself, his household, and his land. The courage of the oath is precisely that Job stakes everything on his own integrity, knowing that God can verify every claim. The final demand — 'let the Almighty answer me' — is breathtaking in its audacity: a human being summoning the Creator to a court proceeding.*

Connections: *The covenant with the eyes (v1) connects to Jesus's teaching on lust in Matthew 5:27-28 and to the concept of guarding the heart in Proverbs 4:23. The treatment of servants as fellow creatures of God (v13-15) anticipates Paul's letter to Philemon and Galatians 3:28. Job's refusal to worship sun and moon (vv26-28) addresses the most common form of ancient idolatry and parallels Deuteronomy 4:19 and Ezekiel 8:16. The demand for a written indictment (v35) uses legal language that resonates with the 'book of life' imagery in Revelation 20:12. Job's statement 'I would bind it on me like a crown' (v36) — wearing the accusation as a diadem — inverts the normal posture of the accused. Where others would dread the charges, Job would display them as proof of his innocence, confident they cannot stand scrutiny. The phrase 'the words of Job are ended' (v40b) formally closes Job's case and creates the silence into which God's whirlwind speech will eventually break.*

1 I made a covenant with my eyes —
how then could I gaze at a young woman?

2 For what portion does God assign from above?
What inheritance does the Almighty give from on high?

3 Is not disaster for the unjust,
and calamity for those who do evil?

4 Does he not see my ways
and count my every step?

5 If I have walked alongside falsehood,
or if my foot has hurried toward deceit —

6 let God weigh me on honest scales,
and let God know my integrity.

7If my step has strayed from the path,
or my heart has followed my eyes,
or any stain has clung to my hands —

8then let me sow and another eat,
and let my crops be uprooted.

9If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door —

10then let my wife grind grain for another man,
and let others kneel over her.

11For that would be depravity,
an offense deserving judgment.

12For it is a fire that devours to the pit of destruction,
and it would uproot all my harvest.

13If I have rejected the just claim of my servant,
man or woman, when they brought a dispute against me —

14For what would I do when God rises to judge?
When he examines, what would I answer him?

15Did not the one who made me in the womb make him?
Did not the same God form us both in the womb?

16If I have withheld from the poor what they needed,
or made the widow's eyes grow dim with waiting —

17or eaten my bread alone,
without the fatherless sharing in it —

18For from my youth I raised the orphan like a father,
and from my mother's womb I guided the widow —

19If I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing,
or the destitute without a covering —

20if his body did not bless me,
warmed by the fleece of my sheep —

21If I have raised my hand against the fatherless
because I saw my supporters in the gate —

22then let my arm fall from its shoulder,
let my forearm snap from its socket.

23For disaster from God was my dread,
and before his majesty I could not stand.

24 If I have made gold my security,
or said to fine gold, 'You are my trust' —

25 if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great,
or because my hand had gained much —

26 If I have gazed at the sun as it blazed,
or at the moon moving in splendor,

27 and my heart was secretly enticed,
and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth —

28 that too would be an offense deserving judgment,
for I would have denied the God who is above.

29 If I have rejoiced at the ruin of my enemy,
or felt a surge of triumph when disaster found him —

30 I did not let my mouth sin
by asking for his life with a curse.

31 Did not the people of my tent say,
'Who can find anyone not satisfied by his meat?' —

32 No stranger spent the night in the street;
I opened my doors to the traveler.

33 If I have concealed my sins as Adam did,
hiding my guilt in my heart —

34 because I feared the great crowd,
or the scorn of clans terrified me,
so that I kept silent and would not go outside —

35 If only someone would hear me!
Here is my signature — let the Almighty answer me!
Let the indictment my accuser has written be given to me!

36 I would carry it on my shoulder;
I would bind it on like a crown.

37 I would give him an account of my every step;
like a prince I would approach him.

38 If my land has cried out against me,
and its furrows have wept together —

39 if I have eaten its yield without payment,
or snuffed out the life of its tenants —

40 then let thorns grow instead of wheat,
and weeds instead of barley.

The words of Job are ended.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Berit karati le-einai ('a covenant I cut for my eyes') is one of the most striking phrases in the Hebrew Bible. The covenant form — normally reserved for agreements between God and humans or between nations — is here applied to a man's relationship with his own body. The verb hitbonen ('to gaze intently, to consider carefully') implies sustained, purposeful looking, not a casual glance. Job has not merely avoided adultery; he has governed the direction of his desire.

2. Job's rhetorical question establishes the theological stakes: one's moral behavior determines the chelek (portion, allotment) from Eloah and the nachalat (inheritance) from Shaddai. This is the retribution principle stated as a question — Job knows the traditional answer (the righteous receive blessing, the wicked receive destruction) and is about to demonstrate that he qualifies for blessing, not destruction.

3. Job states the orthodox position: eid (disaster, ruin) belongs to the avval (the unjust, the crooked), and nekher (estrangement, strange misfortune) to the po'ale aven (workers of wickedness). He is setting up the logical framework: if disaster is for the wicked, and I am not wicked, then my disaster is unjust.

4. Job appeals to divine omniscience as his ally, not his threat. If God sees (yir'eh) every derekh (way, path) and counts (yispor) every tse'ad (step), then God knows Job is innocent. The same divine surveillance that terrified Job earlier (7:17-20) now becomes the basis for his defense — God's all-seeing eye must confirm his integrity.

5. The first 'if' (im) clause begins the oath proper. Walking 'with' (im) shav (emptiness, falsehood, worthlessness) personifies deception as a traveling companion. The foot hastening (tachash) toward mirmah (deceit, treachery) adds urgency — Job swears he has not even moved quickly in the direction of dishonesty. The protasis (if-clause) will be completed by the apodosis (then-clause) in the following verses.

6. Mo'azne-tsedeq ('scales of justice/righteousness') were literal balance scales used in the marketplace, here metaphorically applied to divine judgment. The word tummah ('integrity, blamelessness') is from the same root as tam ('complete, whole, blameless') — the first adjective applied to Job in the book (1:1). Job's demand to be weighed is also his demand that God use accurate instruments, not rigged ones.

7. Three conditions in one verse: the foot straying (titteh ashuri) from the derekh (way, path), the heart (libbi) following the eyes (a reversal of the covenant of v1 — if the eyes have led the heart astray), and any mu'um (stain, blemish, defect) clinging to the hands (kapai). The progression is from action (step) to desire (heart following eyes) to consequence (stained hands). Job claims purity at every level.

8. The self-imprecation: if Job has been dishonest, may the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:30-33 fall on him — planting but not harvesting, laboring for the benefit of strangers. The tse'etsa'ai ('my offspring, my produce') being yeshorashu ('uprooted') carries a double meaning: it can refer to agricultural produce or to descendants. The curse strikes at both livelihood and legacy.

9. The verb niftah ('was enticed, was seduced, was deceived') indicates that the heart was the target of temptation. Job addresses adultery specifically: the ishah (woman) in question is his neighbor's wife, indicated by the lurking at the petach re'i ('door of my neighbor/friend'). The word aravti ('I lurked, I lay in ambush') uses the vocabulary of predation — stalking prey.

10. The self-imprecation for adultery is devastating: titchan ('let her grind') is both literal (grinding grain was menial labor, usually assigned to slaves) and a euphemism for sexual servitude. The second line — 'let others kneel/bow over her' (yikhre'un acherin) — is explicitly sexual. Job invokes measure-for-measure justice: if he violated another man's marriage, let his own marriage be violated. The harshness of the curse reflects the gravity with which the ancient world treated adultery.

11. Job labels adultery with two terms: zimmah ('depravity, wickedness, a planned evil') and avon pelilim ('an iniquity of judges,' meaning a crime serious enough to require judicial action). The word zimmah implies premeditation — this is not accidental but deliberate moral corruption. Pelilim ('judges') indicates the community's legal system should intervene.

12. Adultery is compared to esh (fire) that consumes all the way to Abaddon — the realm of destruction, a synonym for Sheol and the grave. The verb tesharesh ('it would uproot') applied to tevuati ('my produce, my increase') means adultery destroys not only the relationship but everything the adulterer has built. The fire and uprooting imagery echoes the agricultural curses of verse 8.

13. Job now addresses his treatment of servants — a remarkable ethical claim in the ancient world, where slaves had few legal rights. The verb em'as ('I rejected, I despised') applied to mishpat avdi ('the justice/right of my servant') means Job treated his servants' complaints as legitimate legal claims deserving fair hearing. The phrase be-rivam immadi ('when they contended with me') means the servants could bring disputes against their master — an extraordinary concession of equality before justice.

14. Job grounds his treatment of servants in accountability to God. The verb yaqum ('he rises') refers to God rising in judgment, and yifqod ('he visits, he examines, he calls to account') is the verb for divine inspection. Job's question is rhetorical: if he mistreated his servants, he would have no defense before God. The fear of divine judgment motivates just treatment of those below him.

15. The rhetorical question format expects the answer 'yes.' The beten (belly, womb) and rechem (womb) are parallel terms emphasizing the shared origin of all humans in the same creative process. The word echad ('one') — one womb — may also mean 'one God' formed both. Paul echoes this logic in Ephesians 6:9: 'their Master and yours is in heaven, and with him there is no favoritism.'

16. A new section of the oath addresses treatment of the vulnerable. The dallim ('the poor, the weak, the thin ones') have a chefets ('desire, need, what they long for'), and Job swears he has not withheld (emna') it. The almanah (widow) whose eyes akalleh ('I caused to fail, to grow dim') describes a woman watching and waiting for help until her eyes lose hope. Job denies causing this kind of despair.

17. The pitti ('my morsel, my piece of bread') eaten levaddi ('by myself alone') describes the sin of hoarding food when others are hungry. The yatom ('orphan, fatherless child') not eating from it (mimmennah) would mean Job kept his table closed to the most vulnerable. Job denies this — his bread was always shared.

18. Job's parenthetical claim is hyperbolic but theologically pointed: mi-ne'urai ('from my youth') and mi-beten immi ('from my mother's womb') mean that caring for the fatherless and the widow has been his lifelong practice, not a late-life virtue. The verb gedelani ('he grew me up' or 'I raised him') ke-av ('like a father') means Job served as a surrogate father to orphans. The verb anchennah ('I guided her') applied to the widow means he provided direction and protection.

19. The oved ('perishing one') from verse 29:13 returns — someone in mortal danger from exposure. The beli levush ('without clothing') and ein kesut ('no covering') describe complete destitution. The evyon (destitute, needy) is the most desperate category of poor person. Job swears he never saw this condition without acting.

20. The chalatsav ('his loins, his body') berakhuni ('blessed me') is a vivid image: the very body of the poor person, once shivering and now warm, pronounces blessing on Job. The gez kevasai ('the shearing of my sheep') provided the wool for clothing. Job's generosity is specific and material — not abstract charity but actual wool from actual sheep given to actual cold people.

21. The hanifoti yadi ('I waved/raised my hand') against the yatom (fatherless) describes using power against the powerless. The condition ki-er'eh va-sha'ar ezrati ('because I saw my help in the gate') means: because I had allies in the court who would back me, and so I felt safe abusing the orphan. Job swears he never exploited his political connections to oppress the vulnerable.

22. The self-imprecation for oppressing orphans targets the offending limb: the katefi (shoulder, arm) that was raised against the fatherless should fall from the shikhmah (shoulder blade), and the ezro'i (forearm) should break from the qanah (upper arm bone, socket). Measure-for-measure justice: the arm that struck the orphan should be destroyed.

23. Job explains the motivation behind his ethical behavior: pachad (dread, terror) of divine eid (disaster, calamity) and se'eto (his exaltation, his majesty). This is not servile fear but profound reverence — Job feared God's judgment enough to govern his conduct, even when no human eye was watching. The phrase lo ukhal ('I could not endure, I was not able') acknowledges God's overwhelming power.

24. A new section addresses idolatry, beginning with the worship of wealth. The zahav (gold) as kisli ('my confidence, my security') and the kethem (fine gold, pure gold) as mivtachi ('my trust') describe making money into a functional god — relying on wealth the way one should rely on God alone. This is the idolatry of materialism, one of the most common forms of unfaithfulness in the wisdom tradition.

25. The sin here is not possessing wealth but placing one's joy (esmach) in it. The cheili ('my strength, my wealth, my army') and the kabir ('the abundance') that his hand matse'ah ('found, acquired') are not inherently evil — the question is whether Job's heart rested in them or in God. This distinction between having wealth and trusting wealth runs through the entire wisdom tradition.

26. Job now addresses astral worship — the most widespread form of idolatry in the ancient Near East. The or (light) ki yahel ('when it shone brilliantly') refers to the sun, and the yare'ach (moon) yaqar holekh ('precious/splendid in its course') describes the moon's majestic passage across the night sky. The verb er'eh ('I gazed, I looked at') carries the same intentional quality as the gaze in verse 1 — this is not casual observation but worship-directed attention.

27. The verb yiftt ('was enticed') returns from verse 9 (where it described enticement toward adultery) — here applied to astral worship. The gesture va-tishshaq yadi le-fi ('my hand kissed to my mouth') describes the act of blowing a kiss toward the heavenly body — a common worship gesture in the ancient world. The ba-seter libbi ('in the secret of my heart') means even internal, hidden idolatry. Job governs not only his actions but his secret affections.

28. Job labels astral worship the same way he labeled adultery: avon pelili ('a judicial offense'). The reason is devastating in its clarity: ki-khichashti la-El mimma'al ('for I would have been false to the God who is above'). Worshiping the sun and moon is not merely a religious error — it is a lie told to the face of the God who made them. The verb kikhashti ('I would have denied, been false to') carries the weight of covenant betrayal.

29. Job now addresses Schadenfreude — rejoicing (esmach) at the pid (ruin, destruction, calamity) of his mesane'i ('the one who hates me'). The verb hitrorarti ('I roused myself, I was stirred up') describes the inner thrill of seeing a rival fall. Job denies both the outward expression and the inward feeling. This anticipates Proverbs 24:17-18 ('do not rejoice when your enemy falls') and Jesus's teaching to love enemies (Matthew 5:44).

30. Job did not allow his palate (chikki) to sin (lachato) by invoking an alah (oath, curse) against his enemy's nephesh (life, being). In a world where spoken curses were believed to carry real power, Job's restraint is significant. He not only refrained from celebrating his enemy's suffering (v29) but also from invoking divine punishment against him.

31. This verse is traditionally difficult. The mete oholi ('the people of my tent,' Job's household) testify to Job's generous hospitality. The phrase mi-yitten mi-besaro lo nisba ('who will give — from his flesh we are not satisfied') most likely means: who has not been filled by Job's provision? The household itself witnesses that no one left Job's table hungry. The besaro ('his flesh/meat') refers to the meat Job served at his table.

32. The ger (stranger, sojourner, alien) did not yalin (spend the night) ba-chuts (in the street, outside). Job's delatai (my doors) were always open — eftach ('I opened') — to the orach (traveler, one on a journey). Hospitality to strangers was a sacred obligation in the ancient Near East, and its violation is the sin of Sodom in Genesis 19. Job practices the opposite of Sodom.

33. The verb kissiti ('I covered, I concealed') is the same verb used in Psalm 32:5 ('I did not hide my iniquity'). The phrase ke-adam ('like Adam' or 'like humanity') makes this either a specific allusion to Genesis 3 or a universal statement about human nature. The litmon ('to hide, to bury') be-chubbi ('in my bosom') suggests stuffing guilt deep inside where no one can see it. Job denies this kind of spiritual deception.

34. Job asks whether fear of public opinion ever caused him to hide sin. The hamon rabbah ('great multitude') and the buz-mishpachot ('contempt of clans/families') represent social pressure. The verb e'erots ('I dreaded') and yechitteni ('it terrified me') describe the fear of exposure. Job's point: he never sinned and then stayed silent (eddom) or refused to go out (lo etse fatach, 'I did not go out the door') because of fear that others might discover his wrongdoing. He had nothing to hide.

35. The tav (mark, sign, signature) is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and was used as a mark or signature by those who could not write their name. Job is signing his oath — putting his life behind every word. The ish rivi ('man of my lawsuit') may refer to God as Job's legal opponent, or to a human accuser. The sefer (scroll, document, book) is the formal written indictment. Job is demanding due process from the Almighty.

36. Job's response to the hypothetical indictment is staggering: he would not cringe from it but wear it. On his shikmi ('my shoulder') he would carry it — the shoulder bears the weight of authority. He would bind it (e'endennu) as atarot ('crowns, wreaths') — wearing the accusation as a diadem. The confidence is absolute: whatever charges are brought, Job will display them publicly because he knows they cannot stand. The image inverts every expectation: the accused becomes the crowned.

37. Job would declare (aggidenu) the mispar tse'adai ('the number of my steps') — a complete accounting of every action. He would approach God kemo-nagid ('like a prince, like a leader') — not groveling but with the dignity of someone who has nothing to hide. The nagid (ruler, prince, one who is in front) walks forward without fear. Job's innocence gives him royal bearing before the divine court.

38. The final oath section addresses Job's relationship with the land itself. The adamati ('my ground, my land') tiz'aq ('cries out, screams') — the same verb used for human cries of injustice. The telameiha ('its furrows') yivkayun ('they weep') — the plowed rows of earth are personified as witnesses. The land can testify against an unjust owner, just as Abel's blood cried from the ground in Genesis 4:10. Job treats the earth as a moral agent with standing in God's court.

39. Two crimes against the land: eating its kochah ('its strength, its produce') beli-kasef ('without silver, without payment') means taking the harvest without compensating those who worked the land. The second crime is worse: nephesh be'aleiha hipachti ('I caused the soul/life of its owners to expire') means working people to death or defrauding them of their livelihood until they perished. Job denies both exploitation of the land and exploitation of the people who work it.

40. The tachat...tachat ('instead of...instead of') structure invokes covenant reversal: the land that should produce food produces only weeds. The choach (thorn) is the same word from Genesis 3:18. The bo'shah (stinkweed, noxious plant) appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. The colophon tammu divre Iyyov ('the words of Job are complete/finished') uses the verb tamam ('to be complete, to be finished, to be whole') — related to the adjective tam ('blameless') that describes Job in 1:1. Job's words are tam — complete, whole, blameless — just as Job himself is.

32

Summary: *A new voice enters the drama. Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, a younger man who has been listening in furious silence, can no longer contain himself. The narrator explains in prose (vv. 1-5) that the three friends have stopped answering Job because he is righteous in his own eyes, and that Elihu's anger burns against Job for justifying himself rather than God, and against the three friends for condemning Job without finding an answer. When Elihu finally speaks (vv. 6-22), his opening poem is entirely about the right to speak. He defers to age, then claims that age alone does not guarantee wisdom — it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives understanding. He watched the three friends fail, and now he is bursting like a wineskin full of new wine. He will speak without favoritism, without flattery, because his Maker would take him away if he did.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Elihu is the most controversial character in the book of Job. He appears without introduction in the prologue, speaks for six chapters without interruption, and is never mentioned in God's response or the epilogue. Some scholars consider his speeches a later addition; others see him as the author's deliberate bridge between the failed arguments of the friends and the divine speeches of chapters 38-41. What is undeniable is the literary brilliance of his entrance: he is young, angry, and overflowing with words. His self-description as a wineskin about to burst (v. 19) is one of the most vivid images of compulsive speech in all of literature. He is not wrong that the friends have failed — they have. He is not wrong that age does not guarantee wisdom — it does not. But his extraordinary preamble about his own right to speak (sixteen verses of it) reveals a man who is*

more confident in his authority than in his argument. The poem is about Elihu, not about God or Job.

Translation Friction: *The prose introduction (vv. 1-5) is dense with the word charah ('burned with anger') — it appears four times in five verses. Elihu is angry at Job for self-justification and angry at the friends for failing to answer. This double anger is the key to his character: he rejects both positions. He will not side with Job against God or with the friends against Job. He claims a third way. The question the reader must carry through the next four chapters is whether Elihu actually delivers on this promise or merely restates the friends' theology in younger, more eloquent packaging. The Hebrew root ruach ('spirit, wind, breath') dominates the poem — Elihu claims the ruach of God in him (v. 8), says his belly is like wine without a vent (v. 19), and must open his lips to find ruach ('relief,' literally 'wind,' v. 20). The spirit that inspires him is also the pressure that threatens to explode him.*

Connections: *Elihu's claim that the spirit of God gives understanding (v. 8) echoes Proverbs 2:6 ('the LORD gives wisdom') and anticipates God's own speeches, where wisdom belongs to the Creator alone. His wineskin image (v. 19) prefigures Jesus' saying about new wine in old wineskins (Mark 2:22). The genealogy 'Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram' (v. 2) is unusually detailed — Buz is Nahor's son (Genesis 22:21), making Elihu a relative of Abraham. The name Barachel means 'God has blessed,' and Elihu means 'He is my God,' both theologically loaded names for a character about to lecture on divine justice.*

1These three men gave up responding to Job, for he considered himself righteous. 2Then the anger of Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the clan of Ram, burned hot. His anger burned against Job because he justified himself rather than God. 3His anger also burned against his three friends, because they had found no answer and yet had condemned Job. 4Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he in years. 5When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, his anger burned.

6Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said:
I am young in years, and you are aged;
therefore I held back, I was afraid
to declare what I know to you.

7I thought, 'Let days speak,
and the abundance of years teach wisdom.'

8But it is the spirit in a person,
the breath of the Almighty, that gives understanding.

9It is not the great who are wise,
nor the aged who understand justice.

10Therefore I say: Listen to me.
I too will declare what I know.

11Look — I waited for your words.
I listened for your insights
while you searched for what to say.

12I paid close attention to you,
but not one of you refuted Job.
None of you answered his arguments.

13Do not say, 'We have found wisdom —
only God can refute him, not a man.'

14He has not directed his words against me,
and I will not answer him with your arguments.

15They are dismayed; they answer no more.
Words have departed from them.

16I waited, but they do not speak.
They stand there; they answer no more.

17I too will answer my part.
I too will declare what I know.

18For I am full of words;
the spirit in my belly presses hard against me.

19My belly is like wine that has no vent —
like new wineskins, ready to burst.

20Let me speak, so I can breathe.
Let me open my lips and answer.

21I will not show favoritism to anyone,
and I will not flatter any person.

22For I do not know how to flatter;
if I did, my Maker would soon carry me off.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse is prose narration, not poetry. The three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar) have completed their cycles of argument. The phrase tsaddiq be'einav ('righteous in his own eyes') is ambiguous — it could be the narrator's subtle criticism of Job's self-righteousness, or simply an observation that Job maintained his innocence. Given the prologue's endorsement of Job's righteousness, the latter reading is more likely.
2. Buz is listed as a son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, in Genesis 22:21, making Elihu a distant relative of the Abrahamic family. The clan of Ram may connect to the Judahite genealogy of Ruth 4:19, though this is uncertain. The phrase tsaddeqo nafsho me-Elohim ('he justified himself more than God') could also be translated 'he justified himself before God' — but the comparative sense is stronger: Job made himself righteous at God's expense.
3. The tension between 'found no answer' and 'condemned Job' is the crux of Elihu's critique of the friends. They operated from a closed system: suffering proves guilt, therefore Job is guilty. But they never demonstrated what Job's guilt was. Elihu will attempt what they could not — to explain suffering without accusing the sufferer.
4. The verb chikkah ('he waited') indicates deliberate restraint, not passive silence. Elihu held back because of age-based deference: zeqenim hemmah mimmennu le-yamim ('they were elder than he in days'). Ancient Near Eastern culture demanded that younger men yield the floor to elders. Elihu has been observing protocol, but his patience has reached its limit.
5. The fourth appearance of charah af in this introduction. The phrase ein ma'aneh be-fi ('there was no answer in the mouth of') conveys total rhetorical failure — the friends' mouths are empty. Their arguments have been exhausted. This observation triggers Elihu's final ignition: he has waited long enough, and no one else is going to answer. The prose introduction ends here; poetry begins in verse 6.
6. The word yeshishim ('very old, aged') occurs only here and in 15:10 in Job. It implies not just old age but venerable antiquity. Elihu's deference is culturally appropriate but will soon be qualified: age deserves first hearing, not final authority.
7. Elihu articulates the conventional principle he has been following: yamim yedabberu ('days should speak') — age has the right to speak first. The parallel ve-rov shanim yodi'u chokhmah ('and abundance of years should make wisdom known') states the assumption: more years equals more wisdom. Elihu presents this as his former belief, which he is about to overturn.
8. The pairing of ruach ('spirit, wind, breath') and neshamah ('breath, life-breath') echoes Genesis 2:7 where God breathes the neshamah of life into Adam. Elihu's argument is that the same divine breath that gives life also gives understanding. The name Shaddai ('the Almighty') is Job's preferred name for God throughout the dialogue — Elihu adopts Job's own theological vocabulary.

9. The lo rabbim yechkamu ('not the many/great are wise') directly challenges the assumption of verse 7. The parallel u-zeqenim yavinu mishpat ('and elders understand judgment') with the implied negative extends the challenge: neither numbers nor years guarantee wisdom or just discernment. The word mishpat ('judgment, justice, right ruling') is a legal term — Elihu is saying the elders have failed to render a correct verdict in Job's case.

10. Having established that age does not guarantee wisdom and that the spirit of God gives understanding to anyone, Elihu now claims his right to speak: shim'ah li ('listen to me'). The achavveh de'i af ani ('I too will declare my knowledge') uses the same verb chavvah from verse 6, but now without the fear. The af ani ('I also, even I') is emphatic — Elihu inserts himself into the conversation as a legitimate participant.

11. The verb hochalti ('I waited, I hoped') implies patient, expectant waiting — Elihu genuinely hoped the elders would produce a compelling answer. The azin ('I gave ear') conveys attentive listening. The phrase ad tachqerun millin ('until you searched out words') uses chaqar ('to search, to probe, to investigate') — a word used for mining precious metals. Elihu watched them dig for arguments. They came up empty.

12. The verb etbonan ('I paid close attention, I discerned carefully') from bin intensifies the listening — Elihu was not passively hearing but actively evaluating. The verdict: ein le-Iyov mokhiach ('there is no one proving Job wrong'). The word mokhiach (Hiphil participle of yakach, 'to reprove, to argue, to decide') is a legal term for a successful prosecution. No one successfully prosecuted the case against Job. The parallel oneh amarav ('answering his words') confirms the failure: Job's arguments stand unanswered.

13. The verb yiddefennu ('will thrust him, will drive him away') from nadaf suggests forceful pushing. The friends' position — that only God's direct intervention can answer Job — is exactly what will happen in chapters 38-41. But Elihu does not know that yet. He believes the human case can be made.

14. Elihu makes two claims: first, Job has not addressed him personally, so Elihu approaches without personal offense. Second, and more importantly, u-ve-imreikhem lo ashivennu ('and with your words I will not answer him') — Elihu will not recycle the friends' failed arguments. He promises a fresh approach, not a repackaging of retribution theology. Whether he keeps this promise is one of the central interpretive questions of the Elihu speeches.

15. Elihu now addresses the audience (or perhaps speaks to himself) about the friends in the third person. The verb chattu ('they were dismayed, they were shattered') from chatat conveys defeat. The phrase he'etiqu mehem millin ('words have moved away from them') is a vivid image — words themselves have abandoned the three friends. Language has left the building. Elihu steps into the verbal vacuum.

16. The verb hochalti returns from verse 11, forming a frame: Elihu waited, listened, evaluated, and waited again. The friends' silence is now physical: amdu ('they stood still') — they are frozen, speechless, immobilized by their failure. The repetition of lo anu od ('they answered no more') from verse 15 hammers the point: the floor is empty.

17. The emphatic af ani ('I also, even I') appears twice, framing the verse. The word chelqi ('my part, my portion') suggests Elihu sees the conversation as having allotted shares — each speaker has a portion, and his has not yet been delivered. The verb achavveh ('I will declare') from chavvah appears for the third time (vv. 6, 10, 17), the keynote verb of this poem: Elihu's purpose is to declare, to make known, to set forth.

18. The word beten ('belly, womb, inner body') grounds the experience in the gut, not the head. Elihu's wisdom is not intellectual but visceral — it is felt in the body as pressure. This connects to the ancient Near Eastern concept that the internal organs were the seat of thought and emotion.

19. This image will be echoed in Jesus' saying about new wine in old wineskins (Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37-38). The fermentation metaphor implies that Elihu's words are alive, growing, developing pressure of their own — they are not prepared speeches but living insights that demand expression.

20. The shift from 'I am full' (v. 18) to 'let me speak so I can breathe' (v. 20) completes the fermentation metaphor: sealed container, building pressure, release. Elihu's speech is presented not as a choice but as a physical necessity.

21. This pledge of impartiality echoes the prophetic tradition: Samuel (1 Samuel 12:3), Isaiah, and Amos all claim to speak without favoritism. Elihu positions himself as a truth-teller uncorrupted by social hierarchy. Whether his subsequent speeches live up to this standard is debatable.

22. The verb yissa'eni ('would carry me away') from nasa can mean 'to lift up' (in blessing) or 'to carry off' (in judgment). Here it clearly means removal — God would take Elihu out of the conversation, out of the world. This verse establishes the theological stakes of Elihu's speech: he speaks under divine compulsion, and dishonesty would be fatal.

33

Summary: *Elihu addresses Job directly with his first sustained argument: God speaks to human beings, but they do not perceive it. God speaks through dreams and night visions, terrifying people to turn them from destructive paths. God also speaks through suffering — through pain on the sickbed, when a person wastes away and draws near the pit. But then, if there is a mediating angel, one among a thousand, to declare what is right for that person, God is gracious and says, 'Deliver him from going down to the pit — I have found a ransom.' The person's flesh is restored, he returns to the days of his youth, he prays and God accepts him, and he comes before others declaring, 'I sinned and twisted what was right, but it was not repaid to me.' God redeems his soul from the pit, and his life sees light. Elihu concludes by inviting Job to respond or, if he has nothing to say, to listen further.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Job 33 contains one of the most theologically advanced passages in the Hebrew Bible. In verses 23-28, Elihu describes a process of suffering, intercession, ransom, and restoration that anticipates major themes in later biblical theology. The malakh melits ('mediating angel' or 'interpreting messenger') who declares what is right for the sufferer, the kofer ('ransom') that God finds to deliver from the pit, and the padah ('redemption') of the soul — these concepts form a constellation that later tradition will connect to atonement theology. What makes Elihu's contribution distinctive is that he reframes suffering not as punishment (the friends' view) or as inexplicable injustice (Job's view) but as communication. God uses suffering to speak — to open ears, to redirect lives, to create the conditions in which a person can hear what comfort and prosperity would have drowned out. This is not a complete theodicy, but it is the first voice in the dialogue that offers suffering a purpose beyond retribution.*

Translation Friction: *Elihu begins by quoting Job's own words back to him (vv. 8-11) and then says, 'In this you are not right' (v. 12). This is more honest and more respectful than anything the three friends did — Elihu engages Job's actual arguments rather than attacking a straw man. However, the quotation is selective: Elihu focuses on Job's claim of total innocence and God's hostility but ignores Job's more nuanced protests about legal process and the absence of a mediator. Ironically, Elihu then offers exactly the mediator figure Job longed for in 9:33 (a mokiach, 'arbiter') and 16:19 (a witness in heaven) — but Elihu does not seem to realize he is answering Job's earlier prayers. The mediating angel of verse 23 is the theological answer to Job's courtroom metaphor, but Elihu presents it as his own insight rather than as a response to Job's request.*

Connections: *The malakh melits ('mediating angel') of verse 23 connects to Job's yearning for an arbiter (mokiach) in 9:33 and a witness/advocate (ed/melits) in 16:19-21. The kofer ('ransom') of verse 24 uses the same root as the kippurim ('atonements') of Leviticus 16 and anticipates the ransom (lutron) language of Mark 10:45. The restoration sequence — flesh renewed, youth restored, prayer accepted, sin confessed, soul redeemed — parallels the jubilee theology of Leviticus 25 and the restoration promises of the prophets. The phrase 'his life shall see light' (v. 28) connects to the Servant Song of Isaiah 53:11 ('he shall see light and be satisfied'). Elihu's theology of suffering as divine communication anticipates Hebrews 12:5-11, which interprets suffering as the discipline of a loving father.*

1 But now, Job — hear my words.
Listen to everything I say.

2 Look — I have opened my mouth;
my tongue speaks against my palate.

3 My words come from an upright heart,
and my lips speak knowledge sincerely.

4 The spirit of God made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

5If you can, answer me.
Set your case in order before me; take your stand.

6I stand before God just as you do.
I too was pinched from clay.

7My presence will not terrify you,
and my pressure on you will not be heavy.

8But you have said in my hearing —
yes, I heard the very sound of your words:

9'I am pure, without transgression.
I am clean; there is no guilt in me.'

10'But God finds pretexts against me;
he counts me as his enemy.'

11'He puts my feet in the stocks;
he watches all my paths.'

12In this you are not right — let me answer you:
God is greater than any mortal.

13Why do you contend against him?
He does not answer for any of his actions.

14For God speaks in one way,
and in two — though no one perceives it.

15In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls upon people,
in slumber on the bed —

16then he opens people's ears
and seals his instruction upon them,

17to turn a person from a deed,
to cut away pride from a man.

18He holds his soul back from the pit
and his life from crossing over into death.

19Or a person is rebuked with pain on the sickbed,
with unceasing conflict in the bones —

20so that his life loathes bread
and his appetite recoils from choice food.

21His flesh wastes away until it cannot be seen,
and his bones, once hidden, protrude.

22 His soul draws near the pit,
his life approaches the realm of death.

23 If there is an angel beside him,
a mediator, one among a thousand,
to declare to a person what is right for him —

24 then God is gracious to him and says,
'Deliver him from going down to the pit —
I have found a ransom.'

25 His flesh becomes fresher than a child's;
he returns to the days of his youth.

26 He prays to God, and God accepts him.
He sees God's face with a shout of joy,
and God restores his righteousness to him.

27 He sings before others and says,
'I sinned and twisted what was right,
but it was not repaid to me.'

28 He redeemed my soul from crossing into the pit,
and my life will see the light.

29 God does all these things
two or three times with a person —

30 to bring his soul back from the pit,
to be illuminated by the light of the living.

31 Pay attention, Job — listen to me.
Be silent, and let me speak.

32 If you have words, answer me.
Speak — for I want to see you vindicated.

33 If not, listen to me.
Be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Elihu addresses Job by name — the first time any speaker in the dialogue has done so. The friends spoke about Job in the third person or addressed him with 'you.' Elihu's direct address signals a different kind of engagement: personal, face-to-face, naming the man he is about to challenge.
2. The verb patachti ('I have opened') echoes Job's patach in 3:1 and Elihu's promised opening in 32:20. The phrase dibbrah leshoni bechikki ('my tongue has spoken in my palate') gives a physical description of speech: the tongue pressing against the roof of the mouth to form words. Elihu is hyper-aware of the act of speaking — every verse of his introduction is about the mechanics and morality of utterance.
3. The yosher libbi ('the uprightness of my heart') amarai ('my words') — Elihu claims his speech originates in moral integrity, not intellectual posturing. The parallel ve-da'at sefatai barur millelu ('and knowledge my lips clearly speak') emphasizes clarity: barur ('clear, pure, refined') suggests words that have been purified of deception. Elihu stakes his credibility on sincerity and transparency.
4. This verse echoes Genesis 2:7 almost directly: God formed man and breathed into his nostrils the neshamah of life. Elihu uses this shared origin to establish credibility and equality — he is not claiming to be above Job but alongside him, fellow creature before the same Creator.

5. Elihu invites rebuttal: im tukal hashiveni ('if you are able, answer me'). The verb arkhah ('set in order, arrange') is a legal term for marshaling arguments in a court case — the same courtroom language Job himself has used. The verb hityatstsavah ('take your stand, present yourself') suggests a formal legal posture. Elihu frames the exchange as a fair hearing, not a lecture.

6. The verb qarats ('to pinch off') is rare and evocative — it suggests the specific action of a potter tearing a piece of clay from a larger mass to begin forming a vessel. This is more intimate than the general 'formed' (yatsar) of Genesis 2:7. Elihu's self-description is humble: he is a torn-off piece of earth.

7. The word eimah ('terror, dread') and the verb ba'at ('to terrify') are the same terms Job used when describing his inability to face God in court (9:34, 13:21). Elihu's awareness of Job's specific vocabulary suggests he has been listening carefully to the entire dialogue.

8. Elihu now turns from introduction to argument. The phrase amarta be-oznai ('you said in my ears') emphasizes that Elihu is not relying on hearsay — he heard Job with his own ears. The qol millin eshma ('the sound of words I heard') doubles down: this is direct testimony. Elihu will now quote Job, and the quotation, while selective, is not fabricated.

9. The word zakh ('pure') is from the language of metallurgy and oil-pressing — it means refined, free of impurities. The word chaf ('innocent') means 'washed clean.' Together with beli fasha ('without rebellion'), these cover the full spectrum of Job's innocence claims. Elihu does not dispute Job's moral character — he disputes the theological conclusion Job draws from it.

10. Elihu continues quoting Job. The word tenu'ot ('pretexts, occasions for hostility, charges') suggests trumped-up accusations — God is looking for excuses to punish Job. The verb yachsheveni ('he counts me, he reckons me') le-oyev lo ('as an enemy to him') echoes Job 13:24 and 19:11 where Job accused God of treating him as a foe. Elihu has identified the core of Job's complaint: not that God punishes sin, but that God persecutes innocence.

11. The third element of Elihu's quotation: yasem bassad raglai ('he places my feet in the stocks') echoes Job 13:27 almost verbatim. The sad ('stocks, wooden block') is a restraining device for prisoners. The yishmor kol orchotai ('he watches all my paths') echoes the same verse — God as warden, tracking every movement. Elihu has accurately captured Job's image of God as jailer.

12. This is Elihu's thesis statement. He does not say Job is wicked (as the friends did) or that Job's suffering is deserved. He says Job is wrong about God — specifically, wrong to demand that God explain Himself on human terms. The phrase me-enosh ('than a mortal') uses enosh, the term for humanity in its weakness and mortality, emphasizing the gap between Creator and creature.

13. The verb rivota ('you contend, you bring a lawsuit') is legal language — Job has been suing God, and Elihu asks why. The reason God does not respond to Job's lawsuit is not indifference but sovereignty: kol devarav lo ya'aneh ('all his words/matters he does not answer'). God is not accountable to human courts. This sounds like it could slide into the friends' authoritarianism, but Elihu's next move is different: he will argue that God does speak — just not in the courtroom Job has constructed.

14. The numerical ladder pattern (one ... two) is common in Hebrew poetry (Proverbs 6:16, 30:15, 30:18, Amos 1:3). It does not mean exactly two; it means 'multiple, more than you expect.' Elihu will describe two specific channels: dreams (vv. 15-18) and pain (vv. 19-22).

15. The tardemah ('deep sleep') is consistently associated with divine action in the Hebrew Bible: God puts Adam into tardemah to create Eve, puts Abraham into tardemah to make the covenant, causes tardemah to fall on Saul's camp so David can escape. It is not natural sleep but supernaturally deepened unconsciousness — the state in which God can work without human interference.

16. The phrase galah ozen ('uncover the ear') appears also in 1 Samuel 9:15 ('the LORD had uncovered Samuel's ear') and 2 Samuel 7:27 ('you, LORD, have uncovered the ear of your servant'). It is the language of prophetic revelation. Elihu claims that ordinary people receive prophetic-quality communication from God in dreams.

17. The purpose of the dream: lehasir adam ma'aseh ('to turn a person away from a deed') — to redirect someone from a destructive course of action. The parallel ve-gevah mi-gever yekhsasseh ('and pride from a man he covers/hides') uses the verb kasah ('to cover, to hide, to remove') — God covers pride, buries it, removes it from the person's operating system. Dreams are preventive medicine: they stop bad actions before they happen and strip away the arrogance that drives them.

18. The word shachat ('pit') appears throughout Job as a synonym for death and Sheol (9:31, 17:14). It will appear again in verses 22, 24, 28, and 30 of this chapter, forming the structural keyword of Elihu's argument: the pit is the destination God is trying to prevent.

19. Elihu's move here is theologically daring. He does not say suffering is punishment for specific sins (the friends' position) but that suffering is a form of divine address — God speaking through the body when the mind would not listen. This reframes the entire debate: Job's suffering may not be retribution but communication.

20. The verb zihammattu ('it makes loathsome, it causes revulsion') from zaham describes visceral disgust — the sick person's body rejects food. The chayyato lachem ('his life bread') and nafsho ma'akhal ta'avah ('his appetite choice food') describe the total collapse of appetite. Even the most desirable food (ma'akhal ta'avah, 'food of desire') becomes nauseating. The body, which should sustain life through eating, now refuses nourishment.

21. The verb yikhel ('it is consumed, it wastes away') from kalah describes total depletion. The besaro me-ro'i ('his flesh from sight') — the flesh disappears, consumed by disease. The reversal follows: ve-shuppu atsmotav lo ru'u ('and his bones that were not seen are laid bare'). The bones that flesh once covered now jut out visibly. The body becomes a skeleton while still alive — a walking death. This is a clinical description of severe wasting illness.

22. The progression reaches its terminus: vatiqrav la-shachat nafsho ('his soul draws near to the pit'). The shachat ('pit') returns from verse 18 — the very destination God's dream was trying to prevent. The parallel ve-chayyato la-memitim ('and his life to the death-dealers') introduces the memitim ('those who kill, the destroyers') — possibly angels of death, possibly the forces of mortality themselves. The sufferer stands at the edge of Sheol. This is the maximum point of crisis — and it is here that Elihu introduces the mediating angel.

23. The malakh melits is one of the most debated figures in Job. Job asked for a mokiach ('arbiter') in 9:33, an ed ('witness') in 16:19, and a go'el ('redeemer') in 19:25. Elihu's mediating angel may be the answer to all three requests — but Elihu presents it as his own theological insight, not as a response to Job's prayers. The phrase 'one among a thousand' emphasizes rarity: such intercession is possible but not guaranteed.

24. The kofer ('ransom') is from the same root as kippur ('atonement, covering'). In Exodus 21:30, kofer is the ransom price paid to save a life. In Exodus 30:12, it is the atonement money each Israelite pays. Here, God finds the kofer — the ransom is not a human payment but a divine discovery. This reverses the normal transaction: instead of the guilty party paying to escape punishment, the judge provides the payment to rescue the accused.

25. The verb rutafash occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, making its exact meaning uncertain. The context demands something like 'made plump, made fresh, restored to healthy fullness.' The return to youth is a reversal of the wasting described in verses 19-22 — what disease consumed, God's ransom restores and then exceeds.

26. The sequence — prayer, acceptance, face-to-face encounter, restored righteousness — is a complete salvation narrative compressed into a single verse. The 'seeing of God's face' is the highest possible restoration, since Exodus 33:20 declares that no one can see God's face and live. Elihu describes a person brought back from the edge of death to the fullest possible intimacy with God.

27. The phrase ve-lo shavah li ('it was not repaid to me') is theologically crucial. It means that God did not give the person the punishment their sin warranted. Grace exceeded strict justice. This is the testimony of someone who has experienced kofer (ransom): I was guilty, but God found a covering, and I was restored beyond what I deserved.

28. The shift from third person ('he redeemed his soul') to first person ('my life will see') in many Hebrew manuscripts has caused textual debate. Some read both as third person. The first-person reading is more dramatic — the testimony becomes personal mid-sentence, as if the speaker is overwhelmed by gratitude and drops the formal narration.

29. Elihu now generalizes: hen kol elleh yif'al El ('indeed, all these things God does'). The pa'amayim shalosh ('two or three times') im gaver ('with a man') is another numerical ladder: God repeats this cycle of warning, suffering, intercession, and restoration multiple times. God does not give up after one attempt. Divine patience extends to repeated interventions. The word gever ('man, strong person') echoes 32:21 (gaver in the night of conception) — the same human being who was conceived in darkness can be rescued from the pit repeatedly.

30. The phrase or hachayyim ('light of the living') appears also in Psalm 56:14 ('that I may walk before God in the light of the living'). It is the opposite of the tsalmaveth ('shadow of death') that Job invoked in 3:5 and 10:21-22. Elihu's vision of divine purpose ends in light, not darkness — the reversal of Job's opening curse.

31. Elihu returns to direct address: haqshev Iyov shema li ('pay attention, Job, hear me'). The imperative hachresh ('be silent, be still') from charash is a demand for Job's silence — Elihu has more to say. The ve-anokhi adabber ('and I myself will speak') uses the emphatic first-person pronoun anokhi rather than the common ani, adding weight: it is I who will speak.

32. The phrase chafatsti tsaddeqekha ('I desire your vindication') sets Elihu apart from the friends. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar all worked toward Job's condemnation. Elihu works toward Job's vindication — he just insists it must come through acknowledging God's sovereignty, not through accusing God of injustice.

33. The closing verse: im ayin ('if not, if you have nothing to say') attah shema li ('you listen to me'). The final promise: va-aalefkha chokhmah ('and I will teach you wisdom'). The verb alaf ('to teach, to learn') is rare, adding formal weight. Elihu promises chokhmah ('wisdom') — the same wisdom he argued in 32:9 does not come automatically with age. He has positioned himself as wisdom's carrier, not by virtue of years but by virtue of the spirit (32:8). Whether he delivers on this promise is the question that chapters 34-37 will answer.

34

Summary: *Elihu's second speech addresses a wider audience — he calls upon the wise men to listen and judge between his words and Job's. He quotes Job's claim that he is righteous but denied justice, then methodically argues that God cannot be unjust. His argument is structural, not evidential: God governs the entire earth; if God withdrew his spirit, all flesh would perish. Therefore God cannot act with partiality or injustice, because the one who holds all life in his hands has no motive for corruption. God does not need to examine anyone at length — he knows their works and overturns them in a night. He strikes the wicked in open sight, because they turned aside from following him and caused the cry of the poor to reach his ears. When God is silent, who can condemn? When he hides his face, who can see him? Yet he rules over nations and individuals alike. Elihu concludes by calling on Job to submit: if Job has sinned without knowing it, let God teach him; if Job has done wrong, let him repent. The decision is Job's,*

not Elihu's.

What Makes This Remarkable: *Elihu's argument in this chapter operates at a different level than the friends' arguments. The friends reasoned backward from suffering to guilt: you suffer, therefore you sinned. Elihu reasons forward from God's nature to God's justice: God governs all things, therefore God cannot be unjust. This is a cosmological argument, not a forensic one. The most powerful section (vv. 14-15) imagines what would happen if God withdrew his spirit from the world — all flesh would expire, all humanity would return to dust. This counterfactual proves God's ongoing sustaining will: the fact that anything exists at all demonstrates that God is actively choosing to sustain life. A God who sustains everything by choice cannot be accused of indifferent injustice. The argument has force, but it also has a blind spot: it proves that God can do justice but does not explain why God's justice sometimes looks like injustice from the human side. Elihu knows this — his conclusion (vv. 31-37) shifts from argumentation to exhortation, urging Job to let God be the teacher rather than the defendant.*

Translation Friction: *Elihu's quotation of Job in verses 5-6 is more pointed than his previous summary: he now attributes to Job the claim that 'God has taken away my justice' and 'my wound is incurable though I am without transgression.' These are fair paraphrases of Job's actual words (27:2, 6:4, 9:17). But Elihu then adds a charge that is more aggressive: 'What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water, who walks in company with evildoers?' (vv. 7-8). This is not something Job said — it is Elihu's characterization of the effect of Job's words. By claiming innocence while accusing God, Job has, in Elihu's view, aligned himself with those who mock God. This is a harder edge than Elihu showed in chapter 33, and it raises the question of whether Elihu is beginning to slide into the same condemnation that defeated the three friends. The chapter oscillates between genuine theological insight (vv. 14-15) and rhetorical aggression (vv. 7-8, 36-37), making Elihu a more complex and less sympathetic figure than in his first speech.*

Connections: *The counterfactual of verses 14-15 (if God withdrew his spirit, all would die) connects to Psalm 104:29-30 ('when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust; when you send forth your spirit, they are created') and to Genesis 2:7 / 3:19 (from dust, to dust). Elihu's assertion that God shows no partiality to princes (v. 19) echoes Deuteronomy 10:17 ('the LORD your God is God of gods, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribe'). The image of God overturning the mighty in a night (v. 25) anticipates Daniel's theology of divine sovereignty over kingdoms (Daniel 2:21, 'he removes kings and sets up kings'). Elihu's final challenge — 'should God repay according to your terms?' (v. 33) — foreshadows God's own challenge to Job in 38:2 and 40:8.*

1 Then Elihu answered and said:

2 Hear my words, you who are wise;
you who have knowledge, listen to me.

3 For the ear tests words
as the palate tastes food.

4 Let us choose what is just;
let us determine among ourselves what is good.

5 For Job has said, 'I am righteous,
but God has taken away my justice.'

6 'Should I lie about my own case?
My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression.'

7 What man is like Job,
who drinks scorn like water?

8 He keeps company with workers of evil
and walks alongside wicked men.

9For he has said, 'It profits a person nothing
to take delight in God.'

10Therefore, you who have understanding, listen to me:
Far be it from God to do wickedness,
far from the Almighty to commit injustice.

11For he repays a person according to their deeds
and makes everyone find what their path deserves.

12Truly, God does not act wickedly,
and the Almighty does not pervert justice.

13Who entrusted him with the earth?
Who appointed him over the whole world?

14If God set his heart on it,
if he gathered his spirit and his breath back to himself —

15all flesh would perish together,
and humanity would return to dust.

16If you have understanding, hear this;
listen to the sound of my words.

17Can one who hates justice govern?
Will you condemn the Righteous and Mighty One?

18Does one say to a king, 'Worthless one!'?
Or to nobles, 'Wicked!'?

19How much less the One who shows no favoritism to princes
and does not prefer the rich over the poor —
for they are all the work of his hands.

20In a moment they die.
At midnight people are shaken — they pass away.
The mighty are removed, not by human hands.

21For his eyes are on the ways of every person,
and he sees all their steps.

22There is no darkness, no deep shadow,
where workers of evil can hide.

23He does not need to examine a person further
for them to come before God in judgment.

24He shatters the mighty without investigation
and sets others in their place.

25Therefore he knows their deeds;
he overturns them in the night, and they are crushed.

26He strikes them down for their wickedness
in a place where all can see —

27because they turned away from following him
and gave no thought to any of his ways,

28so that the cry of the poor reached him,
and he heard the cry of the afflicted.

29When he is silent, who can condemn?
When he hides his face, who can see him? —
whether over a nation or over a single person.

30so that a godless person does not reign,
so that the people are not ensnared.

31For has anyone said to God,
'I have borne my punishment — I will offend no more'?

32'What I cannot see, teach me.
If I have done wrong, I will do it no more.'

33Should God repay on your terms, since you reject his?
You must choose — not I.
So speak what you know.

34People of understanding will say to me,
and every wise person who hears me will agree:

35'Job speaks without knowledge,
and his words lack insight.'

36Would that Job were tested to the limit
for answering like men of wickedness!

37For he adds rebellion to his sin;
he claps his hands in scorn among us
and multiplies his words against God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard speech-introduction formula. Elihu continues without any indication that Job has responded to the invitation of 33:32-33. Job's silence is itself significant — he does not rebut Elihu as he rebutted the three friends.

2. Elihu broadens his audience: shim'u chakhamim ('hear, wise ones'). He is no longer addressing Job alone but appealing to a wider circle of sages — possibly the three friends, possibly a broader assembly, possibly a rhetorical audience. The yode'im ('those who know, the knowledgeable') in the parallel line forms a jury: Elihu wants his case judged by competent minds.

3. This proverb appeared in Job 12:11 in Job's own mouth: 'Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food?' Elihu either borrows Job's saying or draws from a common wisdom tradition. By using Job's own proverb, Elihu implicitly invites Job to apply his own standard of discernment to what follows.

4. The verb nivcharah ('let us choose') from bachar implies a deliberate, considered selection — not impulse but judgment. The mishpat ('justice, judgment, right ruling') is the object of choice: Elihu frames the discussion as a collective search for justice. The ned'ah beinenu mah tov ('let us know among ourselves what is good') invites communal discernment. Elihu positions himself not as a dictator of truth but as a participant in a shared inquiry.

5. Elihu quotes Job's two-part claim: tsadaqti ('I am righteous') and El hesir mishpati ('God has removed my justice'). The first part echoes Job 27:6 ('I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go'). The second echoes Job 27:2 ('As God lives, who has taken away my justice'). Elihu accurately captures Job's position: I am innocent, and God has denied me the vindication I deserve.

6. Elihu continues the quotation. The rhetorical question al mishpati akhazzev ('against my justice should I lie?') paraphrases Job's refusal to recant (27:4-5). The anush chitsi beli fasha ('my arrow-wound is incurable without transgression') captures Job's protest that his suffering (described as an arrow wound, echoing 6:4) has no cause in his behavior. Elihu presents the full force of Job's complaint before attempting to answer it.

7. The image of drinking scorn like water recurs in Job 15:16 (Eliphaz: 'how much less one who drinks injustice like water'). Elihu may be consciously echoing Eliphaz while applying the image differently — not to humanity in general but to Job specifically. The shift from empathetic interlocutor (ch. 33) to accuser marks a tonal change in Elihu's rhetoric.

8. The verb arach ('he travels, he journeys') le-chevrah ('for companionship') im po'alei aven ('with workers of iniquity') accuses Job of ideological companionship with the wicked — not that Job commits evil acts, but that his theology aligns him with those who deny God's justice. The parallel ve-lalekhet im anshei resha ('and to walk with men of wickedness') uses the metaphor of walking together, implying shared direction and shared conclusions. Elihu's argument: by saying 'God denies justice,' Job walks the same road as those who reject God entirely.

9. The verb ratsah ('to be pleased with, to take delight in') here describes the human side of the relationship: taking pleasure in God, delighting in obedience. Elihu charges that Job has declared this delight worthless. The same question will be raised more subtly by the Adversary's original challenge in 1:9: 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' Elihu, without knowing it, is revisiting the book's foundational question.

10. The word chalilah derives from chalal ('to profane, to defile'). To say that God commits evil is to profane God — it violates the sacred nature of divinity itself. Elihu's argument is that Job's accusation is not merely incorrect but sacrilegious. This is stronger language than the friends used, but it rests on a different foundation: the friends accused Job of sin; Elihu accuses Job of theological error.

11. The positive statement of divine justice: fo'al adam yeshallem lo ('a person's work he repays to him'). The verb shillem ('to repay, to complete, to make whole') implies exact correspondence between action and consequence. The parallel u-khe-orach ish yamtsi'ennu ('and according to a person's path he causes him to find') uses the metaphor of a road: the path you walk leads to the destination you reach. Elihu states retribution theology in its simplest form. The question, which Elihu does not fully address, is what to do when the evidence contradicts this principle — as it does in Job's case.

12. The af omnam ('truly indeed, most certainly') is emphatic: El lo yarshi'a ('God does not act wickedly') uses the Hiphil of rasha — God does not cause wickedness, does not practice it, does not produce it. The parallel ve-Shaddai lo ye'avvet mishpat ('and the Almighty does not twist justice') uses the verb ivvet ('to twist, to pervert, to make crooked') — the same verb Bildad used in 8:3. Elihu and Bildad agree on this point, but Elihu will ground it differently: not in tradition but in cosmology.

13. The verb paqad ('to appoint, to charge, to visit, to attend to') is rich with meaning — it can mean appointing someone to a task, visiting someone for judgment, or entrusting someone with responsibility. The rhetorical answer to both questions is 'no one' — God is self-appointed, self-authorized, and self-sustained.

14. The pairing of ruach and neshamah echoes 33:4 and 32:8, creating a thematic chain: the spirit that gives Elihu authority to speak (32:8), that gives him life (33:4), could be withdrawn at any moment (34:14). Elihu's wisdom, his very existence, depends moment by moment on God's choice to sustain it.

15. This is arguably the most theologically sophisticated moment in the Elihu speeches. The argument is not 'God is powerful and you should fear him' but 'God actively sustains all life by choice, and the continuation of existence is itself evidence of divine care.' This anticipates the theology of Paul in Acts 17:28 ('in him we live and move and have our being') and Colossians 1:17 ('in him all things hold together').

16. Elihu pauses for emphasis: ve-im binah ('and if understanding') shim'ah zot ('hear this'). He is about to shift from cosmological argument to political theology — applying the principle of divine justice to the governance of nations and rulers. The ha'azinah le-qol millay ('give ear to the voice of my words') is a formal demand for attention, signaling that a new section of the argument begins.

17. The word kabbir ('mighty, powerful, great') is rare, appearing mainly in Job. It describes God's overwhelming power combined with righteousness. Elihu's rhetorical question assumes that power and justice are inseparable in God — an assumption Job would challenge by pointing to his own experience.

18. Elihu argues from lesser to greater: ha-amor le-melekh beliyya'al ('does one say to a king, worthless?'). Even human kings are not addressed with such contempt. The beliyya'al ('worthless, wicked, useless') is one of the harshest terms in Hebrew — it will later become a name for the ultimate adversary (Belial). If you would not say this to a human king, how much less to the divine King? The rasha el nedivim ('wicked to nobles') extends the point: you do not accuse rulers of wickedness to their faces. Job, in Elihu's view, has done exactly this to God.

19. The phrase ma'aseh yadav ('the work of his hands') echoes Psalm 8:7 and Isaiah 64:7. Elihu's logic is: favoritism requires that some people matter more than others to the judge. But if the judge made all of them, no one has a prior claim on his attention. God's impartiality flows from his role as universal Creator.

20. The verse describes divine judgment on the powerful: rega yamuthu ('in an instant they die') — death comes without warning. The va-chatsot lailah ('and at midnight') yigo'ashu am ('the people are shaken') echoes the tenth plague in Egypt (Exodus 12:29), when at midnight God struck down the firstborn. The ve-yasiru abbir lo ve-yad ('and they remove the mighty not by a hand') — the mighty are swept away without any visible human agency. God's justice operates directly, without intermediaries, without armies, without visible mechanism.

21. The basis of divine judgment: ki einav al darkhei ish ('for his eyes are upon a person's ways'). God's vision is total — ve-khol tse'adav yireh ('and all his steps he sees'). Every movement, every decision, every path is observed. This answers Job's complaint that God is not paying attention (24:1): God sees everything. The question Job raises — then why does God not act? — is one Elihu addresses in the verses that follow.

22. The ein choshekh ve-ein tsalmaveth ('there is no darkness and no death-shadow') lehissater sham po'alei aven ('for workers of iniquity to hide there'). The choshekh and tsalmaveth that Job invoked as a refuge (3:5, 10:21-22) are declared insufficient as hiding places from God. The verb hissater ('to hide oneself') from satar implies deliberate concealment — but no darkness is deep enough to escape God's vision. This counters Job's implicit suggestion that God cannot see what happens in the dark corners of the world.

23. A difficult verse. The ki lo al ish yasim od ('for he does not place upon a person further') may mean: God does not need additional time or evidence to render judgment. The lahalokh el El ba-mishpat ('to go to God in judgment') suggests that the judicial process does not require prolonged investigation. God's knowledge is immediate and complete. The verse may also mean: God does not impose on anyone more than is right — he does not need to burden people with excessive scrutiny because he already knows everything.

24. The verb yaro'a ('he shatters, he breaks') kabbirim ('mighty ones') lo cheqer ('without investigation, without limit') — God removes the powerful without needing a formal inquiry. His knowledge is already complete (v. 21). The parallel vayyaa'amed acherim tachtam ('and he stations others in their place') describes the replacement of rulers — one regime falls, another rises, all by divine action. This anticipates Daniel's theology of divine sovereignty over kingdoms.

25. The laken yakkir ma'badeihem ('therefore he recognizes their works') — God's knowledge of human deeds is the basis for judgment. The ve-hafakh lailah ('and he overturns in the night') — the reversal comes suddenly, under cover of darkness, without warning. The ve-yiddakke'u ('and they are crushed') from daka ('to crush, to be pulverized') describes total destruction. Elihu's image of nighttime overthrow echoes the fall of Babylon (Isaiah 21:4, Daniel 5:30) and the Egyptian plague.

26. The tachat resha'im ('in the place of wicked ones' or 'because of their wickedness') sefaqam ('he slaps them, he strikes them'). The verb safaq ('to slap, to strike, to clap') implies public humiliation — not secret judgment but open shaming. The bimqom ro'im ('in a place of observers, in the sight of onlookers') makes the judgment visible. God's justice, when it comes, is not hidden but public, serving as both punishment and warning.

27. The reason for the public judgment: asher al ken saru me-acharav ('because they turned aside from after him') — they abandoned God's path. The ve-khol derakhav lo hiskilu ('and all his ways they did not consider') uses hiskil ('to consider, to understand, to act wisely') — they did not even attempt to understand God's requirements. Their sin was not mere failure but deliberate indifference.

28. The tsa'aqah ('cry') is the Exodus word: when the oppressed cry out, God hears and acts. Elihu places God's justice in the framework of exodus theology: God is the liberator of the oppressed, and the oppressor's downfall is certain even if delayed.

29. The verb yashqit ('he is quiet, he gives rest') from shaqat can mean both 'to be silent' and 'to give rest/peace.' Elihu may be saying: when God gives peace, who can make trouble? Or: when God is silent, who can condemn him? The ambiguity is likely intentional — both meanings are theologically valid.

30. The purpose of divine intervention in governance: mi-melokh adam chanef ('from the reigning of a godless person'). God acts to prevent chanef ('godless, profane, hypocritical') rulers from holding power. The mi-moqeshei am ('from the snares of the people') — God prevents the population from being trapped by corrupt leadership. Elihu's political theology: God is active behind the scenes of human governance, removing tyrants and preventing the enslavement of the people.

31. Elihu shifts to exhortation. The ki el El he-amar ('for to God has [anyone] said') nasati ('I have borne, I have carried') lo echbol ('I will not act corruptly') — this is the response Elihu thinks Job should give: an acknowledgment of suffering received and a commitment to further obedience. The verse is textually difficult; some read it as a statement ('surely one should say to God') and others as a question ('has anyone said to God?').

32. The ideal response continues: bil'adei echezeh ('apart from what I see, beyond my sight') attah horeni ('you teach me'). The confession is: my vision is limited; show me what I cannot see on my own. The conditional im avel pa'alti ('if I have committed injustice') lo osif ('I will not continue') — if shown specific wrongdoing, the person commits to repentance. Elihu models the prayer Job should pray: one that acknowledges limited understanding and submits to divine instruction.

33. This verse is among the most difficult in Job to translate. The Hebrew is compressed and ambiguous. The general sense is clear: Elihu challenges Job to either accept God's terms or articulate a better alternative. The phrase ve-lo ani ('and not I') distances Elihu from the decision — he is facilitator, not judge.

34. Elihu appeals to his wider audience: anshei levav ('people of heart/understanding') yomeru li ('will say to me') — the wise will confirm his argument. The ve-gever chakham shome'a li ('and a wise man listening to me') reinforces the appeal: wisdom recognizes wisdom. Elihu is confident that competent judges will rule in his favor.

35. The verdict Elihu expects from the wise: Iyov lo veda'at yedabber ('Job speaks not with knowledge'). The u-devarav lo vehaskeil ('and his words are not with understanding'). This is a blunt assessment, but it is also a quotation of what Elihu thinks the wise will say — he attributes the verdict to them rather than pronouncing it himself. The words lo veda'at ('without knowledge') will be echoed almost exactly by God in 38:2 ('who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge?'), suggesting that Elihu's diagnosis, if not his prescription, is correct.

36. This is Elihu's harshest verse. The avi ('my father' or 'my wish, would that') yibbachen Iyov ('let Job be tested') ad netsach ('to the end, to the limit, forever') — Elihu wishes prolonged testing on Job. The al teshuvot be-anshei aven ('because of answers among men of wickedness') accuses Job of speaking like the wicked. This outburst has troubled commentators who see Elihu as a mediating figure — here he sounds more like the friends at their worst. Some scholars read avi as 'my father' (an invocation of God) rather than 'my wish,' softening it to a prayer rather than a curse.

37. Elihu's closing accusation: ki yosif al chattato ('for he adds to his sin') fesha ('rebellion') — Job's initial suffering may not have been caused by sin, but his response to it (accusing God) compounds the problem. The beinenu yispoq ('among us he claps') — the clapping of hands is a gesture of mockery or contempt (Lamentations 2:15, Nahum 3:19). The ve-yerev amarav la-El ('and he multiplies his words against God') is the final charge: Job talks too much against God. Elihu ends his second speech on a note of frustration, having moved from empathetic engagement (ch. 33) to outright exasperation. His argument that God cannot be unjust is theologically sound; his characterization of Job's response as mockery and rebellion is less defensible.

35

Summary: *Elihu delivers his third speech, challenging Job's claim that righteousness profits a person nothing before God. He begins by quoting Job's own words back to him — 'my righteousness is greater than God's' and 'what advantage is it to me if I do not sin?' — then dismantles the premise. His core argument: God is so transcendently high that human sin cannot harm him and human righteousness cannot benefit him. When people cry out under oppression, they cry from pain but not to God; they demand relief but never ask, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?' Their prayers go unanswered not because God is indifferent but because the cries are empty — born of pain, not of genuine turning toward the divine. Elihu concludes that Job speaks from ignorance, multiplying words without knowledge.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is Elihu's most philosophically daring speech. He articulates a theology of divine transcendence that anticipates God's own speech from the whirlwind: God is so far above human categories that our moral behavior neither enriches nor diminishes him. The logic is sharp — if God gains nothing from your righteousness and loses nothing from your sin, then the entire transactional framework of the friends ('be good and God will reward you') collapses. Elihu is dismantling retribution theology from the top down rather than from Job's bottom up. The most haunting image is verse 10: no one asks 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?' This is the deep diagnosis — suffering people demand rescue but rarely seek relationship. They want God's hand but not God's face. The 'songs in the night' image suggests that God offers something more than pain relief: a capacity for praise even in darkness.*

Translation Friction: *Elihu's argument contains a real insight wrapped in a problematic application. The insight — that God transcends human moral categories — is theologically sound and will be validated by God's own speech. The problem is the pastoral implication: Elihu essentially tells Job that his suffering does not matter to God, that his righteousness makes no difference to the Almighty. This is technically true at the level of cosmic ontology but devastatingly unhelpful at the level of human experience. A man covered in boils does not need to hear that his pain is cosmically insignificant. Elihu also misquotes Job — Job never said 'my righteousness is greater than God's' but rather argued that God was treating him as though he were unrighteous. The misquotation allows Elihu to construct a straw man.*

Connections: *The 'songs in the night' image (verse 10) connects to Psalm 42:8 ('in the night his song is with me') and Psalm 77:6 ('I remember my song in the night'). The theology of divine transcendence anticipates Isaiah 55:8-9 ('my thoughts are not your thoughts'). Elihu's claim that human sin cannot affect God echoes Psalm 50:12-13 where God declares he has no need of bulls or goat blood — he owns the cattle on a thousand hills. The 'look at the heavens' command (verse 5) prefigures God's own strategy in chapters 38-41 of directing Job's gaze upward and outward.*

1 Then Elihu answered and said:

2 Do you consider this a just claim —
when you say, 'My righteousness exceeds God's'?

3 For you ask, 'What good does it do me?
What do I gain by not sinning?'

4 I will answer you with words —
you, and your friends along with you.

5 Look up at the heavens and see —
gaze at the skies, how high they tower above you.

6 If you sin, what do you do to him?
If your offenses multiply, what does it cost him?

7 If you are righteous, what do you give him?
What does he receive from your hand?

8 Your wickedness affects only someone like you;
your righteousness benefits only a fellow human.

9 Under the weight of oppression, people cry out;
they call for help against the arm of the powerful.

10 But no one asks, 'Where is God my Maker,
who gives songs in the night?'

11 He teaches us more than the beasts of the earth
and makes us wiser than the birds of the sky.

12 There they cry out, but he does not answer —
because of the arrogance of the wicked.

13 Surely God does not hear an empty cry;
the Almighty does not regard it.

14 How much less when you say you cannot see him —
the case is before him; wait for him!

15 But now — because his anger has not yet struck,
he does not know the full extent of it.

16 So Job opens his mouth for nothing —
he piles up words without knowledge.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Elihu's third speech begins without the elaborate self-justification of his first two. He moves directly to engage Job's argument. The va-ya'an ('and he answered') follows the standard dialogue formula.

2. The ha-zot chashavta le-mishpat ('do you reckon this as justice/judgment') challenges Job's legal framework. The amarta tsidqi me-El ('you said: my righteousness is more than God's') is Elihu's paraphrase of Job's position — though Job's actual claim was that God was treating him unjustly despite his innocence, not that he was more righteous than God. The verb chashav ('to reckon, to consider') is accounting language: Elihu challenges the

moral arithmetic.

3. Elihu quotes Job's implication: mah yiskon lakh ('what does it profit you') and mah o'il me-chattati ('what do I gain from my sin / from abstaining from sin'). The verb sakan ('to be of use, to profit') and the verb ya'al ('to profit, to benefit') are commercial terms. Job's complaint, as Elihu frames it, reduces righteousness to a transaction — if there is no profit in being good, why bother? This is a fair extraction of what Job implied in 9:29-31 and 34:9.

4. Elihu claims to address both Job and the three friends simultaneously. The ve-et re'eikha immakh ('and your companions with you') signals that Elihu considers the friends' theology equally deficient — they too operate within a transactional framework where righteousness should yield reward.

5. The habbet shamayim u-re'eh ('look at the heavens and see') is the pivot of Elihu's argument. Before reasoning about God, look at the physical distance between earth and sky. The shur shechakim gavehu mimmekka ('gaze at the clouds — they are higher than you') uses the verb shur ('to look, to behold with attention') and shechakim ('clouds, skies, thin clouds'). The visual exercise establishes the scale: if the clouds are beyond your reach, how much more the God who made them.

6. The im chatata ('if you sin') mah tif'al bo ('what do you accomplish against him') — the verb pa'al ('to do, to work, to accomplish') asks what effect human sin has on God. The ve-rabbu fesha'eikha ('and your transgressions are many') mah ta'aseh lo ('what do you do to him') — even massive, accumulated rebellion accomplishes nothing against the divine. God is not injured by human sin. This is not moral indifference but ontological transcendence.

7. The parallel to verse 6: im tsadaqta ('if you are righteous') mah titten lo ('what do you give to him'). The mah mi-yadekha yiqqach ('what from your hand does he take'). The symmetry is complete: sin does not diminish God; righteousness does not enrich God. God is not a merchant who profits from human virtue or loses from human vice. The verb natan ('to give') and laqach ('to take') are exchange verbs — Elihu demolishes the commerce model of divine-human relations.

8. The application: le-ish kamokha ('to a man like you') rish'ekha ('your wickedness') — sin operates horizontally, person to person. The u-le-ven adam ('and to a son of man, a human being') tsidqatekha ('your righteousness') — virtue also operates horizontally. The vertical axis — human to God — is not affected. Elihu's theology locates the moral consequences of behavior entirely within the human sphere. God stands above the transaction.

9. The shift to a new observation: me-rov ashuqim ('from the abundance of oppressions / from the many oppressed') yaz'iqu ('they cry out'). The yeshavve'u ('they call for help, they cry out for rescue') mi-zzero'a rabbim ('from the arm of the great/mighty'). The zero'a ('arm') is the standard metaphor for military or political power. Elihu acknowledges the reality of oppression and suffering — the cry is real. But he will argue the cry is misdirected.

10. The phrase noten zemirot ba-llailah ('who gives songs in the night') has generated extensive commentary. The zemirot may refer to songs of praise, protective songs (night was associated with danger), or the songs of creation itself (birds sing before dawn). Some scholars connect this to the practice of night vigils in Israelite worship. The image anticipates Psalm 42:8 where the psalmist declares 'in the night his song is with me' and Psalm 77:6 where the psalmist searches his spirit in the night. The theological claim is that God's gift is not limited to daytime prosperity — he gives something precious specifically in the dark hours.

11. The mallefenu ('who teaches us') mi-bbahamot arets ('more than the beasts of the earth') — God has given humanity a capacity for understanding that animals lack. The u-me-of ha-shamayim ('and more than the birds of the heavens') yechakkemenu ('he makes us wise'). The argument: humans have been given superior wisdom, yet they fail to use it to seek God. Animals cry from instinct; humans should know better. The bahamot ('beasts') and of ('birds') anticipate the animal catalog in God's speech (chapters 38-41).

12. The sham yits'aqu ('there they cry out') ve-lo ya'aneh ('but he does not answer') — the silence of God in response to human cries. But the cause is identified: mippnei ge'on ra'im ('because of the pride/arrogance of evil men'). The ge'on ('pride, arrogance, swelling') is the reason for divine silence — not God's indifference but the quality of the cry. The cry comes from arrogant self-pity, not from genuine seeking. The ra'im ('evil ones, wicked') describes the character of those crying, not a separate group.

13. The akh shav ('surely emptiness, vanity') lo yishma El ('God does not hear') — the shav ('emptiness, falsehood, vanity') describes the quality of the cry, not its volume. A cry born of self-interest rather than genuine turning toward God is shav — hollow. The Shaddai ('the Almighty') lo yeshurennah ('does not look at it, does not regard it'). The verb shur ('to see, to observe, to regard') means God does not even acknowledge such prayers. The theology is severe: not all prayers are equal, and God distinguishes between genuine seeking and pain-driven demands.

14. The af ki tomar ('how much more/less when you say') lo teshurennhu ('you do not see him') — Job's complaint that God is invisible and inaccessible. Elihu's response: din lefanav ('judgment/justice is before him') — the legal case already stands before God's face even if Job cannot see God's face. The u-techolel lo ('and wait for him, writhe in expectation before him') — the verb chul ('to wait, to writhe, to be in labor') conveys painful expectation. Elihu tells Job to endure the waiting.

15. This verse is textually difficult. The ve-attah ki ayin paqad appo ('and now because nothing/not — he visited his anger') may mean that God has not yet fully punished, so Job is unaware of how severe the consequences could be. The ve-lo yada ba-ppash me'od ('and he does not know in the abundance/extremity greatly') — Job does not recognize the full magnitude of the situation. The pash ('abundance, transgression') is a rare word. Elihu suggests Job's situation could be much worse, and Job does not appreciate God's restraint.

16. Elihu's verdict: ve-Iyyov hevel yiftseh pihu ('and Job — in vain/emptiness he opens his mouth'). The hevel ('vapor, breath, vanity') is the same word that dominates Ecclesiastes — Job's speech is as insubstantial as mist. The bi-veli da'at millin yakhbir ('without knowledge he multiplies words')

echoes God's own coming challenge in 38:2 ('who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge'). Elihu anticipates God's language, though he lacks God's authority to deliver it.

36

Summary: *Elihu's fourth and longest speech begins as a defense of God's justice and climbs steadily toward a meditation on divine power in nature. He opens by claiming to speak on God's behalf, asserting that God is mighty but does not despise anyone. God watches over the righteous and seats them with kings, but when the afflicted are bound in chains, he uses their suffering to expose their transgressions and open their ears to instruction. Those who listen are restored to prosperity; those who refuse perish. The godless in heart nurse anger and refuse to cry for help. Elihu then turns directly to Job, warning him not to long for the night of judgment and not to turn toward iniquity. From verse 22 onward, the speech transforms: Elihu lifts his eyes to the sky and begins describing God's power as revealed in storm, rain, lightning, and thunder. God is great beyond human comprehension. He draws up water droplets that distill into rain. He spreads his lightning and covers the depths of the sea. Through these he judges nations and provides abundant food. Lightning fills his hands and he commands it to strike its mark. The thunder announces his coming — even the cattle sense the approaching storm.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the hinge of the entire Elihu section and arguably of the book. Beginning at verse 22, Elihu stops arguing about suffering and starts pointing at the sky. His speech undergoes a genre shift from didactic discourse to nature poetry, and the nature poetry builds directly into the theophany of chapters 38-41. Elihu becomes the warm-up act for God. The transition is not accidental — it enacts the very theology Elihu has been preaching. He told Job to look up (35:5); now Elihu himself looks up and is overwhelmed by what he sees. The rain cycle described in verses 27-28 is remarkably accurate for ancient observation: God draws up water droplets, they condense in clouds, and the clouds pour down rain on humanity. The lightning imagery in verses 30-33 is visceral — God holds bolts in his hands and hurls them at targets. The chapter ends with cattle sensing the storm, a detail of pastoral observation that grounds the cosmic poetry in lived experience.*

Translation Friction: *Elihu's claim to speak 'on behalf of my Maker' (verse 3) is audacious, and the book will implicitly rebuke it when God speaks for himself. Elihu's pastoral theology in verses 8-15 — that suffering is God's way of opening ears to instruction — contains genuine wisdom but stumbles on the same rock as the friends: it assumes a pedagogical purpose for all suffering, which does not account for the gratuitous dimension of Job's case. The prologue has established that Job's suffering originates in a divine wager, not in a divine lesson plan. Elihu's nature poetry, however, escapes this limitation because it makes no claim about why Job suffers — it simply directs attention toward the God who controls the storm. In doing so, Elihu inadvertently provides the correct preparation for encountering God: not understanding but awe.*

Connections: *The rain cycle (verses 27-28) parallels Amos 4:7 and Psalm 147:8. The 'God is great' declaration (verse 26) uses gadol, the same term in Deuteronomy 10:17 ('the great, mighty, and awesome God'). The throne imagery (verse 7, 'he seats them with kings') echoes 1 Samuel 2:8 (Hannah's prayer: 'he raises the poor from the dust and seats them with princes'). The transition from didactic speech to nature theophany mirrors the structure of Psalm 19, which moves from 'the heavens declare the glory of God' to the law of the Lord. Most critically, Elihu's storm poetry in verses 26-33 functions as the dramatic overture to God's whirlwind speech — the storm that Elihu describes is the very storm from which God will speak in 38:1.*

1 Then Elihu continued and said:

2 Bear with me a little longer — I will show you,
for there are still words to speak on God's behalf.

3 I will draw my knowledge from far away
and ascribe righteousness to my Maker.

4Truly, my words are not false.
One complete in knowledge stands before you.

5See — God is mighty, yet he does not despise.
He is mighty in strength of understanding.

6He does not keep the wicked alive,
but he grants justice to the afflicted.

7He does not withdraw his eyes from the righteous.
He seats them with kings on thrones —
he establishes them forever, and they are exalted.

8But if they are bound in chains,
caught in the cords of affliction —

9then he reveals to them what they have done —
their offenses, how they grew arrogant.

10He opens their ear to correction
and commands them to turn back from wickedness.

11If they listen and serve him,
they will finish their days in prosperity
and their years in contentment.

12But if they do not listen,
they cross over into death by the sword
and perish without ever understanding.

13The godless in heart store up anger;
they do not cry for help when he binds them.

14They die in their youth;
their life ends among the temple prostitutes.

15He rescues the afflicted through their affliction
and opens their ear by means of distress.

16He would have led you too out of the jaws of distress
into a wide place with no confinement,
and your table would be loaded with rich food.

17But you are full of the judgment due the wicked;
judgment and justice have seized you.

18Beware — let not anger lure you into mockery,
and let no size of ransom lead you astray.

19Can your cry for help be arranged so as to keep you from distress?
Can all your strenuous efforts?

20 Do not long for the night
when peoples are swept away from their place.

21 Be careful — do not turn toward wickedness,
for you have preferred this over affliction.

22 See — God is exalted in his power.
Who is a teacher like him?

23 Who has prescribed his path for him?
Who can say to him, 'You have done wrong'?

24 Remember to magnify his work,
which humanity has sung about from old.

25 All humanity has gazed upon it;
mortals behold it from afar.

26 See — God is great beyond our knowing;
the number of his years is beyond searching out.

27 For he draws up the drops of water;
they distill as rain from his mist —

28 which the clouds pour down
and shower upon humanity in abundance.

29 Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,
the thundering from his pavilion?

30 See — he spreads his lightning over it
and covers the roots of the sea.

31 For by these he judges peoples
and gives food in abundance.

32 He covers his hands with lightning
and commands it to strike its target.

33 His thunder announces his coming;
even the cattle sense the rising storm.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The va-yosef Elihu ('and Elihu added/continued') va-yomar ('and he said') — the verb yasaf ('to add, to continue') signals that this is a continuation of his preceding argument, not a new topic. This is Elihu's fourth and final speech, and the longest.

2. The kattar li ze'eir ('wait for me a little, bear with me briefly') — Elihu asks for patience. The va-achavvekka ('and I will declare to you, show you') uses the Aramaic-influenced verb chavah ('to declare, show'). The ki od le-Eloha millin ('for there are still words for God') — Elihu claims that more remains to be said in God's defense. He positions himself as God's advocate.

3. The essa de'i le-merachoq ('I will carry/lift my knowledge from afar') claims a breadth of understanding that transcends local experience. The u-le-fo'ali ('and to my Maker') etten tsedeq ('I will give righteousness/justice') — Elihu's stated purpose is to vindicate God, to prove that God is just. The fo'ali ('my Maker') uses the verb pa'al ('to make, to do'), establishing Elihu's creaturely relationship to the God he defends.

4. The ki omnam lo sheqer millai ('for truly, not falsehood are my words') — Elihu certifies his own honesty. The temim de'ot immakh ('one complete/perfect in knowledge is with you') — Elihu claims comprehensive understanding. The temim ('complete, whole, blameless') is the same word used of Job in 1:1. Whether Elihu refers to himself or to God is debated; the grammar most naturally refers to Elihu himself, which is a striking claim.

5. The hen El kabbir ('behold, God is mighty/great') ve-lo yim'as ('and he does not despise/reject') — God's power does not produce contempt for the small. The kabbir koach lev ('mighty in strength of heart/understanding') — lev ('heart') in Hebrew denotes the seat of intellect and will, not merely emotion. God's might is not brute force but informed power, power guided by understanding.

6. The lo yechayeh rasha ('he does not give life to / preserve the wicked') — God does not sustain the wicked indefinitely. The u-mishpat aniyyim yitten ('and the judgment/justice of the poor/afflicted he gives') — God provides justice specifically to the aniyyim ('the poor, the afflicted, the humble'). The contrast establishes that God's power serves justice, not arbitrary will.

7. The lo yigra mi-tsaddiq einav ('he does not withdraw from the righteous his eyes') — God's gaze remains fixed on the just. The ve-et melakhim la-kkisse ('and with kings to the throne') va-yoshivem ('and he seats them') — the righteous are elevated to royal status. The la-netsach ('forever') va-yigbahu ('and they are exalted') — the establishment is permanent. This echoes Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:8) and anticipates the enthronement theology of Psalm 113:7-8.

8. The ve-im asurim ba-zziqim ('and if they are bound in fetters/chains') — the asurim ('bound ones, prisoners') are not necessarily criminals. The yillakhedun be-chavlei oni ('they are caught/held in the ropes of affliction') — the chavlei ('cords, ropes, birth pangs') of oni ('affliction, poverty, misery') bind the righteous. This is Elihu's theology of suffering: even the righteous may be bound, but the binding has a purpose.

9. The va-yagged lahem po'olam ('and he declares to them their deed/work') — suffering becomes revelation. God uses affliction to show people their own behavior. The u-fish'eihem ('and their transgressions') ki yitgabbaru ('that they acted arrogantly, they were mighty in rebellion'). The verb gavar ('to be mighty, to prevail') in the hitpael means 'to act arrogantly, to behave overbearingly.' Suffering functions as a mirror.

10. The va-yigel oznam ('and he uncovers/opens their ear') la-mmusar ('to instruction, correction, discipline') — the galah ozen ('uncovering the ear') idiom means to reveal something privately, to give privileged information. The va-yomer ki yeshuvun me-aven ('and he says that they should turn from iniquity') — the verb shuv ('to turn, to return, to repent') is the standard term for repentance. Elihu's theology: suffering is God's private tutorial, not his punishment.

11. The conditional promise: im yishme'u ('if they hear/obey') ve-ya'avodu ('and they serve') — the two verbs shama ('to hear') and avad ('to serve') form the core Deuteronomic response to God. The yekhallu yemeihem ba-ttov ('they will complete their days in good') u-sheneihem ba-nne'imim ('and their years in pleasant things'). The ne'imim ('pleasantness, delight') is the positive outcome. Elihu presents a genuinely conditional theology — the outcome depends on response.

12. The alternative: ve-im lo yishme'u ('and if they do not hear') be-shelach ya'avoru ('by the weapon/dart they cross over/pass away'). The shelach is a thrown weapon — a javelin or dart. The ve-yigve'u ('and they expire') bi-veli da'at ('without knowledge') — the tragedy is not merely death but death in ignorance. They never learned what the suffering was trying to teach them. This is Elihu's worst-case scenario: not punishment but wasted revelation.

13. The ve-chanfei lev ('and the godless/profane of heart') yasimu af ('they place/store anger') — the chanef ('godless, profane, polluted') person hoards resentment rather than turning toward God. The lo yeshavve'u ki asaram ('they do not cry out when he binds them') — when God binds them in affliction, they refuse to call out. This is the inverse of verse 10: God opens the ear, but the godless refuse to use the opened ear. Their silence is not peace but sullen defiance.

14. The tamot ba-nno'ar nafsham ('their soul dies in youth') — premature death. The ve-chayyatam ba-qqedeshim ('and their life is among the qedeshim') — the qedeshim are the cultic prostitutes attached to pagan temples. The qadesh ('consecrated one') is an ironic term — 'holy' in etymology but referring to those dedicated to sexual rites in Canaanite worship. The implication: the godless die young and their existence is as degraded as cultic prostitution.

15. The yechallets ani be-onyo ('he delivers the poor/afflicted in/through his affliction') — the preposition be can mean 'in' (during affliction) or 'by means of' (through affliction). Elihu means both: God delivers during suffering and by means of suffering. The ve-yigel ba-llachats oznam ('and he uncovers in the oppression their ear') — the same ear-opening idiom from verse 10. This is Elihu's most concise theological statement: affliction is the instrument of deliverance, not its opposite.

16. Elihu turns directly to Job: ve-af hesitikha ('and indeed he would have enticed/led you') mi-ppi tsar ('from the mouth of distress') — the tsar ('narrowness, distress') has a mouth like a beast; God would have pulled Job from its jaws. The rachav lo mutsaq tachteiha ('a broad place with no constriction beneath it') — expansive freedom after confinement. The ve-nachat shulchanekha male dashen ('and the rest/setting of your table full of fatness') — a table laden with rich food. The dashen ('fatness, richness') is the sign of divine blessing.

17. The ve-din rasha maleta ('and the judgment of the wicked you are full of') — Job is saturated with the kind of judgment that belongs to the wicked. The din u-mishpat yitmokhu ('judgment and justice take hold, seize') — the two terms for justice (din and mishpat) act as agents that grab hold of Job. Elihu's point is ambiguous: either Job has brought this upon himself, or the judgment that seems to belong to the wicked has mistakenly attached itself to him.

18. A warning: ki chemah ('because wrath/anger') pen yesitikha ('lest it entice you') be-safeq ('with a clap, with mockery, with sufficiency') — the safeq can mean 'a handclap' (mocking gesture), 'sufficiency' (wealth), or 'a blow.' The ve-rov kofer al yattekka ('and the greatness of ransom let it not turn you aside') — no amount of payment can buy escape from divine judgment. The verb natah ('to turn aside, to bend') warns against being deflected from the right path.

19. This verse is textually very difficult. The ha-ya'arokh shu'akha ('can your cry/wealth be arranged/set in order') lo be-tsar ('not in distress') — the shua can mean 'cry for help' or 'wealth/riches.' The ve-khol ma'amattsei koach ('and all the exertions of strength') — all human effort is insufficient. Whether read as 'can your wealth keep you from distress' or 'can your cry for help be arranged to avoid trouble,' the answer is the same: no human resource suffices.

20. The al tish'af ha-llailah ('do not gasp for/desire the night') — the verb sha'af ('to pant after, to gasp for, to desire eagerly') suggests desperate longing. The lailah ('night') here means the night of divine judgment. The la'alot ammim tachtam ('for the going up of peoples from beneath them, from their place') — peoples are removed, swept away in the dark. Elihu warns Job not to wish for the eschatological judgment he has been demanding — it is more terrible than Job imagines.

21. The hishamer ('guard yourself, be careful') al tefen el aven ('do not turn toward iniquity') — the verb panah ('to turn') implies a deliberate choice of direction. The ki al zeh bacharta me-oni ('for on account of this you have chosen rather than affliction') — Elihu accuses Job of preferring to complain about injustice rather than accept affliction as instruction. The bacharta ('you have chosen') makes it a matter of will, not fate.

22. The pivot: hen El yasgiv be-khocho ('behold, God is exalted/made high in his power') — from this point, Elihu's speech transforms from argument to praise. The mi khamohu moreh ('who is like him as a teacher/instructor') — the moreh ('teacher, one who instructs') could also be read as 'one who shoots' (from yarah, 'to shoot, to throw, to teach'). God teaches through what he does in nature. This verse launches the nature hymn that will build directly into the theophany.

23. The mi paqad alav darkko ('who has appointed over him his way') — no one assigns God his course of action. The u-mi amar pa'alta avlah ('and who has said: you have committed injustice') — this directly addresses Job's central claim. The verb paqad ('to appoint, to visit, to command') and the noun avlah ('injustice, wrong') frame the question: God is accountable to no one. This anticipates God's own challenge in 40:8: 'Would you condemn me to justify yourself?'

24. The zekhor ki tasgi po'olo ('remember that you should magnify his work') — the verb sagah ('to make great, to magnify') in the hiphil demands active praise. The asher shoreru anashim ('which people have sung/gazed upon') — the verb sharar can mean 'to sing' or 'to behold.' Elihu appeals to a tradition of human response to divine works — people have always seen and celebrated what God does.

25. The kol adam chazu vo ('all humanity has looked at it') — God's work in creation is universally visible. The enosh yabbit merachoq ('a mortal looks from afar') — the verb nabat ('to look, to gaze') with merachoq ('from a distance') acknowledges that human perception is distant. We see God's works but from a great remove. The tension between universal visibility and remote viewing is central: everyone can see, but no one can see closely enough.

26. The saggi ('great') is an Aramaism that appears frequently in the Elihu speeches, supporting the view that these chapters reflect a distinct linguistic layer. The ve-lo neda ('we do not know') is a first-person plural confession — Elihu includes himself in the unknowing. This is his most humble moment. The ein cheqer ('no searching out, unfathomable') is an absolute negation — not 'difficult to search out' but 'impossible to search out.' God's years — his temporal existence — cannot even be numbered, let alone comprehended.

27. The nature poetry begins. The ki yegara nitfei mayim ('for he diminishes/draws up the drops of water') — the verb gara ('to diminish, to withdraw, to draw off') describes the evaporation process: God draws water upward in tiny droplets. The yazoquu matar le-edo ('they refine/distill rain for his mist/vapor') — the verb zaqaq ('to refine, to purify, to distill') is a metallurgical term applied to meteorology. Rain is refined from vapor the way metal is refined from ore. This is remarkably accurate ancient observation of the water cycle.

28. The asher yizzelu shechakim ('which the clouds drip/flow') — the verb nazal ('to flow, to drip, to trickle') describes the steady release of water from clouds. The yir'afu alei adam rav ('they drip upon humanity abundantly') — the verb ra'af ('to drip, to shower') and rav ('much, many, abundant') indicate generous rainfall. The three-verse sequence (26-28) moves from God's unknowable greatness to the observable gift of rain — from theology to meteorology, from the hidden to the revealed.

29. The af im yavin mifrsei av ('indeed, can anyone understand the spreadings of the cloud') — the verb paras ('to spread out') describes the way clouds extend across the sky. The teshu'ot sukkato ('the crashings/thunderings of his booth/pavilion') — the sukkah ('booth, tent, pavilion') is God's dwelling in the storm cloud, and the teshu'ot ('crashings, thunder') are the sounds from that dwelling. God lives in the storm cloud as in a tent, and thunder is the sound of his habitation.

30. The hen paras alav oro ('behold, he spreads over it his light') — the or ('light') here is lightning, spread like a canopy over the storm cloud. The ve-shorshei ha-yam kissah ('and the roots/depths of the sea he covers') — God's lightning illuminates from the heights of the sky to the shorshei ('roots, depths, foundations') of the sea. The range is total: from sky to ocean floor. The verb kasah ('to cover') suggests the lightning reveals what was hidden in the deep.

31. The ki vam yadin ammim ('for by them he judges peoples') — the storm phenomena (rain, lightning, thunder) are instruments of both judgment and provision. The yitten okhel le-makhbir ('he gives food in abundance') — the makhbir ('in abundance, exceedingly') from the root kavar ('to be much, to multiply'). The dual function of storm — destructive judgment and life-giving rain — captures the paradox of divine power: the same force that terrifies also feeds.

32. The al kappayim kissah or ('upon his palms he covers light/lightning') — God holds lightning in his hands like a weapon. The va-yetsav aleiha be-mafgi'a ('and he commands it by/against its target') — the mafgi'a ('the one who intercedes, the one who hits the mark') from the root paga ('to encounter, to meet, to strike'). God aims the lightning and it hits what he intends. The image is of a warrior holding bolts of light and hurling them with precision.

33. The yaggid alav re'o ('his thunder/companion declares about him') — the re'a can mean 'thunder' or 'companion/friend.' As thunder, it announces God's approach. The miqneh af al oleh ('the cattle also concerning what rises') — even livestock sense the approaching storm. The oleh ('what rises, what ascends') refers to the storm building on the horizon. This pastoral detail grounds the cosmic poetry: before God arrives in the whirlwind, the cattle in the fields become restless. Nature knows its Maker before the theologians do.

37

Summary: *Elihu's nature poetry reaches its crescendo as a thunderstorm builds and breaks. His heart pounds at the sound of God's voice in the thunder. He describes God's power moving across the sky — lightning, snow, rain, ice, and wind — all obedient to divine command. God seals the hand of every person so they stop working. Animals retreat to their dens. The storm wind comes from its chamber, and cold from the scattering winds. God's breath produces ice, and the broad waters freeze. He loads the clouds with moisture and scatters his lightning. The clouds wheel in circles, doing whatever God commands over the face of the inhabited world — whether for correction, for the land, or for mercy. Elihu then turns to Job one final time: stop and consider the wonders of God. Do you know how God balances the clouds, how your garments grow hot when the south wind stills the earth? Can you, with him, spread out the sky like a cast metal mirror? Elihu concludes with a theologically charged observation: out of the north comes golden splendor, and around God is awesome majesty. The Almighty — we cannot find him — is great in power and justice, abundant in righteousness. He does not oppress. Therefore mortals fear him; he has no regard for any who are wise in their own heart.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter functions as the dramatic overture to the theophany. The storm Elihu has been describing since 36:26 is the same storm from which God will speak in 38:1. Elihu's poetry does not merely describe weather — it describes the approach of God. Every meteorological phenomenon is a sign of divine presence drawing nearer. The progression is cinematically precise: thunder (verses 2-5), snow and rain that stop all human work (verses 6-8), the storm wind (verses 9-10), cloud movements (verses 11-13), and finally the demand for silence before the arriving Presence (verses 14-20). Elihu's body participates in the revelation — his heart trembles and leaps from its place (verse 1), anticipating Job's own physical response to the theophany. The final image — golden splendor from the north and awesome majesty surrounding God (verse 22) — is the last human description before God himself takes over the narrative. Elihu is the last human voice before the divine voice speaks.*

Translation Friction: *Elihu's closing argument (verses 19-20) contains a troubling implication: 'Teach us what we should say to him — we cannot draw up our case because of the darkness.' This suggests humans should simply accept ignorance and stop arguing. While the humility is appropriate, Elihu uses it to silence Job rather than to comfort him. His final statement — 'he has no regard for any who are wise in their own heart' — is aimed directly at Job and functions as a warning: stop thinking you know better than God. The irony is that God, when he arrives, will not rebuke Job for speaking but for speaking 'without knowledge' (38:2) — a crucial distinction. God wants Job to speak, just with better information. Elihu wants Job to be quiet. The book sides with God's approach over Elihu's.*

Connections: *The 'voice of God' in thunder (verses 2-5) connects to Psalm 29, the great thunder psalm, where God's voice breaks cedars and shakes the wilderness. The sealing of human hands (verse 7) echoes the sabbath principle — God periodically stops human labor to remind people who actually runs the world. The 'chambers of the south' (verse 9) appear in 9:9 where Job mentions them as one of God's cosmic structures. The golden splendor from the north (verse 22) may allude to Ezekiel 1:4 where the divine chariot approaches from the north in a great cloud with flashing fire and brightness around it. The 'cast metal mirror' image for the sky (verse 18) reflects ancient cosmology where the firmament (raqia of Genesis 1:6-8) was understood as a solid dome. Most critically, this chapter ends exactly where chapter 38 begins — the storm that Elihu describes becomes the storm from which God speaks.*

1At this my heart pounds
and leaps from its place.

2Listen — listen closely to the roar of his voice,
the rumbling that comes from his mouth.

3He unleashes it under the whole heaven;
his lightning reaches to the edges of the earth.

4After it, a voice roars.
He thunders with his majestic voice,
and he does not hold back the bolts when his voice is heard.

5God thunders with his voice — marvelous things!
He does great things beyond our understanding.

6For he says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth!'
and to the rain shower — to the heavy downpour of his might.

7He seals the hand of every person
so that all may recognize his work.

8The wild animals enter their lairs
and settle into their dens.

9From its chamber the storm wind comes,
and cold from the scattering winds.

10By the breath of God, ice forms;
the wide waters are frozen solid.

11He loads the thick cloud with moisture;
he scatters his lightning cloud.

12The clouds wheel in circles at his direction,
doing whatever he commands them
across the face of the inhabited world.

13Whether for correction, or for the land,
or for mercy — he sends it forth.

14Listen to this, Job —
stand still and consider the wonders of God.

15Do you know how God arranges them
and makes the lightning of his cloud flash?

16Do you understand the balancing of the clouds —
the wonders of the One perfect in knowledge?

17You — whose garments grow hot
when the earth lies still under the south wind —

18 Can you, with him, spread out the sky —
hard as a mirror of cast bronze?

19 Teach us what we should say to him —
we cannot draw up our case because of the darkness.

20 Should he be told that I wish to speak?
If a man speaks, he would be swallowed up.

21 Now — no one can look at the light
when it blazes in the skies,
but a wind passes and sweeps them clear.

22 From the north, golden splendor comes.
Around God — awesome majesty.

23 The Almighty — we cannot find him out.
He is great in power and justice;
abundant in righteousness, he does not oppress.

24 Therefore mortals fear him.
He has no regard for any who are wise in their own eyes.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The af le-zot ('indeed, at this') yecherad libbi ('my heart trembles/shudders') — Elihu's body responds to the approaching storm. The ve-yittar mi-mmeqomo ('and it leaps/springs from its place') — the verb natar ('to spring, to leap, to start up') describes the heart physically jumping. This is not theological abstraction but somatic experience: Elihu feels God's approach in his chest. The physical trembling anticipates Job's own response in 42:5-6.

2. The shim'u shamo'a ('hear — hear attentively') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute construction to demand full attention. The be-rogez qolo ('in the trembling/agitation of his voice') — the rogez ('trembling, agitation, thunder') is God's voice manifested as thunder. The ve-hegeh mi-ppiv yetse ('and the murmuring/growling that goes out from his mouth') — the hegeh ('murmuring, muttering, growling') is the low, sustained rumble of ongoing thunder. God's voice is not a single clap but a continuous, rolling growl across the sky.

3. The tachat kol ha-shamayim yishrehu ('under all the heavens he lets it loose/directs it') — the verb sharah ('to let loose, to release, to direct') describes God releasing the thunder across the entire sky. The ve-oro al kanfot ha-arets ('and his light upon the wings/edges of the earth') — the kanfot ('wings, corners, edges') of the earth are the furthest visible horizon. Lightning illuminates from horizon to horizon. The scope is total: the entire dome of heaven, the entire surface of the earth.

4. The acharav yish'ag qol ('after it a voice roars') — the flash comes first, then the roar follows. The yar'em be-qol ge'ono ('he thunders with the voice of his majesty/pride') — the ge'on ('majesty, exaltation, pride') applied to God's voice makes thunder a royal proclamation. The ve-lo ye'aqvem ki yishama qolo ('and he does not hold them back when his voice is heard') — once the thunder sounds, the lightning bolts are not restrained. The sequence — light, then sound, then more light — matches the actual experience of a thunderstorm.

5. The yar'em El be-qolo nifla'ot ('God thunders with his voice — wonders') — the nifla'ot ('wonders, marvelous things') are not separate from the thunder but are the thunder itself. Thunder is a wonder. The oseh gedolot ('he does great things') ve-lo neda ('and we do not know/understand') — the identical phrase from 36:26 returns. Elihu's refrain: God does great things that exceed comprehension. The repetition is deliberate — this is the thesis statement of Elihu's nature hymn.

6. The ki la-ssheleg yomar hevei arets ('for to the snow he says: be — earth!') — the command is both to the snow and to the earth; God orders the snow to exist and the earth to receive it. The ve-geshem matar ('and rain, a shower') ve-geshem mitrot uzzo ('and rain, downpours of his strength') — two levels of rain: ordinary showers and powerful storms. The uzzo ('his strength') applied to heavy rain makes the downpour an expression of divine power.

7. The be-yad kol adam yachtom ('on the hand of every person he seals/stamps') — the verb chatam ('to seal, to close, to stamp') means God stops human labor. When the storm comes, people cannot work in the fields. The la-da'at kol anshei ma'asehu ('so that all the people of his making may know') — the enforced idleness has a purpose: recognition. When your hands are sealed shut by weather, you remember that Someone else is at work. The ma'asehu ('his work/making') refers both to God's creative work and to the humans he has made.

8. The va-ttavo chayyah ve-mo arev ('and the beast enters its lair/ambush') — the chayyah ('living creature, wild animal') retreats from the storm. The u-vi-me'onoteiha tishkon ('and in its dens/habitations it dwells') — the me'onot ('dens, dwelling places') are where animals shelter. The detail is observed from pastoral life — during severe weather, wild animals seek shelter. This anticipates the animal catalog in God's speech (38:39-39:30) where God asks Job who provides for the wild creatures.

9. The min ha-cheder ('from the chamber/inner room') tavo sufah ('comes the storm wind') — the cheder ('inner room, bedchamber') is a storage room in the heavens where God keeps the winds. This connects to 38:22 where God asks Job about the storehouses of snow and hail. The u-mi-mmezarim qarah ('and from the scattering winds, cold') — the mezarim is a rare word, likely referring to the northern winds that scatter clouds and bring cold. Some associate it with the constellation Mazzaroth (38:32).

10. The mi-nishmat El ('from the breath/blast of God') yitten qarach ('ice is given/produced') — God's breath is so cold it creates ice. The neshamah ('breath') is the same word used for the breath of life in Genesis 2:7 — the same divine breath that animates the living freezes the waters. The ve-rochav mayim be-mutsaq ('and the breadth of waters in a casting/constraint') — the mutsaq ('pouring, casting, constraint') from the root yatsaq ('to pour, to cast') suggests the water becomes solid as if poured into a mold. The surface of a lake freezes like cast metal.

11. The af beri yatriach av ('also with moisture he burdens/loads the cloud') — the beri ('moisture, fatness, grain') is the water content of the cloud, and the verb tariach ('to burden, to load heavily') describes the cloud becoming heavy with rain. The yafits anan oro ('he scatters the cloud of his light') — the or ('light') here is lightning. God disperses the lightning-bearing clouds across the sky. The two actions — loading with water and scattering with light — describe the full anatomy of a thunderstorm.

12. The ve-hu mesibbot mithappekh ('and it/he turns in circuits, wheeling about') be-tachbulotav ('by his guidance/direction') — the tachbulot ('guidance, steering, direction') is a navigation term, used of a helmsman steering a ship. God steers the clouds like a captain steers a vessel. The le-fo'olam kol asher yetsavvem ('for their work, everything he commands them') — the clouds are obedient servants. The al penei tevel artsah ('upon the face of the world, earthward') — the tevel ('inhabited world') emphasizes that these are not abstract cosmic phenomena but forces directed at the human world.

13. Three purposes of weather: im le-shevet ('if for a rod/correction') — storm as punishment. The im le-artso ('if for his land') — storm as provision, watering the earth. The im le-chesed ('if for mercy/lovingkindness') — storm as an act of divine grace. The yamtsi'ehu ('he causes it to find/reach its target') from the root matsa ('to find'). The three purposes form a theological spectrum: the same storm can be judgment, agriculture, or compassion. God decides, and the storm obeys.

14. Elihu turns directly to Job for the final time. The ha'azinah zot Iyyov ('give ear to this, Job') — the verb azan ('to give ear, to listen') demands full attention. The amod ('stand still') — stop moving, stop arguing, stop everything. The ve-hitbonen nifle'ot El ('and consider carefully the wonders of God') — the hitpael of bin ('to understand') means 'to apply oneself to understanding, to consider deeply.' The nifle'ot ('wonders') are the same ones from verse 5. Elihu's command: stop talking and start looking.

15. The ha-teda ('do you know') be-sum Eloha aleihem ('when God places/arranges upon them') — the verb sum ('to place, to set, to arrange') asks whether Job understands God's process. The ve-hofia or anano ('and he causes the light of his cloud to shine') — the hiphil of yafa ('to shine') describes God making the cloud emit light. Elihu's questions anticipate God's interrogation in chapters 38-41 — the same rhetorical strategy of asking Job what he knows about the natural world.

16. The ha-teda al miflsei av ('do you know about the balancings/poisings of the cloud') — the miflasim ('balancings') from the root palas ('to weigh, to make level, to balance') asks how clouds, laden with water, remain suspended in the sky. This was a genuine mystery in the ancient world and remains striking even with modern meteorological knowledge. The mifle'ot temim de'im ('the wonders of the one perfect in knowledge') — the temim de'im ('complete in knowledge') is God himself, whose omniscience designs the atmospheric systems.

17. The asher begadeikha chammim ('you whose garments are hot') — a shift from cosmic scale to personal experience. When the hot south wind blows, your own clothes become unbearably warm. The be-hashqit erets mi-ddarom ('when the earth is quieted/stilled from the south') — the hiphil of shaqat ('to be quiet, to rest') describes the oppressive stillness of a hot day when the south wind (darom) has silenced everything. Elihu moves from the grandeur of the storm to the intimate sensation of heat on your body.

18. The tarqi'a immo li-shechakim ('can you hammer out with him the skies') — the verb raqa ('to stamp, to hammer out, to spread by beating') is the same verb behind raqia ('firmament') in Genesis 1:6. The ancient understanding was that the sky was a solid dome, hammered out like beaten metal. The chazaqim ki-r'i mutsaq ('strong like a mirror of casting/molten metal') — the r'i ('mirror') in the ancient world was polished bronze. The sky is described as a cast bronze mirror — solid, reflective, and crafted. The question challenges Job: were you there when God forged the sky?

19. The hodi'enu mah nomar lo ('make us know what we should say to him') — Elihu asks Job to instruct them on how to address God. The tone is ironic: if Job is so confident about his case, let him draft the brief. The lo na'arokh mippnei choshekh ('we cannot arrange/set in order because of darkness') — the verb arakh ('to arrange, to set in order, to draw up in battle formation') is used for preparing a legal case or marshaling an argument. The choshekh ('darkness') is intellectual and spiritual — we are in the dark about God.

20. The ha-yesuppar lo ki adabber ('should it be reported to him that I speak') — would anyone dare to send word to God that a human wishes to file a complaint? The im amar ish ki yevulla ('if a man speaks, surely he would be swallowed up') — the verb bala ('to swallow') describes total consumption. A human who presumes to argue with God would be swallowed like food. The image recalls Zophar's digestion metaphors (chapter 20) but here applied to the act of speaking itself — words directed at God consume the speaker.

21. The ve-attah lo ra'u or ('and now they do not see the light') bahir hu ba-sshechakim ('brilliant it is in the skies') — the or ('light') is the sun breaking through after the storm, so brilliant that no eye can bear it. The ve-ruach averah va-ttaharem ('and a wind passed and it purified/cleared them') — the wind sweeps the clouds away, revealing the unbearable brightness behind them. This is the penultimate image before the theophany: the storm clears, the sky opens, and the light is too bright to look at. God is about to appear.

22. The association of the north with divine presence runs deep in the Hebrew Bible. Psalm 48:2 calls Zion 'the heights of Zaphon' (tsafon), identifying God's holy mountain with the mythological divine mountain. Isaiah 14:13 places the 'mount of assembly' in the 'recesses of the north.' Ezekiel 1:4 sees the divine chariot approaching from the north. Elihu's golden splendor from the north is therefore not a weather report but a theophanic signal — God is coming from the direction traditionally associated with divine dwelling.

23. Elihu's penultimate declaration: Shaddai lo metsa'nuhu ('the Almighty — we have not found him') — the verb matsa ('to find') admits failure. God cannot be tracked down, cornered, or fully grasped. The saggi koach ('great in power') repeats the Aramaism from 36:26. The u-mishpat ve-rov tsedaqah ('and justice and abundance of righteousness') — God's unfindable power is not arbitrary but just. The lo ye'anneh ('he does not oppress/afflict') — despite God's incomprehensible power, he does not use it to crush. This is Elihu's final theological assertion: God is simultaneously beyond finding and beyond reproach.

24. Elihu's final words: lakhen yere'uhu anashim ('therefore men fear him') — the proper human response to the God described in this speech is fear, not argument. The lo yir'eh kol chakhmei lev ('he does not see/regard all the wise of heart') — God does not defer to human wisdom. The chakhmei lev ('wise of heart') is aimed at Job, who has argued his case with intellectual brilliance. Elihu's closing shot: no matter how wise you are, God is not impressed. This is the last human word before God speaks. The next verse (38:1) begins: 'Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind.' Elihu's storm has become God's stage.

38

Summary: *God finally speaks — not from a throne room, not from a burning bush, but from the whirlwind. After thirty-five chapters of human argument about the meaning of suffering, the Creator of the universe addresses Job directly, and the answer is not what anyone expected. God does not explain Job's suffering. God does not vindicate the friends' theology. God does not apologize. Instead, God asks questions — a relentless cascade of questions about the architecture of creation that Job cannot answer. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Who set its measurements? Who shut the sea behind doors when it burst from the womb? Have you commanded the morning? Have you entered the storehouses of snow? Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? The questions span the entire created order: earth, sea, light, darkness, weather, constellations, the laws of heaven and earth. The effect is not to humiliate Job but to reframe the conversation entirely — the question is not 'Why do I suffer?' but 'Do you understand the world you live in?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Job 38 is one of the supreme passages of the Hebrew Bible and of world literature. It is the only extended first-person speech of God in the Wisdom literature. The rhetorical strategy is extraordinary: God answers questions with questions. The Hebrew is at its most elevated and compressed — the poetry achieves effects that cannot be fully captured in any translation. The opening min ha-se'arah ('from the whirlwind/storm') is itself a theological statement: God speaks from within the chaos, not above it. The word se'arah carries connotations of storm, tempest, and violent wind — this is the same word used for Elijah's ascent (2 Kings 2:1, 11) and for theophanic storms throughout the prophets. God does not calm the storm before speaking; God speaks as the storm. The questions are not random — they follow a careful sequence from cosmogony (earth's foundation, the sea's birth) through meteorology (rain, snow, hail, lightning) to astronomy (Pleiades, Orion, the Bear). Each question implies the same answer: 'You were not there. You do not know. And yet the world holds together.' The theological force is not that Job is small and God is big — it is that the world is far more complex, more beautiful, more terrifying, and more carefully governed than any human theology can contain. The friends' neat system of retribution cannot account for the storehouses of hail or the channels of the thunderstorm. Job's demand for a legal hearing cannot account for the morning stars singing together. The speech does not answer Job's question; it dissolves the framework in which the question was asked.*

Translation Friction: *The central interpretive problem of God's speech is this: Is it an answer or an evasion? Job asked 'Why do I suffer?' and God responds with 'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?' Many readers — ancient and modern — have felt that God changes the subject, overwhelming Job with power rather than addressing his legitimate complaint. Others argue that the speech is profoundly responsive: it tells Job that the universe operates on principles far beyond retribution, that suffering and justice are embedded in*

a system so vast that no human mind can hold it all at once. The speech also creates a paradox: Job wanted God to appear (9:16, 13:22, 23:3-5), and now God has appeared — but not in the courtroom setting Job imagined. God comes as the Creator, not as a defendant or judge. The 'answer' is the encounter itself: Job asked to see God, and God has come. Whether that is enough depends on whether you think presence can substitute for explanation.

Connections: *The creation imagery in 38:4-7 parallels Genesis 1 but from a radically different angle — here creation is described not as a sequence of commands but as an architectural project with measurements, foundations, cornerstones, and a celebratory chorus of morning stars. The sea's birth in verses 8-11 personifies the ocean as an infant bursting from the womb, then swaddled in clouds — an image that connects to the Babylonian creation myth (Enuma Elish) where Marduk defeats Tiamat (the sea) but also to Psalm 104:6-9 where God sets boundaries for the waters. The constellations in verses 31-33 (Pleiades, Orion, the Bear/Mazzaroth) connect to Amos 5:8 and Job 9:9. The entire speech anticipates Psalm 104 and portions of Isaiah 40-45 where God's incomparability is demonstrated through creation. The phrase 'Where were you?' echoes God's question to Adam in Genesis 3:9 ('Where are you?') — in both cases, God's question reveals the creature's displacement from the center.*

1 Then YHWH answered Job from the whirlwind and said:

2 Who is this who darkens counsel
with words empty of knowledge?

3 Brace yourself like a man.
I will question you, and you will answer me.

4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you possess understanding.

5 Who fixed its measurements — surely you know!
Or who stretched the measuring line across it?

6 On what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its cornerstone —

7 while the morning stars sang in chorus
and every divine being shouted with joy?

8 Who shut the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb?

9 When I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling cloth?

10 I broke upon it my limit,
and set bars and doors in place,

11 and said, 'This far you may come, but no farther.
Here your proud waves must stop.'

12 Have you ever in your life commanded the morning?
Have you shown the dawn its place?

13 so that it seizes the edges of the earth
and shakes the wicked out of it?

14 The earth transforms like clay under a seal;
its features stand out like folds in a garment.

15 From the wicked their light is withheld,
and the upraised arm is broken.

16 Have you gone to the springs of the sea?
Have you walked the floor of the deep?

17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you?
Have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

18 Have you grasped the full breadth of the earth?
Tell me, if you know all of it.

19 Where is the path to where light dwells?
And darkness — where is its place?

20 Can you escort it to its territory?
Do you know the paths to its home?

21 Surely you know — for you were already born then,
and the number of your days is so great!

22 Have you entered the storehouses of snow?
Have you seen the storehouses of hail,

23 which I have stored for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?

24 By what path is lightning distributed?
How is the east wind scattered across the earth?

25 Who cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
or a path for the thunderbolt,

26 to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on a wilderness with no human in it,

27 to satisfy the desolate wasteland
and make the grass spring up?

28 Does the rain have a father?
Who fathered the drops of dew?

29 From whose womb did the ice come forth?
Who gave birth to the frost of heaven?

30 The waters harden like stone,
and the surface of the deep locks tight.

31 Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?
Can you loosen the cords of Orion?

32 Can you bring out the constellations in their season?
Can you guide the Great Bear with her cubs?

33 Do you know the laws of heaven?
Can you establish its authority over the earth?

34 Can you raise your voice to the clouds
so that a flood of water covers you?

35 Can you send out lightning bolts so they go
and say to you, 'Here we are'?

36 Who put wisdom in the hidden depths?
Or who gave the rooster understanding?

37 Who can count the clouds by wisdom?
Who can tip the water-skins of heaven,

38 when the dust hardens into a mass
and the clods stick together?

39 Can you hunt prey for the lioness?
Can you fill the appetite of her young,

40 when they crouch in their dens,
when they lie in ambush in the thicket?

41 Who provides food for the raven
when its young cry out to God
and wander about for lack of food?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The return of the name YHWH is the single most important narrative signal in this verse. The friends and Job have debated about God using generic terms; now the personal, covenant Name speaks. This is not 'a god' responding — it is the God of Israel, the God who appeared to Moses, the God who brought Israel out of Egypt. The se'arah may connect to Elijah's experience in 1 Kings 19:11-12, where YHWH was not in the wind or earthquake but in the still small voice. Here, by contrast, YHWH speaks from within the storm itself. Different theophanies, different modes of divine speech.
2. The word etsah ('counsel, purpose, plan') is critical — it implies that the universe has a plan, a design that Job's suffering fits into, even though Job cannot see it. God does not reveal the plan but insists it exists. The phrase beli da'at ('without knowledge') will be answered by Job himself in 42:3 when he repeats this exact phrase and admits he spoke of things too wonderful for him.
3. The image of girding the loins refers to tucking the long robe into the belt to free the legs for action — running, fighting, or hard labor. It signals preparation for something strenuous. The use of gever rather than adam or ish is a mark of respect: God addresses Job as a warrior worthy of engagement, not as a worm to be crushed.
4. The architectural metaphor — founding, measuring, laying cornerstones — runs through verses 4-7 and presents creation not as speaking things into existence (as in Genesis 1) but as constructing a building. This is a different creation tradition, one that emphasizes design, engineering, and craftsmanship. Both traditions affirm divine intentionality but from different angles.
5. The ironic ki teda ('surely you know') recurs as a rhetorical device throughout the speech. It does not mock Job so much as it emphasizes the gap between human knowledge and cosmic reality. The measuring line (qav) appears in Isaiah 34:11 and Zechariah 1:16 as an instrument of both destruction and rebuilding — God measures what God makes and what God unmakes.

6. The word hotba'u ('were sunk, were plunged') suggests the bases were driven deep, like pilings sunk into bedrock. The image implies massive engineering force. The cornerstone (even pinnah) appears in Isaiah 28:16 as a metaphor for what God establishes in Zion — the theological connection between the foundation of the earth and the foundation of God's kingdom is not accidental.

7. The morning stars (kokhevei voqer) and the sons of God (benei Elohim) form a parallel pair, suggesting that the stars themselves are conceived as divine beings — or at least that heavenly beings and celestial objects belong to the same celebratory chorus. The image of creation accompanied by song appears nowhere in Genesis 1 but is developed in Psalm 19:1-4 ('The heavens declare the glory of God') and Psalm 148. This verse supplies what Genesis omits: the emotional atmosphere of creation. God made the world, and the universe applauded.

8. The birth metaphor for the sea is unique to this passage and stands in contrast to the combat mythology of other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts where the sea-god must be defeated. Here the sea is not an enemy but a child — powerful, untamed, but ultimately subject to God's parental authority. The doors (delatayim) are a household image: God closes the nursery door on the raging infant ocean.

9. The word chatullah ('swaddling cloth') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. It derives from chatal ('to wrap, to swaddle'). The image of swaddling connects to Ezekiel 16:4 where Jerusalem is described as an abandoned infant not swaddled at birth — here, by contrast, God swaddles the sea carefully. The theological implication is that God's relationship to the most chaotic force in nature is parental, not adversarial.

10. The verb va'eshbor ('and I broke/prescribed') alav chuqqi ('upon it my statute/limit') — God imposed a boundary on the sea, a decree it cannot cross. The chuq ('statute, decree, limit') is the same word used for divine law given to Israel. The same God who decrees moral law for humanity decrees physical law for the ocean. The bars (beriach) and doors (delatayim) complete the image: the sea is enclosed, contained, held.

11. This verse is echoed in Psalm 104:9 ('You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth') and Jeremiah 5:22 ('I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, an eternal decree it cannot cross'). The proud waves (ga'on gallekha) use language elsewhere applied to human arrogance — the sea's physical pride and humanity's moral pride are governed by the same God.

12. The dawn (shachar) is personified throughout the ancient Near East — in Ugaritic mythology, Shachar is a deity, the god of dawn. The Hebrew Bible demythologizes this: dawn is not a god but a servant, directed by God to its appointed place. The question implies that the daily miracle of sunrise is governed by the same intelligence that governs everything Job questions.

13. The word kanfot ('wings, edges, corners') is the same word used for the corners of a garment (Numbers 15:38) and the wings of the Temple cherubim. The earth-as-garment image appears also in Isaiah 24:20. The shaking out of the wicked (na'ar, 'to shake off, to shake out') is a vivid domestic image applied to cosmic justice — God shakes the earth clean every morning.

14. The imagery describes what dawn does to the landscape. Tithappekh kechomer chotam ('it turns like clay to a seal') — a seal pressed into clay reveals the image carved into it. When light comes, the formless darkness of night is pressed into shape, and the contours of the earth appear, as if a seal has stamped definition into what was blank. The parallel veyityatsevu kemo levush ('and they stand out like a garment') suggests the earth's features take on color and texture, like the patterns in a dyed fabric becoming visible in light.

15. A paradox: the light that reveals the world also denies itself to the wicked. Veyimmana meResha'im oram ('and their light is withheld from the wicked') — the wicked operate by the 'light' of darkness; dawn destroys their working conditions. The uzero'a ramah tishaver ('and the raised arm is broken') — the arm lifted in violence is snapped by the dawn. The daily sunrise is a daily act of judgment against those who exploit the night.

16. The tehom ('deep, abyss') is one of the most resonant words in Hebrew cosmology. It appears in Genesis 1:2 as the primordial water over which God's spirit hovers, in Genesis 7:11 when the fountains of the great deep break open during the Flood, and in Psalm 104:6 as the waters that covered the earth before God set them boundaries. The tehom is the oldest thing in the universe besides God.

17. The sha'arei mavet ('gates of death') and sha'arei tsalmaveth ('gates of deep shadow/death-shadow') describe the entrance to the underworld — Sheol, the realm of the dead. Job, who longed for death in chapter 3, has never actually been there. He romanticized death as a place of rest, but he has never seen its gates. God's question implies that death, like the sea and the dawn, is a domain God governs and Job has never visited. The parallelism between mavet ('death') and tsalmaveth ('deep shadow') echoes Job 3:5 where Job invoked tsalmaveth in his curse.

18. The hitbonanta ('have you considered, have you perceived') ad rachavei arets ('unto the breadths of the earth') asks whether Job comprehends the sheer size of the world. The challenge im yadata khullah ('if you know all of it') is the most sweeping question yet: not a specific detail but totality. Do you know everything? The question is rhetorical — no one does — but it reframes Job's complaint: if you cannot even measure the earth, how can you measure the justice of the God who made it?

19. Light and darkness are treated as substances with fixed addresses. Ei zeh ha-derekh yishkon or ('where is the way where light dwells') — light has a home, a dwelling, a location it returns to when it is not illuminating the earth. Likewise darkness (choshekh) has a meqom ('place'). The cosmology is poetic rather than scientific, but the theological point is clear: light and darkness are not abstract concepts but created realities with assigned locations, governed by God.

20. The verbs are almost humorous: ki tiqqachennu el gevulo ('that you might take it to its border') imagines Job walking light home, escorting it to the boundary of its domain. Vekhi tavin netivot beito ('and that you might understand the paths to its house') — do you know the way to light's house? The personification treats light as a traveler who needs a guide, and the implication is that God is that guide. Every morning God escorts light out; every evening God walks it home.

21. The sharpest irony in the speech so far. Yadata ki az tivvaled ('you know, for then you were born') — you must know how creation works because you were there when it happened. Umispar yamekha rabbim ('and the number of your days is great') — you have been alive so long that you must have witnessed it all. Of course Job was not born at creation. His days are not great on the cosmic scale. The irony is cutting but not cruel — it is the kind of challenge a teacher gives a student who has overstepped his knowledge.

22. The otserot ('storehouses, treasuries') of snow and hail — God keeps weather in storage, like grain in a warehouse. The image suggests that snow and hail are not random phenomena but stockpiled resources, stored until needed. The word otsar is used for royal treasuries and temple storehouses — weather is God's treasury, and God dispenses it according to purposes Job cannot see.

23. The hail is not just weather — it is weaponry. Asher chasakti le'et tsar ('which I have withheld for the time of distress') leyom qerav umilchamah ('for the day of battle and war'). God stockpiles hail as a military reserve. Joshua 10:11 records God hurling hailstones at Israel's enemies; Isaiah 28:2 and 17 describe hail as divine judgment. Weather is an instrument of providence, stored and deployed according to purposes that extend far beyond Job's comprehension.

24. The ei zeh ha-derekh yechalek or ('where is the way light is divided/distributed') likely refers to lightning — the or here is the flash that splits across the sky in multiple directions. The parallel yafets qadim alei arets ('the east wind is scattered upon the earth') asks how wind patterns are generated. Both questions point to the same reality: weather has pathways, distribution networks, routing systems that Job has never mapped and cannot control.

25. Mi fillag la-shhetef te'alah ('who split a channel for the flood') — the verb pilleg ('to split, to divide, to channel') describes the engineering of drainage and water flow. Even rainstorms follow channels. The derekh la-chaziz qolot ('a path for the flash of thunders') extends the image: lightning follows a path, a derekh, as if traveling a road God built. The questions continue to expose the hidden infrastructure of weather — systems Job cannot see or replicate.

26. This verse is a direct challenge to retribution theology, which assumes every divine act must serve human justice. God sends rain where no one can benefit — the rain serves purposes beyond human calculation. This is one of the clearest statements in the Hebrew Bible that God's providence extends beyond the human sphere and operates according to principles that include but transcend human welfare.

27. Lehasbia sho'ah umesho'ah ('to satisfy the desolation and waste') — the word sho'ah ('devastation, ruin, desolation') is used as a near-synonym with mesho'ah. God satisfies the waste — gives it what it needs, fills its emptiness with water. The ulehatsmiach motsa deshe ('and to cause the emergence of grass to sprout') — even in the desolate place, grass grows because God sends rain. The wilderness has needs and God meets them, regardless of human observation.

28. Hayesh la-matar av ('does the rain have a father') — the question is deceptively simple. In Canaanite religion, the storm-god Baal was considered the father of rain. The Hebrew Bible's answer is implied: yes, rain has a father, and it is YHWH, not Baal. The mi holid eglei tal ('who fathered the drops of dew') extends the paternity metaphor. Rain and dew are God's children, born of divine will. The questions simultaneously demythologize pagan weather-gods and affirm YHWH's intimate relationship with meteorological phenomena.

29. The birth metaphor recurs: mibetten mi yatsa ha-qerach ('from whose womb came the ice') — ice has a mother, a womb from which it emerged. The ukfor shamayim mi yelado ('and the frost of heaven, who bore it') asks who gave birth to frost. Like the sea in verse 8, frozen water is a child — born, not manufactured. The cumulative effect of these paternity and maternity questions is to reveal a creation that is intimately parented by God, not mechanically produced.

30. Ka'even mayim yitchabbe'u ('like stone the waters hide themselves') — when water freezes, it conceals itself inside stone-like ice. The pnei tehom yitlakkedu ('the face of the deep is seized/locked') describes ice forming over deep water — the surface of the tehom is captured, locked in place. The deep, which was born in verse 8 and explored in verse 16, is now imprisoned by its own frozen surface. The image conveys God's power over even the most primordial element of creation.

31. Kimah (Pleiades) and Kesil (Orion) appear together also in Job 9:9 and Amos 5:8. The identification is generally accepted though not absolutely certain. The ma'adannot may also mean 'delights' or 'luxuries' — the Pleiades were associated with pleasant weather and spring rains. The moshkhot ('cords, drawing-bands') of Orion suggest the constellation's stars are held in tension like a bow or a yoke.

32. The Mazzarot are either the zodiacal constellations or a specific constellation group — the word appears only here and its identification is debated. The key point is be'itto ('in its season') — the constellations appear at appointed times, following a schedule Job did not set. The Ayish ('the Bear') with al baneiha ('upon/with her sons/cubs') is likely Ursa Major, the Great Bear, whose 'children' are the smaller stars trailing behind it. God guides the Bear across the sky as a mother leads her young. Even the stars are parented.

33. The word chuqqot ('statutes, ordinances') applied to heaven connects the physical order to the moral order — the same God who legislates for Israel legislates for the cosmos. The unique word mishtar ('rule, governance') may be related to the Aramaic root for 'writing' or 'recording,' suggesting the laws of heaven are inscribed, permanent, authoritative.

34. Hatarim la'av qolekha ('can you lift your voice to the cloud') — can Job shout at the sky and make it rain? The veshif'at mayim tekassekka ('and an abundance of water covers you') describes the result Job cannot produce: a downpour on command. Elijah prayed for rain (1 Kings 18:41-45), but even Elijah did not command it. God alone commands the clouds.

35. Hateshallach beraqim veyelekhu ('can you send lightnings and they go') — the lightnings are messengers, dispatched on a mission. The veyomeru lekha hinnenu ('and they say to you, here we are') is extraordinary: the lightning bolts report back. They say hinneni ('here I am') — the same word

Abraham used in response to God (Genesis 22:1), the same word Isaiah used (Isaiah 6:8). Lightning bolts are obedient servants of God. They go where sent and report for duty. The universe operates on a chain of command that flows from God, and Job is not in it.

36. This verse is notoriously difficult. Mi shat ba-tuchot chokhmah ('who set wisdom in the tuchot') — the tuchot may mean 'inward parts' (the kidneys or inner organs as seats of wisdom) or 'ibis' (an Egyptian bird believed to predict the Nile's flooding). The parallel mi natan la-sekhvi vinah ('who gave understanding to the sekhvi') — sekhvi may mean 'mind/heart' or 'rooster' (which announces the dawn). Many modern scholars prefer the bird readings: the ibis and the rooster both demonstrate an innate wisdom — the ability to read weather signs — that was implanted by God. Whether the verse refers to human intuition or animal instinct, the point is the same: wisdom is God's gift, not humanity's invention.

37. Mi yesapper shechaqim bechokhmah ('who can count the clouds with wisdom') — the shechaqim ('thin clouds, sky, firmament') are innumerable, and counting them would require a wisdom beyond any human's capacity. The venivlei shamayim mi yashkiv ('and the skins of heaven, who can lay them down/tip them') — the nivlei are wineskins or water-skins. The sky is a collection of water-skins, and when God tips them, it rains. The domestic image — pouring water from a skin — applied to the cosmic sky is characteristically Joban: the grandest phenomena described through the simplest objects.

38. The betsheqet afar la-mutsaq ('when the dust pours into a casting/mass') describes what happens when rain hits parched ground — the loose dust fuses into hard earth. The urgavim yedubbaqun ('and the clods cling together') completes the image: scattered clumps of dry soil become a solid surface. This is a small, observational detail — mud forming — but it is one more thing God governs and Job does not. Even the behavior of wet dirt is part of the divine design.

39. The speech now shifts from cosmology and weather to animals — a transition that will continue through chapter 39. Hatatsud le-lavi taref ('can you hunt for the lioness prey') — the lavi is the lioness, the primary hunter in a lion pride. Can Job do her job? Can he provide food for wild predators? The vechayyat kefirim temalle ('and the life/appetite of young lions can you fill') asks whether Job can sustain lion cubs. God feeds predators. The theology is startling: God's care extends to carnivores, to the violent food chain that Job might consider unjust. God does not only feed the gentle and the good.

40. Ki yashsochu ba-me'onot ('when they crouch in the dens') yeshvu ba-sukkah lemo arev ('they sit in the cover/booth for ambush') — the lions wait in hiding, and their hunt is successful because God designed them for it. The sukkah ('booth, shelter, cover') is the same word used for the temporary shelters of Sukkot — the lions have their own sukkah, their own shelter. The verse describes predatory behavior without moral judgment: lions ambush prey, and this is part of God's world.

41. The raven (orev) is the first bird Noah sends from the ark (Genesis 8:7), and it is listed as unclean in Leviticus 11:15. Yet God feeds it. Jesus echoes this verse in Luke 12:24: 'Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap... and yet God feeds them.' The crying of the raven chicks to God (el El yeshavve'u) attributes a kind of prayer to animals — they call out in need, and God responds. The universe is full of creatures in need, and God provides for all of them, not just the ones humans value.

39

Summary: *God continues speaking from the whirlwind, but the subject shifts from cosmology to zoology. Chapter 38 asked Job about the architecture of the earth, the behavior of weather, and the laws of the stars. Now God asks about animals — creatures that live beyond human control and often beyond human comprehension. The parade of animals is deliberately chosen: mountain goats who give birth on cliffs no human visits, the wild donkey who despises the city, the wild ox who will not serve at Job's manger, the ostrich who abandons her eggs yet runs faster than the horse, the war horse who laughs at fear and charges into battle, and the hawk and eagle who soar by wisdom Job did not give them. Each animal embodies freedom, wildness, strangeness, or power that exists entirely outside the human economy. God did not make these creatures for Job. They serve no human purpose. They are magnificent on their own terms, and God delights in them.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The animal portraits in Job 39 are among the finest nature poetry in any language. They are not illustrations of theological propositions — they are celebrations of creaturely existence in its own right. The wild donkey is not a moral lesson; it is a wild donkey, free and fierce and contemptuous of civilization. The war horse does not symbolize courage; it is courage made flesh, snorting, pawing, laughing at fear. The ostrich is not a parable about foolish parenting; she is a bizarre, beautiful anomaly — cruel to her young by human standards, yet equipped with speed no horse can match. God does not explain these creatures; God presents them. The theological effect is not a lesson but a reorientation: Job has been asking why the universe does not conform to human categories of justice. God's answer is to show him a universe that does not conform to human categories at all. The wild donkey does not care about Job's lawsuit. The eagle does not know about retribution theology. The world is bigger, wilder, stranger, and more glorious than any*

system — whether the friends' or Job's — can contain.

Translation Friction: *The central tension in this chapter is the ostrich passage (verses 13-18), which contains the most explicit divine commentary in the speech: God says He did not give the ostrich wisdom but gave her speed instead. This is the only place in the speech where God explains one of the creatures rather than simply presenting it. Some scholars consider it an interpolation because it breaks the pattern of questions — God makes statements here rather than asking. But it may be deliberately placed as the center of the animal catalog, the one creature that most clearly defies human categories: she is cruel, foolish, and glorious all at once. The theological problem is sharp: if God withheld wisdom from the ostrich, does God withhold understanding from humans too? Does the speech imply that Job's incomprehension is by divine design?*

Connections: *The animal catalog connects to Psalm 104, which also celebrates wild creatures (wild donkeys, rock badgers, lions) as evidence of God's wisdom and delight. The war horse passage (verses 19-25) has no close parallel in Scripture but echoes ancient Near Eastern horse literature. The hawk and eagle at the end (verses 26-30) connect to Isaiah 40:31 ('those who wait for YHWH shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles'). The entire chapter anticipates the Behemoth and Leviathan passages in chapters 40-41, where God will present the two supreme animals. The movement from domestic concerns (chapters 3-37) to wild animals is a geographic movement as well — from the inhabited world to the wilderness, the desert, the cliff face, the sky. God is pulling Job's attention away from the human world and toward the larger creation.*

1 Do you know when the mountain goats give birth on the cliff?
Do you watch over the deer as they labor?

2 Can you count the months until they are due?
Do you know the time of their delivery?

3 They crouch down, push out their young,
and are done with their birth pangs.

4 Their young grow strong, they thrive in the open;
they leave and do not return.

5 Who set the wild donkey free?
Who untied the ropes of the onager?

6 I made the wasteland its home
and the salt flats its dwelling.

7 It laughs at the noise of the city.
It does not hear the driver's shouts.

8 It roams the mountains as its pasture
and searches for every green thing.

9 Will the wild ox consent to serve you?
Will it spend the night at your feeding trough?

10 Can you bind the wild ox to a furrow with ropes?
Will it harrow the valleys behind you?

11 Can you trust it because its strength is so great?
Would you leave your heavy work to it?

12 Do you trust it to bring in your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?

13 The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully —
but are they the pinions of the stork?

14 She leaves her eggs on the ground
and lets them warm in the dust,

15 forgetting that a foot may crush them
or a wild animal may trample them.

16 She treats her young harshly, as if not her own.
Her labor may be for nothing — she does not care.

17 For God did not grant her wisdom
or give her a share of understanding.

18 But when she spreads her wings and runs,
she laughs at the horse and its rider.

19 Did you give the horse its strength?
Did you clothe its neck with a flowing mane?

20 Can you make it leap like a locust?
The splendor of its snorting is terrifying.

21 It paws in the valley and rejoices in its strength.
It charges out to meet the weapons.

22 It laughs at fear and is not dismayed.
It does not turn back from the sword.

23 The quiver rattles against its side,
the flashing spear and the javelin.

24 With trembling and fury it devours the ground.
It cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.

25 At each blast of the trumpet it cries, 'Ha!'
From far off it catches the scent of battle —
the thunder of commanders and the war cry.

26 Does the hawk soar by your wisdom,
spreading its wings toward the south?

27 Does the eagle rise at your command
and build its nest on high?

28 It dwells on the rock and lodges there,
on the crag of the cliff and the stronghold.

29From there it searches for food;
its eyes scan the distance.

30Its young ones feast on blood,
and where the slain are — there it is.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The ya'alei sala ('rock-goats, ibex') are mentioned also in 1 Samuel 24:2 and Psalm 104:18. They inhabit the most inaccessible terrain in the Near East — the cliffs of Ein Gedi and the Judean wilderness. The verb cholel ('to writhe, to be in labor') describes the pain of animal childbirth, observed by God alone.

2. Tispor yerachim temalle'nah ('can you count the months they fulfill') — each species has its own gestation period, its own biological calendar. God tracks each pregnancy. The veyadata et lidtanah ('and you know the time of their bearing') challenges Job to demonstrate reproductive knowledge he does not possess. The verse implies that God functions as the midwife of the wild — counting months, watching over pregnancies, attending births no human sees.

3. Tikhrana ('they bow down, they crouch') yaldeihen tefallechna ('their young they push out') — the description is vivid and physical: the animals crouch and deliver. The chevleihem teshallechna ('their labor-pains they send away') — once the birth is complete, the pain is over. The word chevel ('labor-pain, rope, cord') is the same word used for human labor pains throughout Scripture. These wild animals experience pain, endure it, and move on — without explanation, without protest, without asking why.

4. Yachlemu beneihem ('their children become strong/healthy') yirbu va-bar ('they increase in the open field'). The yatse'u velo shavu lamo ('they go out and do not return to them') describes the natural weaning process: the young grow up, leave, and never come back. There is no sentimentality here — this is how wild animals live. The theological point is understated but clear: God sustains a world in which creatures are born, grow strong, leave their parents, and live independently. The system works without human management.

5. The pere (wild donkey, onager) is one of the most frequently mentioned wild animals in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 16:12, Isaiah 32:14, Jeremiah 2:24, Hosea 8:9). It symbolizes wildness, independence, and refusal to be domesticated. Ishmael is compared to a pere adam ('wild donkey of a man') in Genesis 16:12. God's delight in the wild donkey's freedom is a direct challenge to the anthropocentric view that all creatures exist to serve humanity.

6. Asher samti aravah beito ('which I set the steppe/wilderness as its house') — God assigned the wild donkey its habitat, and that habitat is the aravah ('desert plain, steppe, wilderness'). The umishkenotav melechah ('and its dwellings the salt land') — the melechah is salt-crusted terrain where nothing grows. The wild donkey lives in places no sane farmer would settle. Its home is the anti-city, the anti-garden. God gave it this home deliberately, and the wild donkey thrives there.

7. Yischaq lahamon qiryah ('it laughs at the tumult of the city') — the verb sachaq ('to laugh, to mock') expresses contempt. The wild donkey finds the city ridiculous. The teshu'ot noges lo yishma ('the shouts of the driver it does not hear') — the noges ('driver, taskmaster, oppressor') is the same word used for the Egyptian slave-drivers in Exodus. The wild donkey is immune to the taskmaster. It cannot be driven, whipped, or controlled. It lives outside every system of domination. God made a creature that is constitutionally free.

8. Yetur harim mir'ehu ('the range of the mountains is its pasture') — the wild donkey's grazing land is the entire mountain range. No fence contains it. The ve'achar kol yaroq yidrosh ('and after every green thing it searches') — the verb darash ('to seek, to search') is the same verb used for seeking God. The wild donkey searches for food with the same intensity a worshipper searches for God. The portrait is complete: the wild donkey is free, wild, self-sufficient, contemptuous of civilization, and wholly sustained by God.

9. The re'em (traditionally translated 'unicorn' in the KJV, following the LXX monoceros) is almost certainly the aurochs (Bos primigenius), the wild ancestor of domestic cattle, which stood six feet at the shoulder and had enormous horns. It went extinct in 1627. The re'em appears in Numbers 23:22, Deuteronomy 33:17, Psalm 22:21, and Psalm 92:10, always as a symbol of overwhelming strength. God made an animal too powerful for human service.

10. Hatiqshor re'em betelem avoto ('can you bind the wild ox in the furrow with its rope') — can Job yoke the wild ox to a plow and make it walk a straight furrow? The im yesadded amaqim acharekha ('will it harrow the valleys after you') — will it follow behind Job, breaking up the soil? The wild ox's strength would be extraordinary in agriculture, but it cannot be harnessed. Power without submission — God made that too.

11. Hativtach bo ki rav kocho ('will you trust in it because its strength is great') — the wild ox is immensely strong, but strength without obedience is useless to a farmer. Trust requires reliability, and the wild ox is reliably unreliable. The veta'azov elav yegi'ekha ('and will you leave your toil to it') — yegi'a ('toil, labor, the fruit of labor') is what Job has worked for. Would he entrust his harvest to an animal that will not obey? The verse tests whether raw power is the same as dependable service. It is not.

12. Hata'amin bo ki yashiv zar'ekha ('will you believe in it that it will return your seed/grain') — the verb he'emin ('to trust, to believe') is the same root as emunah ('faithfulness') and amen. Can Job have faith in the wild ox? The vegornekha ye'esof ('and your threshing floor it will gather') asks whether the ox will complete the harvest. The answer is no — the wild ox has no interest in human agriculture. Its magnificence is not for human use. God made beauty and power that serve no one but the Creator.

13. The word renanim (from ranan, 'to shout with joy, to sing') names the ostrich for its cry. The chasidah ('stork') is named for chesed ('faithful love, devotion') — ironically, the stork is the devoted parent while the ostrich is the negligent one. The juxtaposition of names highlights the contrast: the 'joyful singer' does not fly; the 'faithful one' does.

14. Ki ta'azov la'arets betseiah ('for she abandons to the earth her eggs') — the verb azav ('to leave, to abandon, to forsake') is strong. The ostrich does not carefully nest her eggs; she leaves them on the ground. The ve'al afar techamem ('and upon dust she warms them') — the eggs are incubated by the heat of the desert floor, not by attentive sitting. By human standards, this is negligent parenting. By divine design, it works — ostrich eggs are remarkably heat-resistant and the species has survived for millions of years.

15. Vatishkach ki regel tezureha ('and she forgets that a foot may crush it') — the ostrich does not guard against the most obvious danger. The vechayyat ha-sadeh tedusheha ('and the animal of the field may trample it') — any passing beast could destroy her eggs. The ostrich's apparent carelessness is presented without moral judgment. God made her this way. Not every creature parents the way humans think creatures should.

16. Hiqshiach baneiha lelo lah ('she hardens against her children as if not hers') — the verb hiqshiach ('to harden, to treat cruelly') suggests the ostrich is indifferent to her own offspring. The leriq yegi'ah beli fachad ('her toil is for emptiness, without fear') — her labor may produce nothing, and she feels no anxiety about it. The phrase beli fachad ('without fear') is key: the ostrich does not fear failure. She does not worry. This is not wisdom — the text will say God withheld wisdom from her — but it is a kind of freedom. She exists without the burden of anxious care that torments Job.

17. This verse breaks the speech's question-only pattern — God makes a declarative statement about the ostrich. Some scholars consider this evidence that the ostrich section is a later addition. Others argue it is the deliberate center of the animal catalog, the point where God most directly addresses the question of why creatures (and by extension, humans) lack the understanding they wish they had. The answer is discomfiting: because God chose not to give it.

18. Ostriches can run at speeds exceeding 40 miles per hour, faster than any horse. The ancient world knew this and marveled at it. The portrait of the ostrich is a masterpiece of reversal: every apparent deficiency (flightless wings, abandoned eggs, no wisdom) is answered by an unexpected gift (speed, survival, fearlessness). The creature that seems most cursed is in some ways the most free.

19. The war horse passage (verses 19-25) is the longest and most vivid animal portrait in the speech. The horse is the only domesticated animal in God's catalog, but it is presented not as a servant but as a creature of terrifying power and joy. The ra'mah ('thunder/mane') debate is ancient — the LXX reads 'fear' (phobos), while the Vulgate reads 'neighing' (hinnitum). The ambiguity may be intentional: the horse's mane is like thunder.

20. Hatar'ishennu ka'arbeh ('can you make it tremble/leap like a locust') — the comparison to a locust may seem odd, but it captures the horse's explosive forward movement, the way it springs into a gallop. The hod nachro eimah ('the glory/majesty of its snorting is terror') — the horse's snort (nachar) has hod ('majesty, splendor'), the same word used for God's glory in Psalm 8:1 and 104:1. The horse's nostrils exhale something majestic. Terror and beauty merge.

21. Yachperu va'emeq ('they paw/dig in the valley') — the war horse paws the ground before battle, impatient to charge. The veyasis bekoach ('and it rejoices in strength') — the horse experiences joy in its own power. This is not mere instinct; it is delight. The yetse liqrat nasheq ('it goes out to meet the weaponry/armor') — the horse moves toward danger, not away from it. It runs toward swords. The portrait inverts every human instinct of self-preservation.

22. Yischaq lefachad ('it laughs at fear') — for the third time in this chapter, a creature laughs (the wild donkey at the city, the ostrich at the horse, now the horse at fear itself). The velo yechat ('and is not shattered/dismayed') — the verb chatat ('to be shattered, to be terrified') describes the kind of fear that breaks a person. The horse does not experience it. The velo yashuv mippenei charev ('and it does not turn from the face of the sword') — the horse faces the blade and does not flinch. This is the ultimate portrait of courage — not the absence of danger but the refusal to retreat from it.

23. Alav tirneh ashpah ('upon it the quiver rings/rattles') — the sound of arrows jangling in their case against the horse's flank as it gallops. The lahav chanit vekhidon ('the flame of the spear and the javelin') — lahav ('flame, blade') describes the glint of metal, the flash of weapon-light. The verse is pure sensory description: sound (the rattling quiver) and sight (the flashing spear). The horse is surrounded by implements of death and runs faster.

24. The verb gama ('to swallow') applied to the earth is one of the most powerful images in the passage — the horse literally eats distance, consuming ground as it charges. The shofar (ram's horn trumpet) connects this military scene to Israel's liturgical life — the same instrument that calls Israel to worship calls the horse to war.

25. The exclamation he'ach ('ha!') is an onomatopoeia — the horse's excited snort or neigh rendered as human speech. The fact that the horse 'says' something puts it in the company of creation's other speakers: the morning stars that sing (38:7), the lightning bolts that say 'here we are' (38:35), and the night that announced Job's conception (3:3). God's creation is full of voices, and the horse's voice is one of fierce delight.

26. Hamibbinatkha ya'aver nets ('is it from your understanding the hawk flies') — the nets ('hawk, falcon') flies by an understanding Job did not supply. The yifros kenafav leteiman ('it spreads its wings toward the south') — the migratory instinct that carries hawks southward in winter is a form of wisdom, but it is God's wisdom implanted in the bird, not knowledge the hawk learned or Job taught. Migration is a mystery of navigation that humans still do not fully understand.

27. Im al pikha yagbiha nasher ('is it at your mouth/command the eagle soars high') — the nasher ('eagle' or 'vulture,' likely the griffon vulture) does not take orders from Job. The vekhi yarim qinno ('and that it raises its nest') — the eagle nests at heights no human chooses. The word al pikha ('at your mouth') echoes the idea that creation obeys God's mouth/word (Genesis 1), not Job's.

28. Sela yishkon veyitlonan ('on the rock it dwells and lodges') — the eagle's home is the sela ('rock, cliff'), the most inaccessible terrain. The al shen sela umetsudah ('on the tooth of the rock and the fortress') — shen sela ('tooth of the rock') describes a sharp, narrow pinnacle. The metsudah ('stronghold, fortress') is a military term applied to a bird's nest — the eagle lives in a natural fortress. Like the mountain goats in verse 1, the eagle inhabits places humans cannot reach. God's creatures have territories beyond human jurisdiction.

29. Mishsham chafar okhel ('from there it searches for food') — the eagle hunts from its high perch, scanning the ground below. The lemerachoq einav yabbitu ('from afar its eyes gaze') — the eagle's vision is legendary. It sees prey from distances no human eye can match. The verse describes a divinely engineered predator: positioned high, equipped with extraordinary sight, designed to hunt. The eagle's vision is a gift from the same God who asks Job to see beyond his own suffering.

30. The final image — eagle chicks feeding on blood, the eagle present wherever the slain lie — connects to Jesus' words in Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17:37: 'Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.' The saying may have been proverbial even before Jesus, rooted in this verse. The chapter ends without resolution, without moral, without comfort — only with the stark reality of a world God made and governs on terms that are not humanity's to set.

40

Summary: *This chapter falls into two distinct movements. First, God pauses his whirlwind speech and challenges Job to respond (verses 1-2). Job answers with radical brevity: he puts his hand over his mouth and says he has nothing to add (verses 3-5). This is not yet repentance — it is stunned silence. Then God speaks a second time from the storm, and the tone shifts from cosmic wonder to direct confrontation. God challenges Job: Would you really annul my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? (verse 8). If Job has an arm like God's and a voice like thunder, let him dress himself in majesty and crush the proud (verses 9-14). Then God unveils the first of two great beasts: Behemoth, a creature of overwhelming power whose bones are bronze tubes, whose limbs are iron bars, who drinks up a river without haste, who cannot be captured. Behemoth is the first of God's works — a creature made alongside humanity, yet utterly beyond human control.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Behemoth passage (verses 15-24) is one of the most debated sections in the Hebrew Bible. The identity of Behemoth has been argued for centuries: hippopotamus, elephant, water buffalo, mythological chaos beast, dinosaur, or a purely literary creation. The Hebrew behemot is the plural of behemah ('beast, cattle'), and the intensive plural may simply mean 'the Beast par excellence' — the supreme land animal. What matters theologically is not zoological identification but the rhetorical function: God presents a creature that is maximally powerful, maximally wild, and maximally beyond human dominion. The point is not 'look at my pet' but 'this is what I made, it lives alongside you, and you cannot touch it.' The description is laced with military and architectural language — bronze, iron, cedar — as if the animal is a living fortress. God's pride in this creature is palpable. Behemoth eats grass like an ox (verse 15) and yet is described with the language of cosmic power. The mundane and the magnificent merge: God delights in a grass-eating monster.*

Translation Friction: *The critical question of the chapter is verse 8: 'Would you annul my justice? Would you condemn me so that you may be justified?' This is the heart of God's challenge, and it cuts in a way that readers often miss. God is not asking Job to stop complaining. He is identifying the logical structure of Job's argument: if Job is innocent and God is responsible for his suffering, then God must be unjust. Job's self-justification requires God's condemnation. God does not deny Job's innocence — nowhere in the divine speeches does God say Job sinned. Instead, God challenges the binary: must either Job or God be guilty? Is there no framework large enough to hold both Job's innocence and God's justice? The friends said Job was guilty to preserve God's justice. Job said God was unjust to preserve his own innocence. God refuses both moves.*

Connections: *Behemoth as 'the first of the ways of God' (verse 19, reshit darkhei El) echoes Proverbs 8:22 where Wisdom is 'the beginning of his way' (reshit darkho). Both Wisdom and Behemoth are primordial — created first, existing before and beyond human civilization. The 'sword' of verse 19 (only his Maker can approach him with a sword) connects to the cherubim's flaming sword guarding Eden (Genesis 3:24) — certain divine prerogatives are fenced off from human access. The lotus and willow imagery (verses 21-22) locates Behemoth in the Jordan valley ecosystem, grounding the mythological in Palestinian geography. The challenge to 'deck yourself with glory and splendor' (verse 10) uses the same vocabulary (hod and hadar) applied to God in Psalm 104:1 and to the king in Psalm 21:6 — God is asking Job to try on divine clothing.*

1Then YHWH answered Job and said:

2Will the one who contends with Shaddai correct him?
Let the one who argues with God answer.

3Then Job answered YHWH and said:

4Look — I am small. What can I answer you?
I put my hand over my mouth.

5Once I spoke, but I will not answer again.
Twice — but I will add nothing more.

6Then YHWH answered Job from the storm and said:

7Brace yourself like a warrior —
I will question you, and you will answer me.

8Would you really annul my justice?
Would you condemn me so that you can be in the right?

9Do you have an arm like God's?
Can you thunder with a voice like his?

10Clothe yourself with grandeur and majesty!
Dress yourself in glory and splendor!

11Unleash the fury of your anger!
Look at every proud person and bring him low.

12Look at every proud person and humble him!
Trample the wicked where they stand.

13Bury them in the dust together!
Bind their faces in the hidden place.

14Then even I will praise you —
that your own right hand can save you.

15Look now at Behemoth, which I made alongside you —
he eats grass like an ox.

16Look at the strength in his loins,
the power in the muscles of his belly.

17He stiffens his tail like a cedar;
the sinews of his thighs are braided tight.

18His bones are tubes of bronze;
his limbs are bars of iron.

19He is the first of God's works —
only his Maker can approach him with the sword.

20The mountains bring their produce to him,
and all the wild animals play nearby.

21He lies under the lotus plants,
hidden among the reeds and marsh.

22The lotus plants screen him with their shade;
the willows of the stream surround him.

23If the river rages, he does not panic.
He is calm even when the Jordan surges against his mouth.

24Can anyone capture him while he watches?
Can anyone pierce his nose with a trap?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The divine speech pauses — this is a transition marker, giving Job an opening to respond before God continues. The verb va-ya'an ('answered') implies a dialogical structure: God expects a response.

2. The verb yasar ('to discipline, instruct, correct') in the hiphil implies authoritative correction — the kind a parent gives a child or a teacher gives a student. God asks whether Job is positioned to discipline the Almighty. The mokhiach ('the one who reproves, who brings a legal complaint') uses the same root (yakach) that Job used when demanding a hearing. God holds Job to his own legal language.

3. Job's first response to God. After thirty-seven chapters of demanding a hearing, Job now stands before God and speaks — but only to announce his silence.

4. The KJV's 'I am vile' is misleading. The qalloti means 'I am light, insignificant, of little account' — it is a statement about inadequacy, not moral corruption. Job is not retracting his innocence. He is acknowledging that the scale of the divine speeches has rendered his own words insufficient. The hand-over-mouth gesture appears elsewhere in Job (21:5, 29:9) as a sign of being struck dumb by something overwhelming.

5. The achat dibbarti ('once I spoke') ve-lo e'eneh ('and I will not answer') — Job acknowledges he has spoken and now declines to continue. The ushtayim ('and twice') ve-lo osif ('and I will not add') intensifies the refusal. The 'once… twice' pattern is a standard Hebrew poetic intensifier (cf. Psalm 62:12, Job 33:14). Job's silence is deliberate: he is not cut off mid-sentence but choosing to stop. This is not yet the full resolution — that comes in 42:1-6 after the Behemoth and Leviathan speeches.

6. God speaks a second time min ha-se'arah ('from the storm, from the whirlwind'). The storm that began in 38:1 has not subsided. God is not satisfied with Job's stunned silence — he wants a deeper engagement. The second divine speech will be shorter but more intense, culminating in the Behemoth and Leviathan descriptions.

7. The same challenge formula as 38:3, repeated verbatim. The ezar na khe-ghever chalatseikha ('gird up now like a strong man your loins') is a call to prepare for combat or hard labor — tighten the belt, tuck in the robe, get ready to fight. God does not want Job's stunned silence; he wants Job fully engaged. The esh'alkha ve-hodi'eni ('I will ask you and you will make known to me') maintains the examination format.

8. The verb parar ('to break, annul') in the hiphil means to cause something to be nullified — not just to question but to overthrow. The mishpati ('my justice') is not merely 'my judgment in your case' but God's entire framework of justice. The tarshi'eni ('you declare me wicked/guilty') uses the same verb (rasha' in the hiphil) used in courtroom verdicts — Job has been acting as judge, rendering a verdict of guilty against God. The lema'an titsdaq ('so that you may be justified/righteous') reveals that Job's self-justification requires God's condemnation. God does not deny Job's innocence. He challenges the framework that makes innocence and divine justice mutually exclusive.

9. The zero'a ('arm') is the standard Hebrew metaphor for power — the 'arm of God' delivers Israel from Egypt (Exodus 6:6, Deuteronomy 4:34). God asks if Job possesses this kind of force. The be-qol kamohu tar'em ('with a voice like his you thunder') — can Job's voice shake the cosmos the way God's voice does? The implication: if you want to run the universe, you need the equipment.

10. The adeh na ga'on va-govah ('deck yourself now with pride and height/exaltation') — God invites Job to try on the divine wardrobe. The hod ve-hadar tilbash ('glory and splendor you shall wear') uses the same pair (hod and hadar) that describes God in Psalm 104:1 and the Davidic king in Psalm 21:6. This is bitter irony: if Job wants to sit in God's seat of judgment, he must first put on God's robes.

11. The hafets evrot appekha ('scatter the overflows of your anger') — if Job can channel divine wrath, let him try. The ur'eh khol ge'eh ve-hashpilehu ('and see every proud one and bring him low') — the task of humbling the arrogant is God's work. Can Job do it? The challenge is not sarcasm but a genuine theological point: administering justice requires the power to execute it.

12. The parallel intensifies: re'eh khol ge'eh hakhni'ehu ('see every proud one, subdue him') adds the verb kana' ('to subdue, humble, bring into submission'). The va-hadokh resha'im tachtam ('and tread down the wicked in their place') — crush them on the spot. The verbs escalate from 'bring low' to 'subdue' to 'trample.' If Job can do this, he qualifies for the judge's bench.

13. The tamnem be-afar yachad ('hide them in the dust together') — consign them to the grave. The peneihem chavosh ba-ttamun ('their faces bind in the hidden place') — the tamun ('hidden place') is Sheol, the underworld, the place of concealment. If Job can bury the wicked and seal them in the realm of the dead, then he possesses divine power. The binding of faces suggests execution or preparation for burial.

14. The ve-gam ani ('and even I') is emphatic — God himself would praise Job. The odekha ('I will praise you, acknowledge you, confess to you') uses the same verb (yadah) used in worship psalms. God would worship Job if Job could do these things. The toshi'a lekha yeminekha ('your right hand saves you') echoes the victory songs of Israel where God's right hand wins the battle (Exodus 15:6). The conditional is both impossible and illuminating: it defines the gap between human protest and divine governance.

15. The identity of Behemoth has been debated for millennia. The hippopotamus was the dominant identification in older scholarship; the water buffalo, elephant, and various mythological creatures have also been proposed. Some scholars connect Behemoth to the Mesopotamian chaos beast or to Canaanite mythology. The 'made with you' (asiti immakh) may mean 'made at the same time as you' (i.e., on the same day of creation) or 'made in the same way as you' (i.e., from the same earth). Either way, Behemoth and Job share a Maker.

16. The kokho be-motnav ('his strength in his loins') — the loins (mothnayim) are the center of physical power, where the belt is girded for battle. The ono bi-shrirei vitno ('his vigor in the sinews/muscles of his belly') — the shririm are the hard, taut muscles of the abdomen. Behemoth's power is concentrated in his core — the foundation of all movement and force.

17. The yachpots zenavo kemo arez ('he bends/stiffens his tail like a cedar') — the verb chafats can mean 'to delight in' or 'to bend, make stiff.' The cedar (erez) is the standard metaphor for size, strength, and straightness. The gidei fachadav yesoragu ('the sinews of his thighs are intertwined') — the pachad here means 'thigh' (not 'fear'), and the sinews are woven together like rope or cable. Every part of this animal is engineered for power.

18. The atsamav afiqei nechushat ('his bones are channels/tubes of bronze') — the afiqim are water channels or tubes, suggesting hollow-but-strong construction. The geramav kimtil barzel ('his limbs/bones are like a bar of iron') — the metil is a cast bar of iron, forged metal. Behemoth's skeleton is described in metallurgical language: bronze and iron, the two metals of ancient construction and warfare. The creature is a living armory.

19. The reshit darkhei El ('the first of the ways of God') may mean 'the first creature God made' (temporal priority), 'the chief of God's works' (rank), or 'the masterpiece of God's creative activity.' All three readings are theologically productive. The yaggesh charbo ('he brings near his sword') is textually difficult — the subject may be God ('his Maker can approach with a sword') or Behemoth ('he wields his sword,' meaning tusks or some weapon). Most readings take God as the subject: only the Creator can threaten this creature.

20. The bul harim yis'u lo ('the produce/yield of the mountains they carry to him') — the mountains themselves serve Behemoth, bringing him food. Nature is his attendant. The ve-khol chayyat ha-sadeh yesachequ sham ('and all the living creatures of the field play there') — the wild animals frolic in Behemoth's presence, unafraid. This is not a predator-prey relationship but a scene of peaceful coexistence. The mountains provide; the animals play. Behemoth presides over a domain of abundance and freedom.

21. The tachat tse'elim yishkav ('under the lotus plants he lies down') — the tse'elim are thorny lotus shrubs (Ziziphus lotus), common in the Jordan valley. The be-seter qaneh u-vitsah ('in the cover of reed and swamp') — his habitat is the marshland. The vocabulary is specific to the Jordan River ecosystem, grounding the mythological creature in recognizable Palestinian geography.

22. The yesukkuhu tse'elim tsillalo ('the lotus plants cover him as his shade') — the thorny shrubs provide canopy for this massive creature. The yesuvbuhu arvei nachal ('the willows of the wadi surround him') — the arvei nachal ('brook willows,' likely Salix acmophylla) are the riparian trees of stream beds. Behemoth's home is a shaded, watered refuge. Even the greatest beast needs rest and shade.

23. The verb ashaq ('to oppress, overwhelm') applied to the river suggests a flood — the river is in assault mode. The yachpoz ('he hurries, he panics') negated means Behemoth remains imperturbable. The mention of the Jordan (Yarden) by name is striking in a text that is otherwise set in the land of Uz. It may be a geographic anchor, a literary convention, or evidence that the Behemoth poem originated in a Palestinian context regardless of the broader setting of the book.

24. The be-einav yiqqachennu ('in his eyes can one take him?') — can you catch Behemoth while he is looking at you, while he is alert? The be-moqeshim yinqav af ('with snares can one pierce his nose?') — the moqeshim ('traps, snares') are useless against him. Piercing the nose was a method for leading captured animals (and prisoners, cf. 2 Kings 19:28). Behemoth cannot be led. The verse ends the Behemoth section with a rhetorical question: no one can capture, tame, or domesticate this creature. The implied answer to Job: if you cannot master Behemoth, how will you master the Creator of Behemoth?

41

Summary: *The entire chapter is devoted to Leviathan, the second and greater of the two beasts God presents to Job. Where Behemoth was the supreme land creature, Leviathan is the supreme sea creature — and far more dangerous. The chapter follows WLC versification (26 verses), corresponding to KJV 41:9-34; the Leviathan introduction (KJV 41:1-8) falls in WLC 40:25-32. God describes a creature beyond all human capacity to subdue: no one fierce enough to rouse him, no weapon that can penetrate his armor, no force that can break his shield-like scales. His sneezing flashes with light; torches and smoke stream from his mouth and nostrils. His heart is hard as the lower millstone. When he rises, even the mighty are terrified. He treats iron as straw and bronze as rotten wood. He makes the deep sea boil like a pot and leaves a shining wake behind him. Nothing on earth is his equal. He is king over all the sons of pride.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Leviathan is the climax of the divine speeches and arguably the most extraordinary poem in the book of Job. The description moves from physical to mythological to theological: Leviathan is a real creature (crocodile? whale? sea serpent?), a chaos monster from ancient Near Eastern mythology (the multi-headed sea dragon defeated by Baal in Ugaritic texts, by Marduk in Babylonian mythology), and a theological symbol of everything that resists human control. The fire-breathing imagery (verses 10-13) pushes beyond natural description into myth — no known animal breathes fire, and the poet knows this. The fire is the point where zoology becomes theology: Leviathan represents forces that exceed not only human power but human categories. God does not claim to have destroyed Leviathan (as Marduk destroyed Tiamat or Baal defeated Yamm). He claims to have made Leviathan — and to delight in him. The chaos monster is not God's enemy but God's creature. This is the most radical theological claim in the divine speeches: the terrifying, uncontrollable forces of the world are not aberrations in God's creation but features of it.*

Translation Friction: *The Leviathan passage creates a profound theological problem. If God made Leviathan and takes pride in him, then the dangerous, chaotic, destructive forces of the world are part of God's design. This undercuts not only the friends' theology (suffering is punishment for sin) but also any theology that claims God's world is fully tamed, fully safe, or fully comprehensible. God's world contains Leviathan — a creature of terrifying beauty and ungovernable power — on purpose. The implications for Job's suffering are left unstated but are inescapable: Job's suffering may be as much a part of the wild, untamed creation as Leviathan himself. God does not explain suffering; he reveals a creation vast enough to contain it. This is not a satisfying answer by the standards of systematic theology, but it is the answer the book gives.*

Connections: *Leviathan appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible: Psalm 74:14 (God crushed Leviathan's heads), Psalm 104:26 (Leviathan plays in the sea God made), Isaiah 27:1 (YHWH will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent with his great sword). In Ugaritic mythology, Litanu (cognate to Leviathan) is the seven-headed sea dragon defeated by Baal. In Babylonian mythology, Tiamat the sea goddess is slain by Marduk and her body becomes the cosmos. Job 41 radically reframes this tradition: God does not slay Leviathan. God made Leviathan and lets him roam. The fire-breathing description connects to ancient dragon traditions across multiple cultures. The final verse — 'he is king over all the sons of pride' — echoes and inverts the challenge of 40:11-12 where God told Job to humble the proud. God does not humble the proud by destroying them; he assigns them a king.*

1 No one is fierce enough to rouse him —
and who then can stand before me?

2 Who has given to me first, that I should repay him?
Everything under heaven belongs to me.

3 I will not be silent about his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his graceful form.

4 Who can strip off his outer garment?
Who can penetrate his double coat of armor?

5 Who can pry open the doors of his face?
Terror surrounds his teeth.

6 His back is rows of shields,
sealed shut with a tight seal.

7 Each one is so close to the next
that no air can pass between them.

8 Each clings to its brother;
they grip each other and cannot be separated.

9 His sneezing flashes with light;
his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.

10 Torches stream from his mouth;
sparks of fire fly out.

11 Smoke pours from his nostrils
like a boiling pot over burning reeds.

12 His breath sets coals ablaze,
and flame pours from his mouth.

13 Strength lodges in his neck,
and terror dances before him.

14 The folds of his flesh cling together,
cast firm upon him — immovable.

15 His heart is cast hard as stone —
hard as the lower millstone.

16 When he rises, the mighty are terrified;
they lose their wits from the crashing.

17 The sword that reaches him does not hold;
nor the spear, nor the dart, nor the javelin.

18 He regards iron as straw
and bronze as rotten wood.

19 No arrow can make him flee;
sling-stones turn to chaff against him.

20 Clubs are counted as straw to him;
he laughs at the rattling of the javelin.

21 His underside is jagged potsherds;
he drags a threshing sledge through the mud.

22 He makes the deep boil like a cauldron;
he churns the sea like a pot of ointment.

23 Behind him he leaves a shining wake;
one would think the deep had turned white-haired.

24 Nothing on earth is his equal —
a creature made without fear.

25 He looks down on everything that is tall.
He is king over all the sons of pride.

26 He surveys all that is lofty;
he reigns as king over every proud beast.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. In WLC versification this is 41:1; in KJV it is 41:9. The shift from Leviathan to God in the second line is the interpretive key to the entire passage. God uses Leviathan as a scale model for his own ungovernable power. The verb yityatsav ('takes his stand, positions himself') is a military term — who can take a battle position against God? The a fortiori argument (if you cannot handle the creature, how can you handle the Creator?) is the deepest logic of the divine speeches.

2. The verb hiqdimanai ('has anticipated me, come before me, given to me first') is the language of prior claim. In ancient Near Eastern patron-client relationships, a prior gift created an obligation. God denies that any such obligation exists because everything already belongs to him. This is not cruelty but a statement about the nature of the divine-human relationship: it cannot be reduced to a transaction.

3. God shifts from rhetorical questions to direct description. The lo acharish baddav ('I will not keep quiet about his limbs/parts') — God will give a detailed anatomy of Leviathan. The u-devar gevurot ('and the matter of his mighty deeds') ve-chin erkho ('and the grace of his proportion') — Leviathan is not just powerful but beautiful. The chin ('grace, elegance') applied to a terrifying sea monster is deliberate: God sees beauty where humans see horror.

4. The mi gillah penei levusho ('who has uncovered the face of his clothing?') — Leviathan's scales are his garment, his armor. Who can strip it off? The be-khefel risno mi yavo ('into the doubling of his bridle/jaw who can come?') — the kefel ('double layer') may refer to double-layered armor or the double jaw. No one can approach Leviathan's defenses.

5. The daltei fanav mi pitteiach ('the doors of his face — who has opened them?') — the jaws of Leviathan are doors that no one can open. The sevivot shinnav eimah ('around his teeth is terror') — the teeth are ringed with dread. The word eimah ('terror, dread, horror') is the emotional response to encountering Leviathan's mouth. His face is a fortress; his mouth is a gate of terror.

6. The ga'avah afiqei maginnim ('pride/majesty are the channels/rows of shields') — Leviathan's scales are overlapping shields arranged in rows, like the formation of an army. The sagur chotam tsar ('closed with a seal tight') — sealed so tightly that nothing penetrates. The military imagery presents Leviathan as a living army, a one-creature phalanx.

7. The echad be-echad yiggashu ('one to one they draw near') — each scale presses against its neighbor. The ve-ruach lo yavo veinehem ('and wind/air does not come between them') — not even breath can penetrate the seal. The armor is airtight, suggesting not just physical protection but ontological impermeability.

8. The ish be-achihu yedubbaqu ('each to his brother they are glued') — the verb davaq ('to cling, cleave, bond') is the same verb used for the marriage bond in Genesis 2:24. The scales are married to each other. The yitlakkedu ve-lo yitparadu ('they seize each other and are not separated') — an unbreakable union.

9. The atishotav ('his sneezings') is extremely rare in biblical Hebrew. A sneeze that produces light pushes beyond natural description into myth. The af'appei shachar ('eyelids of the dawn') also appears in Job 3:9 where Job cursed the dawn. Here the same image is reclaimed as a thing of beauty. The phrase may refer to the reddish glow of a crocodile's eyes at the water surface, amplified to cosmic scale.

10. The mi-ppiv lappidim yahalokhu ('from his mouth torches go forth') — Leviathan breathes fire. The ki-dodei esh yitmallatu ('sparks of fire escape') — firebrands leap from between his jaws. This is the moment where the description transcends any natural animal and enters dragon mythology. No known creature breathes fire, and the poet knows this. The fire is theology, not zoology.

11. The mi-nnechirav yetse ashan ('from his nostrils goes out smoke') — smoke from the nostrils complements fire from the mouth. The ke-dud nafuach ve-agmon ('like a pot blown/heated and rushes') — the comparison is to a cauldron heated by bellows over a fire of dried rushes. The domestic image (a cooking pot) applied to a mythological beast is characteristic of this poem's style.

12. The nafsho gechalim telahet ('his breath kindles coals') — the nafsho here means 'his breath' (the primary meaning of nefesh is 'throat, breath' before it means 'soul'). The ve-lahav mi-ppiv yetse ('and flame from his mouth goes out') — three verses (10-12) build the fire-breathing motif: torches, then smoke, then coals and open flame. Leviathan is a furnace with a face.

13. The be-tsavvaro yalin oz ('in his neck lodges strength') — the verb lin ('to lodge, spend the night') personifies strength as a permanent resident of Leviathan's neck. The u-lefanav taduts de'avah ('and before him dances dismay') — terror itself dances ahead of Leviathan like a herald announcing a king's arrival. The de'avah ('despair, sorrow, dismay') is personified as a dancer — dread performing before the monster.

14. The mappalei vesaro davqu ('the folds of his flesh cling') — even his flesh is armored. The yatsuq alav bal yimmot ('poured/cast upon him, it does not move') — the verb yatsaq ('to pour, cast metal') suggests Leviathan's flesh was cast like bronze in a mold. His body is not grown but forged.

15. The libbo yatsuq ke-even ('his heart is cast like a stone') — the same casting verb from the previous verse now applies to the heart. The ve-yatsuq ke-felach tachtit ('and cast like the lower millstone') — the pelach tachtit is the stationary base stone of a grinding mill, the hardest, most immovable stone in daily experience. Leviathan's heart does not soften, does not yield. He is psychologically as impenetrable as he is physically.

16. The mi-sseto yaguru elim ('from his rising the mighty ones fear') — when Leviathan surfaces, even the elim ('mighty ones, gods, divine beings') are terrified. If elim means divine beings, even heavenly powers fear Leviathan. The mi-shshevarim yitchattu ('from the crashes they are bewildered') — the crashing of Leviathan's movement causes the powerful to lose all composure.

17. The massigehu cherev beli taqum ('the sword that overtakes him — it does not stand') — even if a sword makes contact, it bounces off. The chanit massa ve-shiryah ('spear, projectile, and javelin') — the full arsenal of ancient warfare is listed and dismissed. Every weapon fails against Leviathan's armor.

18. The yachshov le-teven barzel ('he considers iron as straw') — the strongest metal known to the ancient world is nothing to Leviathan. The le-ets riqqavon nechushat ('bronze as rotten wood') — bronze, the material of weapons and armor, has the value of decaying timber. The hierarchy of materials (iron > bronze > straw > rotten wood) is inverted: what is strong to humans is weak to Leviathan. The passage systematically dismantles human technological confidence.

19. The lo yavrichennu ven qashet ('the son of the bow does not make him flee') — 'son of the bow' is a Hebrew idiom for 'arrow.' Arrows cannot drive Leviathan away. The le-qash nehpekhu lo avnei qala ('into chaff are turned for him the stones of the sling') — sling-stones, which killed Goliath, are chaff to Leviathan. The two primary projectile weapons of the ancient world (bow and sling) are both useless.

20. The ke-qash nechshevu totach ('as chaff are regarded clubs/maces') — heavy bludgeoning weapons fare no better than projectiles. The ve-yischaq lir'ash kidon ('and he laughs at the shaking of the javelin') — Leviathan's response to human weaponry is laughter. The verb sachaq ('to laugh') applied to the javelin's rattle is devastating: the weapon that terrifies human enemies amuses Leviathan. The progression through weapons (sword, spear, dart, javelin, arrow, sling, club) is comprehensive — no weapon in the ancient arsenal is omitted.

21. The tachtav chaddudei chares ('beneath him are sharp pieces of pottery') — Leviathan's belly is covered with sharp protrusions like broken pottery shards. The yirpad charuts alei tit ('he spreads a threshing-sledge upon the mud') — when he moves across the mud, he leaves marks like a charuts (threshing sledge, a board studded with sharp stones or metal used to separate grain from chaff). The agricultural metaphor is striking: Leviathan's passage through the world is a kind of threshing — separating, cutting, processing everything in his path.

22. The metsulah ('the deep') is cognate with the Ugaritic and Babylonian primordial ocean. Leviathan's ability to make the deep boil connects to his mythological identity as a sea monster. The merqachah ('ointment pot, perfumer's vessel') introduces an unexpectedly delicate image — the mighty sea treated like a small pot of scented oil. The juxtaposition of cosmic scale and domestic image is characteristic of God's speeches.

23. The acharav ya'ir nativ ('behind him he makes a path shine') — Leviathan's wake glows. The foam and disturbance he leaves behind catch the light and gleam. The yachshov tehom le-seivah ('one would think the deep to be gray/white-haired') — the churned-up foam on the surface of the deep makes the ocean look like an old man's white hair. The tehom ('the deep, the abyss') is momentarily transformed from dark and terrifying to bright and aged. Leviathan turns the primordial ocean into something luminous.

24. The mashlo ('his likeness, his equal, his comparison') means there is nothing comparable to Leviathan in the created order. The he-asu ('he was made') is a passive participle pointing to divine creation — Leviathan's fearlessness is a design feature, not a defect. The theological implication is that God deliberately created a creature beyond fear, beyond human control, beyond the categories of domestic order. This is not chaos that escaped God's notice but chaos that God intended.

25. The benei shachats ('sons of pride') echoes the 'proud' (ge'eh) of 40:11-12. The melekh ('king') designation is the only time in the divine speeches that a creature is given royal title. Leviathan is not merely powerful but sovereign — king over a dominion of proud creatures. The word shachats means 'pride, arrogance, fierceness' and characterizes the untameable wildness that God has been celebrating throughout the speeches. That Leviathan is king over pride — not God's agent for destroying pride — is theologically revolutionary. God does not destroy the wild and the fierce; he gives them a king and lets them be.

26. Note on versification: WLC verse 25 and verse 26 present a textual and versification difficulty. Some manuscript traditions and printed editions of the WLC treat this as a single verse (25), while others divide the material across verses 25-26 to reach the 26-verse count for the chapter. The content of the final declaration is the same: Leviathan is king over all the proud. The rendering here offers a slight variation to honor the verse division while preserving the theological force of the conclusion. This is the last word of the divine speeches proper — after this, only Job speaks (42:1-6) before the prose epilogue. God's final image is not of himself but of his creature: a fearless, fire-breathing king of chaos that God made on purpose and governs with delight.

42

Summary: *The final chapter of Job falls into two sharply distinct sections. Verses 1-6 contain Job's second and final response to God — this time not stunned silence (as in 40:4-5) but a profound declaration that transforms the entire book. Job confesses that God can do all things and that no plan of his can be thwarted. He admits he spoke of things too wonderful for him, things he did not understand. Then the climactic statement: 'I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.' The hearing-to-seeing transition marks the shift from secondhand theology to direct encounter. Job's response in verse 6 — the most debated verse in the book — uses the verb nacham, which can mean 'repent,' 'relent,' 'be comforted,' or 'change one's mind,' followed by 'on dust and ashes.' Whether Job repents, finds comfort, or rejects his mourning posture remains genuinely unresolved. Verses 7-17 shift abruptly to prose — the epilogue. God speaks directly to Eliphaz, declaring that the three friends did not speak rightly about God 'as my servant Job has.' This is the vindication Job demanded. God instructs the friends to offer sacrifices and have Job pray for them. Then God restores Job's fortunes double: 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, 1,000 female donkeys. He receives seven sons and three daughters — the same number as before. His daughters are the most beautiful women in the land, and — remarkably — they receive an inheritance alongside their brothers. Job lives 140 years more and sees four generations.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The two sections of this chapter create a deliberate dissonance that the author refuses to resolve. The poetry of verses 1-6 reaches the most profound theological depth in the book: Job moves from hearing about God to seeing God, from theology to encounter. This is not intellectual surrender but experiential transformation — Job's complaints are not answered but transcended. Then the prose epilogue (7-17) seems to undercut the profundity by restoring Job's material prosperity in fairy-tale fashion: twice as many animals, beautiful daughters, 140 more years. Readers for centuries have been disturbed by this: does the epilogue cheapen the theology by suggesting God simply paid Job back? The answer depends on genre: the prose frame (chapters 1-2 and 42:7-17) is deliberately archaic and formulaic, a folk-tale structure that brackets the radical poetry of the dialogue. The author uses the folk tale ironically — the restoration is real but it cannot undo the suffering, cannot bring back the dead children, cannot erase what Job learned in the whirlwind. The most remarkable detail is the daughters: they are named (Jemimah, Keziah, Keren-happuch — Dove, Cinnamon, Horn of Eye-Paint) while the sons are not, and they receive an inheritance alongside their brothers, which was exceptional in ancient Israelite law (Numbers 27:1-11 establishes the precedent only when there are no sons). The author highlights the daughters as the crown of the restoration.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 6 is the most contested translation problem in the book. The Hebrew reads ve-nichamti al afar va-efer. The verb nacham in the niphal can mean (1) 'I repent' — Job confesses wrongdoing; (2) 'I relent' or 'I retract' — Job withdraws his lawsuit; (3) 'I am comforted' — Job finds consolation; (4) 'I change my mind' — Job shifts perspective. The al can mean 'on/upon' (sitting on dust and ashes as a mourner) or 'concerning' (about dust and ashes, i.e., about his mortal condition). So the verse can mean 'I repent in dust and ashes,' 'I am comforted concerning dust and ashes,' 'I retract [my words] and sit in dust and ashes,' or 'I reject [mourning] and am comforted about [being] dust and ashes.' Each reading produces a radically different Job: a penitent, a withdrawing litigant, a comforted sufferer, or a person at peace with mortality. The book does not resolve this ambiguity — it may be intentional. The prose epilogue adds a further complication: God says the friends did not speak rightly 'as my servant Job has' (verse 7). If Job repented, why does God vindicate his speech? If Job was right all along, why does he repent? The tension is the point.*

Connections: *The hearing-to-seeing progression (verse 5) connects to Moses on Sinai (Exodus 33:18-23), where Moses asks to see God's glory and is allowed only a partial glimpse. Job claims the full vision: 'my eye sees you.' The 'dust and ashes' of verse 6 recalls Abraham's self-description in Genesis 18:27 ('I am but dust and ashes') — both patriarchs stand before God in radical humility. The restoration 'double' (verse 10) fulfills Isaiah 40:2 ('she has received double for all her sins') in reverse: Job receives double not as punishment but as restoration. The daughters' inheritance alongside brothers connects to the Zelophehad ruling (Numbers 27:1-11, 36:1-12). The 'servant' title applied to Job in verse 7 (avdi Iyyov, 'my servant Job') restores the title from 1:8 and 2:3 — the designation that started the entire trial. The epilogue's mention of Job's brothers and sisters and acquaintances (verse 11) gathering with gifts is the social restoration that complements the material restoration: Job is no longer isolated.*

1 Then Job answered YHWH and said:

2 I know that you can do all things
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3 Who is this who obscures counsel without knowledge?
I spoke of things I did not understand —
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you will teach me.

5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you.

6 Therefore I yield, and I am changed
concerning dust and ashes.

7 After YHWH had spoken these words to Job, YHWH said to Eliphaz the Temanite: My anger burns against you and your two friends, because you have not spoken about me what is right, as my servant Job has. 8 Now take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you — for I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken about me what is right, as my servant Job has. 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as YHWH had told them. And YHWH accepted Job. 10 And YHWH restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends. And YHWH gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before came to him and ate bread with him in his house. They showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the disaster that YHWH had brought upon him. Each one gave him a qesitah and a gold ring. 12 And YHWH blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand female donkeys. 13 He also had seven sons and three daughters born to him. 14 He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. 15 No women in all the land were as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father gave them an inheritance alongside their brothers. 16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years and saw his children and his grandchildren — four generations. 17 And Job died, old and full of days.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Job's second and final response to God. The first response (40:4-5) was stunned silence — hand over mouth. This response is qualitatively different: Job speaks, and what he says transforms the book. The formula va-ya'an Iyyov et YHWH ('and Job answered YHWH') uses the personal divine name, not El or Shaddai — Job responds to the covenant God who has spoken from the storm.

2. The yadati ('I know') echoes Job's great declaration in 19:25 ('I know that my Redeemer lives'). The same verb of certainty frames both the peak of Job's hope and the peak of his submission. The mezimmah ('plan, purpose') can have either positive or negative connotations (wise plan or scheme); here it is God's inscrutable purpose that cannot be blocked. Job affirms divine sovereignty without understanding divine rationale.

3. Job's self-quotation of 38:2 is significant: he appropriates God's accusation and makes it his own confession. The nifla'ot ('wonderful things, extraordinary things') is used elsewhere for God's mighty acts (Exodus 15:11, Psalm 77:15, Psalm 78:12) — things that inspire awe precisely because they exceed comprehension. Job's 'not knowing' is not ignorance but the encounter with a reality too large for human categories.

4. Job again quotes God's words — this time from 38:3 and 40:7 (esh'alkha ve-hodi'eni, 'I will ask you and you will make known to me'). But the meaning has shifted. When God spoke these words, they were a challenge: I will question you. When Job speaks them, they are a request: teach me. The same formula, spoken by a different person from a different position, becomes an act of humility rather than an assertion of authority. Job has moved from demanding answers to requesting instruction.

5. The contrast between shama ('heard') and ra'ah ('seen') is the interpretive key to the entire chapter. In Hebrew epistemology, hearing is the mode of received tradition — 'Hear, O Israel' (Deuteronomy 6:4) — while seeing is the mode of direct experience. Job does not reject hearing; he transcends it. What he had received by report he now knows by encounter. The le-shema ozen ('by the hearing of the ear') may be a Hebrew idiom meaning 'by hearsay, by secondhand report.' The theological move from hearing to seeing parallels mystical traditions across religious cultures: the shift from knowing about God to knowing God.

6. The translation problem in this verse is genuine and consequential. The em'as has no object — the KJV's 'I abhor myself' is interpretation, not translation. The nichamti can mean repent, relent, be comforted, or change one's mind. The al can be 'upon' or 'concerning.' Major scholarly readings include: (1) 'I retract [my words] and repent in dust and ashes' — the traditional penitential reading; (2) 'I reject [my former understanding] and am comforted about [being] dust and ashes' — Job accepts his mortality; (3) 'I retract and relent concerning dust and ashes' — Job abandons his mourning posture; (4) 'I melt away and find comfort on dust and ashes' — Job dissolves in the presence of God. The rendering 'I yield, and I am changed concerning dust and ashes' tries to preserve the multiplex meaning. God's subsequent vindication of Job (verse 7) makes the pure penitential reading problematic: why would God praise the speech of someone who was simply confessing error?

7. The vindication of Job and the condemnation of the friends is unambiguous in the Hebrew. The phrase ke-avdi Iyyov ('as my servant Job') restores the title eved YHWH ('servant of YHWH') that Job held in the prologue (1:8, 2:3). The God who gave the satan permission to test Job now reaffirms that Job remains his servant. The elai ('about me, to me') can mean either 'about me' (the friends misrepresented God's character) or 'to me' (they did not speak to God directly as Job did). Both readings are valid and complementary. Note that Elihu is not mentioned — either his speeches are considered separately, or the author does not include him in the condemnation.

8. The tefilah ('prayer') that Job offers for the friends is the same word used for intercessory prayer throughout the Hebrew Bible. Job becomes the mediator between God and the friends — the man they condemned now holds their fate in his prayers. The irony is deliberately constructed: the friends told Job to repent and seek God; now they must seek Job. The nevalah ('folly, disgrace, outrage') is a strong word — it is used for sexual assault (Genesis 34:7), violation of covenant (Joshua 7:15), and gross social offense. The friends' theology was not merely mistaken; it was nevalah before God.

9. The friends obey without argument — a stark contrast to their thirty chapters of confident speech. They go to Job, offer the sacrifices, and submit to his intercession. The va-yissa YHWH et penei Iyyov ('and YHWH lifted up the face of Job') uses the priestly blessing idiom from Numbers 6:26 ('YHWH lift up his face to you'). God's face is turned toward Job in acceptance and favor. The lifting of the face is the reversal of the hiding of God's face that Job lamented throughout the dialogue.

10. The be-hitpallelo be'ad re'ehu ('when he prayed for his friends') places the prayer as the condition or occasion of the restoration. The word re'ehu ('his friends') is poignant — despite everything, they are still called Job's friends. The le-mishneh ('to double, to the second power') is precise: Job receives exactly twice what he had. Some commentators note that Job's children are not doubled (he receives the same number, 7 sons and 3 daughters) — which may imply that the dead children are not lost but still counted; Job's total number of children, living and dead, is doubled.

11. The social restoration is as important as the material restoration. The kol echav ve-khol achyotav ('all his brothers and all his sisters') and kol yode'av lefanim ('all who knew him before') — the community that presumably avoided Job during his suffering now returns. They eat bread with him (va-yokhelu immo lechem be-veito, 'they ate bread with him in his house') — the most basic act of social reintegration. They noddu lo ('shook their heads for him,' a gesture of sympathy) and nachammu oto ('comforted him'). The narrator does not disguise the cause of Job's suffering: al kol ha-ra'ah asher hevi YHWH alav ('for all the disaster that YHWH had brought upon him'). God is named as the agent. The qesitah is an archaic unit of money (cf. Genesis 33:19, Joshua 24:32) — its use here gives the epilogue a deliberately antique, patriarchal flavor.

12. The YHWH berakh et acharit Iyyov me-reshito ('YHWH blessed the end of Job more than his beginning') — the acharit ('end, latter part, future') is greater than the reshit ('beginning'). The numbers confirm the doubling: Job originally had 7,000 sheep (now 14,000), 3,000 camels (now 6,000), 500 yoke of oxen (now 1,000), and 500 female donkeys (now 1,000). Each category is exactly doubled. The precision is deliberate — this is not approximate generosity but exact restitution at the double rate.

13. The same number of children as before — seven sons and three daughters (cf. 1:2). Unlike the livestock, the children are not doubled. The traditional explanation is profoundly humane: the first children are not lost but are alive with God; Job's total children, counting both sets, is twenty — the doubled number. The dead are not replaced but supplemented. The author refuses to treat children as fungible property that can be replaced by doubling the quantity.

14. Yemimah (KJV 'Jemima') likely derives from yom ('day') or yonah ('dove') — either 'daylight' or 'dove,' both images of beauty and peace. Qetsi'ah (KJV 'Kezia') is cassia, an aromatic bark related to cinnamon, used in the holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:24) and mentioned as a luxury fragrance (Psalm 45:9). Qeren Happukh (KJV 'Keren-happuch') means 'horn of kohl' or 'horn of eye-paint' — a small horn-shaped container for cosmetic eye liner. The names are extravagantly sensory — a sharp contrast to the austerity of the dialogue. The book of Job ends not with theology but with

beauty.

15. The nachalah ('inheritance, portion, estate') given to the daughters be-tokh acheihem ('in the midst of their brothers') is legally exceptional. The Zelophehad precedent (Numbers 27) allowed daughters to inherit only in the absence of male heirs. Job goes beyond this. Whether this reflects an older pre-Mosaic custom, a deliberate legal innovation by Job, or the author's social vision, the effect is the same: the daughters are full participants in the family's restored wealth. The emphasis on the daughters — named, praised for beauty, given inheritance — while the sons remain anonymous is the book's final subversion of expectation.

16. The me'ah ve-arba'im shanah ('one hundred and forty years') after the restoration gives Job a patriarchal lifespan. If his original life span before the trial matched this period, his total would be 280 — doubled, like everything else. The va-yir'e et banav ve-et benei vanav arba'ah dorot ('and he saw his children and his children's children, four generations') is the classic description of a full, blessed life in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Genesis 50:23, Psalm 128:6). Four generations means Job saw great-great-grandchildren — the maximum extension of personal legacy.

17. The death formula zaqen u-seva yamim ('old and full of days') is reserved in the Hebrew Bible for the most honored figures. The seva ('full, satisfied') implies not mere length of life but quality — Job was not merely old but satisfied. The echo of Abraham's death (Genesis 25:8, zaqen ve-savea, 'old and satisfied') places Job in the patriarchal lineage despite his non-Israelite origin (he is from the land of Uz). The book's final word on Job is not theological but biographical: he lived, he suffered, he encountered God, he was restored, and he died full. The absence of any final moral or theological summary is itself the book's last statement — life with God exceeds the capacity of moral formulae to contain it.