The Book of Job heads the Wisdom books of the Bible. It is more than a story: the great questions of the human condition are deeply pondered upon.

Job’s misfortunes – after being enriched and fulfilled all his life, he is reduced to utter misery – are merely a pretext to have us reflect on this reality: human life on this earth is not satisfying. Suffering and death would not be so scandalous if it were not for the absence of God in our world. We cannot meet God, and this is the cause of our uneasiness.

It is not by chance that Job is introduced as a rich man of Uz, a land that is foreign to God’s people. Job is not supposed to know either Moses or the prophets; he will speak in the name of all humanity and not only for believers. It is enough for Job to contemplate nature to believe in God and in his Providence, but he has not seen him, and God has never addressed his word to him. Yet Job feels himself to be the work of God. He realizes that only a dialogue with his Creator will enable him to situate himself in his place. Even though he looks for an opening, he does not find it.

The Book of Job

The starting point of this book is a popular tale found in the first and last pages (1:1—2:13 and 42:10-17), the story of the holy man Job. Yahweh tested him by taking everything away from him, and in spite of this Job remained steadfast, trusting God who always rewards the just. In the end, God gave everything back to him.

This morality tale is obviously a little simplistic. Then an author unknown to us developed the story of Job in the dialogues of chapters 3-41. There, Job shouts his indignation over the human condition and his three friends confront him with the answers of the wise people of the day.
THE TRADITIONAL FIGURE OF JOB

1 Job, a blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil, once lived in the land of Uz. He had seven sons and three daughters.

2 Owner of seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and a large number of servants, he was considered the greatest man among the people of the East.

3 His sons used to take turns holding banquets in their homes and they would invite their three sisters to dine and drink with them. After each series of banquets, Job would send for his sons and daughters and have them purified. He would rise early in the morning, offer a holocaust for each of his children, thinking, “Perhaps they have sinned and blasphemed God in their hearts.” This had been quite a routine for Job.

4 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before Yahweh, and Satan came with them. Yahweh asked Satan, “Where have you been?” Satan answered, “Going up and down the earth, roaming about.”

5 Yahweh asked again, “Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as blameless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil.”

6 But Satan returned the question, “Does Job fear God for nothing? He has built a protective wall around him and his family and all his possessions. You have blessed and prospered him, with his livestock all over the land. But stretch out your hand and strike where his riches are, and I bet he will curse you to your face.”

7 Yahweh said to Satan, “Very well, all that he has is in your power. But do not lay a finger upon the man himself.” So Satan left the presence of Yahweh.

8 One day, while his sons and daughters were feasting in the house of their eldest brother, a messenger came to Job and said, “Your oxen were plowing, and your donkeys were grazing nearby when the Sabaeans came and carried them off. They killed the herdsmen. I alone escaped to tell you.”

9 While he was still speaking, another messenger came, “God’s fire fell from the sky and burned all your sheep and the shepherds as well. I alone have escaped to tell you.”

10 He had hardly finished speaking when another messenger arrived, “Three raiding teams of Chaldeans have killed your servants and carried off your camels. I alone have escaped to tell you.”

11 He was still speaking when another messenger came and said to Job, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking in the house of their eldest brother when suddenly a great wind blew across the desert and struck the house. It collapsed on the young people and they all died. I alone have escaped to tell you.”

12 In grief Job tore his clothes and
shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground and worshiped, saying,

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
naked shall I return. Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken away.
Blessed be his name!”

In spite of this calamity, Job did not sin by blaspheming God.

Once more the heavenly beings came to present themselves before Yahweh, and again Satan was with them. Yahweh asked Satan, “Where have you been?”

Satan answered, “Going up and down the earth, roaming about.”

Yahweh asked again, “Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as blameless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil. He still holds fast to his integrity even if you provoked me to ruin him without cause.”

Satan replied, “Skin for skin! For his own life, anyone will give everything he owns. But lay your hand against his own flesh and bones and he will curse you to your face.”

Yahweh said to Satan, “Very well, he is in your power. But spare his life.”

So Satan left the presence of Yahweh and afflicted Job with festering sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Job took a potsherd to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

His wife said to him, “Do you still hold on to your integrity? Curse God and die!”

Job replied, “You talk foolishly. If we receive good things from God, why can’t we accept evil from him?” In spite of this calamity, Job did not utter a sinful word.

HERE BEGIN THE POEMS OF JOB

Three of Job’s friends – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite – heard of the misfortune that came upon him. They set out from their own homes and journeyed together to offer their sympathy and consolation to Job. Failing to recognize him from the distance, they wept aloud, tore their garments and poured dust upon their heads. For seven days and seven nights, they sat on the ground beside him. They did not say a word to Job, for they saw how terribly he suffered.

May that day perish when I was born

At length it was Job who spoke, cursing the day of his birth. This is what he said:

Cursed be the day I was born,
and the night which whispered:
A boy has been conceived.

As we remarked in the introduction, this is the beginning of the dialogue on suffering, leaving aside the story of Job, the popular figure who accepted God’s will without arguing as we saw in chapter 2. Cursed be the day I was born (v. 3). These first verses repeat what Jeremiah said in a moment of despair (see Jer 20: 14). God’s friends have at times spoken in the same way, others – less solid – have thought of suicide.

Why is light given to the miserable… whose path has vanished (vv. 20-23)? Why are children born crippled or blind, or destined for an atrocious death? We would be wrong to only think of the marginalized or those crushed by misfortune. It’s in the world where nothing is
May that day be dark,  
may God on high ignore it.  
May no light shine upon it.

May the shadow of death claim it as its own.  
May a cloud settle over it;  
may blackness obstruct its light.

Let darkness swallow that night  
let it not add to the rest of the year  
let it not be included in the month.

That night – oh, let it be barren,  
untouched by shouts of joy.

Let it be cursed by those who hate the light,  
sorcerers who call on the Devil.

Let its morning stars no longer shine;  
let it wait for light in vain  
and never see the first rays of dawn,

since it did not close the womb  
to keep my eyes from seeing doom.

Why didn’t I die at birth,  
or come from the womb without breath?

Why the knees that received me,  
why the breasts that suckled me?

For then I should have lain down  
asleep and been at rest

with kings and rulers of the earth  
who built for themselves lonely tombs;

or with princes who had gold to spare  
and houses stuffed with silver.

Why was I not stillborn,  
like others who did not see the light of morn?

There the trouble of the wicked ceases,  
there the weary find repose.

There the prisoners are at ease;  
they no longer hear the taskmaster’s voice.

Great and small fare equally there,  
where the slave is free from his master.

Why is light given to the miserable,  
and life to the embittered?

To those who long for death  
more than for hidden treasure?

They rejoice at the sight of their end,  
they are happy upon reaching the grave.
No one is just before God

1 Eliphaz the Temanite spoke next:

2 Shall we speak? Do you mind?
   For who could remain silent?

3 Remember how you have taught many others,
   how you have strengthened their feeble hands.

4 Your words have supported those who wavered,
   have steadied the knees that faltered.

5 But when your turn has come, you are discouraged;
   as soon as you are struck, you are dismayed.

6 Should you not rely on your piety,
   and find assurance in your integrity?

7 Have you seen a guiltless man perish,
   or an upright man done away with?

8 As I see it, those who plow evil
   or those who sow trouble reap the same.

9 By the breath of God they are swept away;
   by the blast of his wrath they are destroyed.

10 The lion may roar and growl; it will fall,
    the teeth of its cubs will be broken.

11 The lion will die for lack of prey,
    and the whelps of its mate will stray.

12 I had a secret revelation;
   a whisper of it reached my ear.

13 Amid thoughts from night visions,
    when people are heavily wrapped in slumber,

23 Why give light to a man whose path has vanished,
   whose ways God blocks at every side?

24 Instead of bread I feed on sighs.
   My groans are like water poured out.
25 For what I fear has come upon me,
   what I dread has befallen me.
26 I find no rest, I find no ease;
   only turmoil, nothing of peace!

• 4.1 Eliphaz is a believer. Faced with Job’s grief, he repeats what was commonly said in those days:
   – God is just in this life: he rewards the just with health and prosperity.
   – If you are sick and abandoned, it is because you have sinned.

Eliphaz claims he is speaking because of a revelation from God such as many prophets had in their dreams. He is surely pointing out the truth: *can a mortal be just in the eyes of God? Can anyone be pure before God?* People complain that life is meaningless, but maybe sin prevents them from seeing its meaning. *Have you seen a guiltless man perish?* (v. 7).

People of faith understand that God “brings the powerful down and he exalts the humble,” but daily experience often seems to show the opposite. According to the Gospel, wealth can be a negative sign. Eliphaz speaks with such assurance because he has not suffered in his own flesh, nor does he pay enough attention to those who suffer.
14 I was seized with fear and trembling	hat shook me to my very bones.
15 A spirit passed over my face,
and the hair of my body stood on end.
16 It stopped and stood before my eyes,
but I could not make out what it was.
Silence... and then – a voice was heard:
17 “Can a mortal be just in the eyes of God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?
18 If God can put no trust in his servants,
if he can charge his angels with error,
19 how much more those who live in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed as easily as moths!
20 Between dawn and dusk they perish,
and unheeded, vanish forever,
21 Their tent has been unpegged
and they died without knowing why.

[\[5\]3 I have seen a fool taking root when
suddenly his household collapsed.
4 His children went about without security,
crushed in court without a defender.
5 The hungry consumed his harvest
and carried it to a hiding place;
his surplus was taken away,
the thirsty hankered after his wealth.
6 For affliction comes not from the earth,
 nor does sorrow sprout from the ground;
7 humans are those who carry about trouble,
as an eagle in the heights brings down
lightning flash.
2 Resentment kills the fool,
and anger slays the simple.
1 Call then, but who will answer you?
Who of the Saints will you turn to?
8 If I were you, I would appeal to God
and lay before him my case,
9 for wonders are past all reckoning,
his miracles beyond all counting.
10 He pours rain down on the earth
and sends water upon the fields.
11 He sets the lowly on high,
turns grief into joy.
12 He wrecks the plans of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.
13 He traps the clever in their devices
and puts an end to the schemes of the wily.
14 Darkness comes upon them in the day-
time;
they grope at noon as in the night.
15 He rescues the despoiled from the de-
spoiler,

What is man that you keep him in mind

6 1 Job replied:
2 If only my anguish could be measured
and my misery put on the scales;
In 6:15-30, Job emphasizes the abyss which separates those who suffer from those who come to console. How many disguises at a patient’s bedside? Those consoling the afflicted want to hide their own confusion before pain and their inability to really lighten suffering. However, the sick person is not fooled and feels more isolated in realizing he or she is not told the truth.

In chapter 7, Job addresses an absent God. Job does not know God-Father and the trial brings out in him suspicions against a jealous God who watches people in order to punish them. Yet Job’s complaint against God reminds us of the friction between people who love each other, and precisely because they love each other they are more demanding.

What is man that you make much of him (7:17)? If God is watching over his favorite creatures at all times, could it not be because he cannot live without them?

3 they would outweigh the sands of the seashore!
4 It is for this that I speak impetuously.
5 Pierced by the arrows of the Almighty, my spirit absorbs their poison; my heart fails before the terrors of God.
6 What taste would food have without salt? What flavor is there in the white of an egg?
7 So everything is tasteless for me, I am bored with my bread.
8 Would that I get my request, that God grant me what I want – that he would decide to crush me, let loose his hand and strike me down!
9 Then this at least would comfort me, my only joy in merciless dread, that I have not cursed the will of the Holy one.
10 Will I be able to go on hoping, what expectation to keep on waiting?
11 Have I the strength of stone, and is my flesh of bronze?
12 There is no one to help me, all aid has departed from me.
13 Friends without compassion made me lose the fear of the Almighty,
14 My brothers have been fickle, like the flowing of seasonal waters.
15 They were but melted ice running from under the snow.
16 But summer comes and the river dries, under the blazing sun no water is left.
17 Because of this caravans get lost, go to wastelands and perish.
18 The merchants of Tema search for the brooks, the travelers of Sheba look for them.
19 In vain they expected, they are frustrated on arriving there.
20 Now you too are unable to help me; you see a horror and draw back in fear.
21 Have I asked you to give me anything? Did I say, “Pay a ransom for me, deliver me from the enemy or rescue me from a tyrant?”
22 Teach me and I will keep silent; show me where I have been wrong.
23 Honest words I must not resent, but what have your arguments shown?
24 Do you mean to scorn my words, or throw to the wind a cry of despair?
25 Would you cast lots for the orphan and bargain over your friend?
26 But now, give me your attention; surely I will not lie to your face.
27 Relent, and grant me justice; reconsider, my case is not yet tried.
28 Is there insincerity on my tongue? Have I misunderstood misery?

7 Man’s life on earth is a thankless job, his days are those of a mercenary.
2 Like a slave he longs for the shade of evening, like a hireling waiting for his wages.
3 Thus I am allotted months of boredom and nights of grief and misery.
4 In bed I say, “When shall the day break?”
5 On rising, I think, “When shall evening come?”
6 and I toss restless till dawn.
7 My body is full of worms and scabs; my skin festers with its boils and cracks.
8 My days pass swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,
9 heading without hope to their end.
10 My life is like wind, you well know it, O God; never will I see happiness again. The eye that saw me will see me no more; when you look for me, I shall have gone.
11 So I will not restrain my words, I will speak out in anguish;
12 “Am I the sea or a monster of the deep, that you keep me under watch?”
13 When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will soothe my pain, then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions,
14 I would prefer death by strangling rather than such a trial.
15 See I am dying, never to live again. Leave me alone; I am finished.
16 What is man that you make much of him, that you give him so much attention,
that every morning you examine him and check him all the time?
Will you never take your eyes off me and give me respite to swallow my spittle?
Suppose I sinned, what has it done to you,
O keeper of humans? Why choose me as your target?
Have I become a burden to you?
Why not pardon my sin and take away my guilt?
For in the dust I will soon lie down; when you search for me, I shall have gone.

Does God pervert judgment?

1 Bildad the Shuhite spoke:
2 How long will you say such things?
Your words are long-winded blusterings.
3 Does God pervert judgment?
Does the Almighty distort justice?
4 If your children did him wrong, he has made them pay for their sins.
5 But if you will have recourse to God and plead with the Almighty,
6 if you are faultless and righteous, even now he will care for you and restore you to your rightful place.
7 And your prosperity will be such as to make you forget former times.
8 Inquire of the past generations and learn from their ancestors’ experience;
9 for born but yesterday, we know nothing and our days on earth are but a shadow.
10 They will correct and teach you with words that come from the heart.
11 Can papyrus thrive without marsh?
Can reeds flourish without water?
12 Even if still growing and uncut, they wither more quickly than any plant.
13 Such is the end of those who forget God; the hope of the godless perishes.
14 His trust is hanging by a thread; a spider’s web is what he relies on.
15 He leans on his house, but it does not stand;
he clings to it, but it crumbles.
16 He is sturdy under the sun, spreading its shoots in the garden,
17 its roots entwined around the rocks, holding fast to each stone.
18 But when uprooted, the place rejects it:
“I have never known you.”
19 And there it lies rotting by the road, while other plants grow in its place.
20 Indeed God does not reject the blameless, nor lend his hand to the evildoer.
21 He will again fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with joyful shouts.
22 Your enemies will be confused, and the tent of the wicked will disappear.

I cannot argue with you, nevertheless...

1 Then Job answered:
2 Very well I know that it is so.
But how can a mortal be just before God?
3 If one were to contend with him, not once in a thousand times would he answer.
4 His power is vast, his wisdom profound.
Who has resisted him and come out unharmed?

If I were innocent, my own mouth would condemn me (v. 20). Job reminds us of those notorious trials where militants, unjustly accused by their own party, come to admit their guilt “spontaneously.” Similarly, many times a single mishap would be enough to make us feel sinful.

In your goodness you gave me life (10:12). Job cannot deny that God is concerned about his creatures, and he remembers the wonders God achieves in the pregnant mother. These attentions only open the way for his demands: gifts coming to us from people above arouse our suspicions more than our gratitude: I know what was in your mind (10:13).

After years without thinking, people begin to reflect and it is then that the absence of the Creator may prepare them for rebellion.
5 He moves mountains before they are aware; he overturns them in his rage.

6 He makes the earth tremble and its pillars quake.

7 He commands the sun, and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars.

8 He alone stretches out the skies and treads on the waves of the seas.

9 He made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and every constellation.

10 His wonders are past all reckoning, his miracles beyond all counting.

11 He passes by, but I do not see him; he moves on, but I do not notice him.

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

13 God does not turn back when angered; before him Rahab’s cohorts cowered.

14 How then can I answer him and find words to argue with him?

15 If he does not answer when I am right, shall I plead with my judge for mercy?

16 Even if I appealed and he answered, I do not believe that he would have heard.

17 He who crushes me for a trifle and multiplies my hurt for no reason.

18 He does not give me time to breathe, but fills me with grief without pause.

19 If it is a contest of strength, he is mighty.

If a matter of justice, who will summon him?

20 If I were innocent, my own mouth would condemn me; if blameless, it would pronounce me guilty.

21 But am I innocent, after all? I do not know, and so I find my life despicable.

22 It is all the same! And this I dare say: both blameless and wicked – he destroys.

23 When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent.

24 When a nation falls into a tyrant’s hand, it is he who makes the judges blind.

But if it is not he – who else then?

25 Swifter than a runner are my days; without a shred of joy they fly away.

26 They skim along like reed canoes or like eagles swooping on their prey.

27 If I resolve to forget my affliction, to smile and change my expression, my trials make me fear

for I know I shall be held accountable.

29 In any case if I am to be condemned, why should I bother in vain?

30 If I washed my body with snow and cleansed my hands with soap,

31 you would plunge me into the dung pit, and my very clothes would abhor me.
He is not a man like me that I might say, “let us go to court together.”
Would that there were an arbiter between us, who could lay his hand upon both of us.

He would remove from me the rod of God and his terrors which frighten me.
But it is not so. Then I will speak to myself alone without fear.

You hunt me like a lion

1 Since I loathe my life, I shall pour forth my complaint; I shall speak of my soul’s torment.

2 I shall say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what is your quarrel with me?
3 Would it be good for you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked?

4 Have you human eyes? Do you see as man sees?

5 Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a mortal’s lifetime?

6 Why do you seek guilt in me and search for my faults?

7 You know I have not sinned, but who can rescue me from your hand?

8 You have formed and made me. Will you then turn and destroy me?

9 Remember that you molded me from clay. Will you turn me to dust again?

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

11 You wrapped me up in skin and flesh, knit me together with bones and sinews.

12 In your goodness you gave me life and watched over my breathing with care.

13 Yet this is what you hid in your heart, I know what was in your mind:

14 You wanted to see if I sinned, and not let my fault be forgiven.

15 If I am guilty – alas for me! If innocent – I dare not lift my head, humbled and shamed in my affliction.

16 Exhausted, you hunt me like a lion, you want to prove that you are stronger.

17 You renew your attack on me; you intensify your rage, wave upon wave, your forces assail me.

18 Why did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died unseen,

19 a being that had not been – carried from the womb direct to the tomb.

20 Are not my days almost over? Turn away; leave me a while to recover

21 before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and shadow,
to the land of chaos and deepest night, where darkness is the only light.

The discourse of Zophar

1 Zophar the Naamithite spoke: Must these words go unanswered? Will you be right for talking so much? Will your prattle keep us silent? Will no one answer your mocking?

2 You say to God that your way is right, that you are clean in his sight. How I wish that God would speak and open his lips against you, to show you the secrets of wisdom which put intelligence to shame, then you would know that God is recalling your sins.

3 Can you fathom the mysteries of God, probe the extent of his perfection? It is higher than heaven – what can you do? Deeper than the world of death – what can you know?

4 Its measure is wider than the earth, broader than the sea. Who can stop him when he passes, when he imprisons and calls to judgment?

5 He sees evil; he recognizes deceit. Will he not then take note of it? So stupid people learn to be wise as wild donkeys become tame.

6 If you set your heart aright and stretch out your hands to him, if you wash your hand of sin and allow no evil in your tent, you will then raise your face in honor; having no fear, you will feel secure.

7 You will forget your suffering and recall it only as waters gone by. Your life will be brighter than noonday and its darkness like the morning.

8 You will be comforted, for there is hope; you will be protected when you sleep. You will lie down with no one to fear; many will come to court your favor. But the eyes of the wicked will fail; they will lose all way of escape, their one hope – that death will come.

Will you defend God with lies?

1 Then Job answered: No doubt you are the people’s voice; when you die, wisdom dies with you! But I have a mind as well as you, I know all that you have said. To my friends I am a laughingstock when I call on God who does not answer; the just and blameless man is made fun of.

2 “Contempt for the unfortunate,” so think the prosperous, “a blow for those who are staggering.” Yet the robbers’ tents are undisturbed, those who provoke God are in peace, those who make a god of their strength. But ask the beasts to teach you, the birds of the air to tell you, the plants of the earth to instruct you, the fish of the sea to inform you. Who among them does not understand that behind all this is God’s hand? He holds the life of every creature and the breath of humans. The ear surely can test the words as the tongue tastes food; wisdom is found in the old, and understanding in great age; in God however is wisdom and power; his are counsel and understanding.

3 What he tears down, none can rebuild; the one he imprisons, none can release. If he withholds water, there is drought; if he lets it loose, there is flood. In him are strength and perception; deceived and deceiver are in his power. He leads counselors away stripped and makes fools of judges. He loosens the belt of kings and ties a loincloth about their waist. He leads priests away, barefoot, and overthrows those in power. He compels advisers to keep silent, and strips elders of their discernment. He puts princes to shame; he unties the girdle of the strong. (He uncovers the gloomy recesses and brings the deep darkness to light.) He makes a nation rise and fall, a people to grow and to dwindle. He deprives leaders of their judgment, leaving them to roam in a trackless waste.

4 Without light, they grope in the dark and stagger like drunkards.
13

My eyes have seen all this,
my ears have heard and understood.

2 What you know, I also know;
I am not inferior to you.

3 But I would like to speak to the Almighty,
I want to plead my case with God.

4 You are glossing over the problem
and offering false remedies.

5 If only you would keep silent,
that would at least be wisdom.

6 Hear now my argument;
listen to my defense.

7 Will you speak falsely for God?
Will you defend him with false inventions?

8 Will you side with him
and advocate on his behalf?

9 What if he examines you?
Could he be deceived as people are?

10 He will rebuke you for sure
if in secret you show partiality.

11 You will be terrified by his majesty,
and you will be in dread of him.

12 Heaps of ashes are your maxims;
mounds of clay are your defenses.

13 So keep silent and let me speak;
this will be at my own risk.

14 I am putting myself in jeopardy
and gambling for my life.

15 Though he may slay me,
I will still argue with him;

16 and this boldness might even save me
for godless do not dare draw near him.

17 Carefully listen to my words,
give my case a hearing.

18 I will proceed in due form
believing that I am guiltless.

19 If anyone makes good his charges,
I am ready to be silenced and die.

20 Only grant me these two things, O God,

* 13.1 Faced with a meaningless life, hum-
man wisdom does not have an adequate answer. 
So Job accuses these wise men who pretend to 
justify God while forgetting reality (13:1-6). *Will you defend God with false inventions* (v. 7)? It is better to keep quiet and admit our own ignorance. *This boldness might even save me* (v. 16). Job is so convinced that God is just that he wants to force him to break his silence. Perhaps God will make him die because of his boldness but, at least, Job will have had an answer and he will know why he dies (13:13-20).

Job’s bold attitude corrects the widespread image of a believer as one who accepts with resignation without trying to understand. Job does not fall down before God like a slave, but rather, being conscious of his dignity in the eyes of his Maker, he asks for an explanation.
Through his personal case, Job presents a general criticism of the human condition, and he does it in a way very similar to Ecclesiastes. He emphasizes the following about human fate:

- life is short;
- sufferings are countless;
- the grace of youth is followed by the bitterness of adult life;
- there is a degree of impurity in humans, namely, something mysterious which ruins everything they undertake;
- when looking at life, they would like to live forever, which is not granted to them.

While Ecclesiastes accepts the universal law, Job dreams of a God who might talk with him and forget, for a time, his superiority (vv. 15-17).

Here we see one of the results of the teaching that God gave his people for centuries. As the Israelites understood better the alliance that linked them with God, they became more human. Whereas their ancestors like Jacob or Moses were resigned to their mortal destiny, they aspired for something better.
9 at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a young plant.

10 But when man is cut down, he comes undone; he breathes his last – where will he be?
11 The waters of the sea may disappear, rivers drain away,
12 but the one who lies down will not rise again; the heavens will vanish before he wakes, before he rises from his sleep.

• 13 If only you would hide me in the grave and shelter me till your wrath is past!
If only you would set a time for me and then remember me!
14 If you die, will you live again? All the days of my service I would wait for my release.
15 You would call and I would answer; you would long for the work of your hands again.
16 Now you watch my every step, but then you would stop counting my sins.
17 My offenses would be sealed in a bag, and you would do away with my guilt.

18 But as mountains erode and crumble, as rock is moved from its place, as waters wear away stones and floods wash away the soil, so you destroy the hope of man.
19 You crush him once for all, and he is gone; you change his appearance and send him away.
20 If his children are honored, he does not know it; if brought low, he does not see it.
21 Only the pain of his own body does he feel; only for himself does he mourn.

Another discourse of Eliphaz

1 Eliphaz the Temanite spoke:
2 Should a wise man answer with airy notions, puff himself up with senseless opinions?
3 Should he argue in empty talk, in words that are meaningless?

4 You are undermining piety and meditation in God’s presence.
5 Your iniquity instructs your mouth, and you talk like the crafty.
6 Your own mouth condemns you, your own lips, not mine.
7 Are you mankind’s firstborn?
Were you brought forth before the hills?
8 Are you privy to God’s counsels?
Do you alone possess wisdom?
9 What knowledge have you that we do not have?
What do you understand that is obscure to us?
10 The gray-haired and the aged are among us, men older than your father.
11 Are God’s consolations too small for you, and the words spoken gently to you?
12 Why does your heart carry you away, why do your eyes flash
13 when you turn your wrath against God and utter such words as these?

• 13. In 14:13-17 Job mentions the place of the dead, or Sheol, or netherworld, where the Jews thought that, after death, they would have some semblance of life, but would be more like prisoners far from Yahweh than like human beings who are alive and praise God (see Is 38:18-19). When someone has been called and loved by God he can no longer accept that he will disappear forever. And if God were to let him survive in a place not close to God, he would always long to reach God: I would wait for my release, You would call and I would answer you.

In chapters 15–18 everyone proceeds without listening to the other: Job expresses his despair and his friends repeat their conviction that misfortunes are for the wicked.
14 What is man to claim innocence, the child of woman to be cleared of guilt?
15 If God puts no trust in his holy ones, and (the) heavens are not clean in his eyes,
16 how much less man who is vile and corrupt,
who drinks evil as if it were water!
17 Listen and I will explain; I will tell you of my experience
and of the sages' teachings passed on to them by their fathers,
19 to whom alone the land was given when no foreigner moved among them.
20 The wicked are in torment all their days.
During the years allotted to the tyrant
21 his ears are filled with terrifying sounds,
his peace shattered by the attack of marauders.
22 He despairs of escaping the darkness and sees himself given to the sword,
then left as a prey for vultures, he knows his destruction is at hand.
23 The hour of darkness fills him with dread,
as distress and anguish close in on him.
25 But look: he challenged God, he raised his hand against the Almighty,
charging stubbornly against him behind a thick, sturdy shield.
27 His face had grown full and fat, his thighs bulged with flesh.
28 He would dwell in ruined cities, in deserted and crumbling houses.
29 He will not prosper or take root; he will not escape from darkness;
the wind will carry off his blossom.
30 Let him not trust in greatness for he will get nothing in return.
32 He will be paid in full before his time, and his branches will never again be green.
33 Like a vine he will be stripped of unripe grapes; like the olive, he will shed his blossoms.
34 For the breed of the godless will be barren, and fire will consume the tents of extortioners.
35 Who conceives mischief will bring forth evil, deceit will spring from his own womb.

Where then can my hope be?

16 Then Job answered:
1 Have heard many such things.

What miserable comforters you are!
3 When will your airy words end?
What ails you and keeps you arguing?
4 I too could talk as you do, if you were in my place;
I could declaim over you and shake my head at you.
5 I would give you strength, and comfort you with words.
6 Yet if I talk, my suffering is not eased, if I refrain, it does not go far from me.
7 I am upset with such ill will; an evil band takes hold of me. They stand to testify against me; and answer me with slanders.
9 They assail me with fury and gnash their teeth at me; my enemies lord it over me.
10 With open mouths they jeer at me; they strike my cheek, and together they mass themselves against me.
11 God has given me over to sinners and cast me into the clutches of the wicked.
12 All was well until he shattered me, but he seized me and dashed me to pieces. Having set me up for a target,
13 he had his arrows pointed at me, striking from every direction, piercing my sides without pity, spilling my gall on the ground.
14 Like a warrior he bears down on me, thrusting me unceasingly.
15 I have fastened sackcloth over my skin and buried my brow in dust.
16 My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes;
17 yet my hands are free of violence, and my prayer sincere.
18 O earth, do not cover my blood; let not my cry come to rest!
19 Even now my witness is in heaven and my defender is on high.
20 Now my prayer has gone up to God as I poured out my tears before him.
21 Would that one could discuss with God as he does with his fellows.
22 My years are numbered, and soon I will take the road of no return.

17 My spirit is broken, my days are over and the grave awaits me.
2 Mockers surround me; my eyes grow dim with nights of bitterness.
3 Sponsor me, O God, since no one will support me.
19. This poem in 19:13-22 deals with the destiny of the elderly and the sick who feel their pride, but, in fact, he is removing the roots of our pride.

17:8-10 must be seen as Job’s ironic answer to his friends, “You say that in seeing the wicked’s misfortune, the just praise God’s justice, well then, in seeing me so humiliated, rejoice and say: well done!”

19.13 This poem in 19:13-22 deals with the destiny of the elderly and the sick who feel
14 My kinsfolk and companions have gone away;  
my guests have forsaken me,  
15 my maidservants count me as an alien  
as if they had never known me
16 I summon my servant, but he does not answer,  
even when I plead with him.  
17 To my wife my breath is offensive;  
to my own brothers I am loathsome.  
18 Even little children ridicule me:  
Come! let us make fun of him!  
19 All my intimate friends detest me;  
those I love have turned against me.  
20 I have become skin and bone  
and have escaped with only my gums.  
21 Have pity my friends, have pity,  
for God's hand has struck me!
22 Why do you hound me as God does?  
Will you never have enough of my flesh?
23 Oh, that my words were written,  
or recorded on bronze  
24 with an iron tool, a chisel  
or engraved forever on rock!
25 For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and he, the last, will take his stand on earth  
26 I will be there behind my skin,  
and in my flesh I shall see God.  
27 With my own eyes I shall see him –  
I and not another. How my heart yearns!
28 If you say, “We will pursue him!  
let us find a charge against him”,
29 be afraid of the sword yourselves;  
when Wrath is enflamed against wrong,  
you will know there is judgment.

Zophar: Evil will come to an end

1 Zophar of Naamath spoke next:
2 My troubled thoughts move me to reply  
for I have been feeling impatient.  
3 I hear a rebuke which puts me to shame,  
and I am inspired to give an answer.  
4 You know how it has been from of old,  
since man was placed on earth,  
5 that the triumph of the wicked is short  
and the joy of the godless is but a moment.
6 Though his pride reach to the heavens  
and his head touch the clouds,  
7 he vanishes like a phantom;  
those who have seen him ask where he is.  
8 Like a dream he takes flight,  
like a vision of the night.  
9 The eye that met him sees him no more;
10 that the triumph of the wicked is short  
and the joy of the godless is but a moment.
11 Though his pride reach to the heavens  
and his head touch the clouds,  
12 he vanishes like a phantom;  
those who have seen him ask where he is.  
13 Like a dream he takes flight,  
like a vision of the night.  
14 The eye that met him sees him no more;
15 that the triumph of the wicked is short  
and the joy of the godless is but a moment.
16 Though his pride reach to the heavens  
and his head touch the clouds,  
17 he vanishes like a phantom;  
those who have seen him ask where he is.  
18 Like a dream he takes flight,  
like a vision of the night.  
19 The eye that met him sees him no more;
neither shall his dwelling shelter him again.

11 His youthful frame that was full of vigor shall at last lie with him in the dust.

12 Evil was sweet in his mouth, and he hid it under his tongue,

13 He liked it and did not let it go and still kept it within his mouth,

14 yet his food turns sour and becomes venom in his stomach.

15 He vomits the riches he swallowed; God compels his belly to belch it out.

16 Because he sucked the poison of a viper, he will be killed by the fangs of an adder.

17 He will no longer see the streams of oil, no rivers of honey and milk.

18 He gives back the fruit of his toil: he could not swallow it.

19 For he has oppressed the poor and seized houses instead of building them.

20 His children must make amends to his victims:

his own hands must pay back his riches.

21 For his greed had no limit, and no one could escape his appetite;

22 this is why his prosperity will not endure.

23 In the midst of plenty, distress seizes him,

the full force of misery falls upon him.

24 When his belly is filled God unloads his wrath upon him

and pelts him with his arrows.

25 While he flees from an iron weapon, the bronze bow strikes him down.

26 A dart sticks in his back, in his liver an arrow.

He is in the grip of a terrible fear;

27 total darkness has been stored for him,

a fire which he did not kindle devours him

and consumes whatever was left in his tent.

28 The heavens will expose his guilt; the earth will rise up against him.

29 A flood will sweep away his house, the waters of God's wrath.

30 Such is the fate of the wicked – their lot which comes from God.

Job replied:

21 Listen at least to my words, enough of your consolation.

2 Listen with me while I speak; and then you can mock.

3 Is my grudge against humans? Why then should I not be impatient?

4 Look at me and be appalled; cover your mouth for a moment.

5 When I think about this I am troubled and trembling seizes my body.

Job: It's well for the wicked!

7 Why do the wicked live, increase in age and in power?

8 Their descendants flourish in their sight, their kinsfolk and their offspring.

9 Their homes are safe, free from fear; they do not feel the scourge of God.

10 Their bulls breed without fail; their cows calve and do not miscarry.

11 They have children as they have lambs their little ones dance like deer.

12 They sing to the rhythm of timbrel and harp; make merry to the sound of the flute.

13 They live out their days in happiness and go down to Sheol in peace.

14 Yet they said to God, “Go away! We have no desire to learn your way.

15 Who is the Almighty that we should serve him? What will it profit us if we pray to him?”

for him is not to prevail in reasoning with his adversaries, but to see God and hear him (v. 27).

• 21.7 Here, too, we recognize Jeremiah’s complaint in 12:1 and the questions raised in Psalm 73. In the Old Testament the just are scandalized by the prosperity of the wicked, because it seems to deny God’s justice. Is it true, as we sometimes hear, that death is the ultimate justice?
16 Though they planned everything far from God
prosperity is in their hands.
17 How often is their lamp put out?
How often does calamity befall them?
How often does God’s anger wipe them out?
18 How often are they like straw before the wind,
like chaff which the storm sweeps away?
19 You say, “His children will pay for his sin.”
Let the man himself pay for his iniquity;
let him drink the wrath of the Almighty!
20 What does he care about his family when he dies,
when his months have been cut off?

22 Can anyone teach God knowledge,
since he judges even the highest?
23 One man dies in full vigor,
at ease and completely secure;
24 full and nourished is his figure,
rich in marrow are his bones.
25 Another dies in bitterness,
ever having enjoyed happiness.
26 But in the dust they lie down
side by side, covered with worms.
27 I know your thoughts fully
and your schemes about me.
28 For you say, “Where is the house of the
great prince?”
Where is the tent of the wicked?”
29 Have you never asked the travelers,
or have you misunderstood what they say –
30 that the evil man is spared from calamity,
delivered from the day of God’s fury?
31 Who will denounce his conduct to his
face
or pay him back for what he has done?
32 When people have carried him to the
grave his image watches from his tomb.
33 The soft earth is sweet to him;
behind him you see everyone follow
and before him a countless horde.
34 How then can you console me with your
nonsense?
Pure falsehood is all you have said.

Eliphaz: Can we be of any use to God?

Eliphaz the Temanite replied:
Only himself a wise man benefits.

* What would the Almighty gain if you
were upright?

What profit if you were blameless in your
ways?
4 Is it for your piety that he reproves
and brings you to judgment?
5 Is it not for your great wickedness,
for there is no end to your sins?
6 Without any need you kept your
kinsmen’s goods
and stripped them naked of their clothing.
7 You denied drink to the thirsty
and withheld bread from the hungry.
8 The powerful control the land
and allot it to their cronies.
9 You have sent widows away empty-handed
and crushed the arms of orphans.
10 No wonder snares are round about you
and sudden terror makes you dismayed,
you are blinded by darkness
and covered by flood.
11 Is not God above the heavens?
See how lofty are the highest stars.
12 Yet you say, “What does God know?”
Can he see through deep shadows?
13 He cannot see for thick clouds veil him
as he walks upon the vault of the heavens.”
15 Will you keep to the old path
that the wicked have trod?
16 In a moment they were carried off
and their foundation washed away.
17 They said to God, “Away from us!
What can the Almighty do to us?”
18 He had filled their houses with good
things,
but the thoughts of the wicked were far
from him.
19 The righteous see their ruin and are glad,

• Eliphaz’ speeches are repetitious: if
Job suffers, it is because he has sinned. He must
have oppressed his neighbor in spite of his
reputation for integrity. Yet, note the list of sins
that Job might have committed: it is always a
matter of oppressing the weak or failing to assist
them. Jesus will say nothing new when, in
Matthew 25:40 he condemns to eternal punish-
ment those who failed to provide bread and
water to those in need.
the innocent laugh at them and say,
20 "Now the great have come to nothing,
fire has devoured their heritage."

21 Come to terms with God and make peace;
in this way you will prosper.
22 Listen to his teaching
and keep his words in your heart.

23 If you return humbled to the Almighty,
if you drive injustice from your tent,
then you will look on gold as dust,
gold of Ophir as pebbles from a stream.
25 For the Almighty will be your gold
and your sparkling silver.
26 For then you will delight in the Almighty
and lift up your face to God.
27 You will pray to him and he will hear,
and you will fulfill your vows.
28 You will succeed in your decision,
and light will shine upon your way.
29 For God brings down the proud
and saves the downcast.
30 He who rescues the innocent,
will rescue you too if your hands are clean.

1 Job answered and said:
2 Again today my complaint is rebellious;
I groan under his heavy hand.
3 If only I knew where to find him,
if only I could go to his dwelling,
4 I would bring my case before him
and lay out in full my arguments.
5 I would find out his answer
and understand what he would say.
6 Would he need great power to debate
with me?

No! he needs only to listen!
7 He would know the complainant to be an upright man
and I would be free of my judge.
8 But if I go eastward, he is not there;
if I go westward, I still cannot see him.
9 Seeking him in the north, I do not find him;
looking for him in the south, he is not there.
10 But he knows my every step,
and I will come out as gold in his test.
11 I have always walked along his path;
I have kept his ways and not turned aside.
12 I have not departed from his commands,
instead I have treasured his words.
13 But who can oppose once he has decided?
He does what he desires.
14 He will carry out his decree
and other plans laid out for me.
15 That is why I am terrified
when I think of all this.
16 God has made me lose courage;
the Almighty has made me afraid,
17 but I am not silenced by darkness,
by the thick gloom that covers my face.

Why does God not ask?

1 Why is what happens hidden from God?
Why do his faithful never see his justice?
2 The wicked remove landmarks
and steal both flocks and shepherds.
3 They seize the orphan’s ass
and for a pledge take the widow’s ox.
4 The needy stay far from the road,
the poor go into hiding.
5 Like wild asses in the wasteland,
they look for food;
the poor toil in the night,
there is no food for their children!

The commentary on vv. 29-30 can be found with Isaiah 2:6-22.

• 23.1 Job comes back to what he had already said: there is something tormenting religious people: to know that God is always looking at us and yet never be able to find him. This was commented for chapter 7: Job personifies those who do not know Christ and have not felt “how good the Lord is towards those who serve him with love.” The same rebellion is found in many atheists today: they reject the idea of a God who watches them only to punish their faults.

• 24.1 A terrible accusation against God who keeps silent when the oppressed are before him. Few prophets expressed the horror of human evil more forcefully.

The poor go into hiding. It is a fact that the media has made us more aware of universal misery and, doubtless, we see there a result of the Gospel. It is a fact that this trend has affected
6 They gather fodder in the fields, 
work in the vineyards of the wicked. 
7 Destitute, they lie down naked, 
shivering in the freezing cold. 
8 Drenched with mountain rains, 
they hug the rocks for lack of shelter. 

9 The fatherless child is snatched from the breast, 
the infant of the poor seized for a debt. 
10 Without clothes, they go naked, 
starving as they carry the sheaves. 
11 Between the millstones they crush olives; 
they tread the winepress but suffer thirst. 
12 In the city the dying groan, 
and the wounded cry out for help 
but God pays no attention.

13 Many rebel against the light, 
they do not know its way or stay in its path. 
* 14 When dawn breaks, the murderer rises 
to kill the poor and the helpless. 
15 The adulterer waits for dusk, 
thinking that no eye watches him. 
At night the thief walks about 
and puts a mask over his face, 
ready to break into the houses 
that he chose during the day. 
16 Morning is their darkest hour 
the time for them to fear. 
18 The wicked are foam on the face of the waters; 
their portion of the land is cursed, 
and no one goes to their vineyards. 
19 As drought and heat snap up the thawed snow, 
so Sheol swallows up the sinner, 
20 and the womb which formed him, forgets him. 
Evil men are no longer remembered, 
like a fallen tree they are broken. 
21 They preyed on the barren, childless woman, 
and showed no kindness to the widow. 
22 But the Powerful stands against them 
and drags away the mighty. 
23 He may let them feel secure, 
but his eyes are upon their ways. 
24 They are momentarily exalted, and then gone; 
they wither and fade like a weed. 
They are cut off like heads of grain. 
25 If this is not so, who can prove me wrong 
and reduce my words to nothing?

25* 1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: 
2 His is dominion and awesome power, 
he who establishes peace in the heavens. 
3 Can his armies be numbered? 
Upon whom does his light not rise? 
4 How can man be righteous before God? 
How can one born of woman be pure? 
5 Even the moon is not bright 
or are the stars pure in his sight – 
6 how much less man – this insect, 
the human – a worm?

also other religions, which have opened up in recent years. Every country hides its poor and the rich are separated so that they rarely meet the poor, and consequently ignore them. That would be nothing if God did not also appear to forget the poor (and accept that his Church so easily forgets to bring them the Gospel).

• 14. This paragraph seems to be out of place here. The God of light allows the presence of dark areas on earth, where the children of darkness are at work. Paragraph 24:18-23 would be better located after 27:23.

• 25.1 Bildad offers a new presentation of the splendor of the world. The people of that time still had very primitive ideas about the origin of the world. They accepted the legends of neighboring people, the Canaanites and the Chaldeans, that presented the universe as organized by the gods after they had destroyed the monsters of chaos. For centuries, the Jews kept these images; they were satisfied to remove from the legends the references to pagan gods and spoke of a first victory of Yahweh at the beginning of the world. See also Isaiah 51:9.

The first chapter of Genesis was written after these poems. There the notion of God-Creator is purified: God created everything from the beginning and he did so by his word alone.
The shades of the deep are terrified,
the waters and their inhabitants tremble.
Sheol is naked before God;
destruction lies uncovered.
Over the void he spreads out the northern skies;
over emptiness he suspends the earth.
He wraps up the waters in his clouds,
yet the clouds do not burst their seams.
He covers the face of the moon
and spreads his clouds over it.
On the face of the waters he draws the horizon as a boundary between light and darkness.
The pillars of the heavens quake,
stunned at his thunderous rebuke.
By his power he stilled the sea;
by his wisdom he smote Rahab.
By his wind the skies were cleared;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
These are but hints of his power;
a whisper is all that we hear of him.
But who can understand the thunder of his might?

Job answered then:
What help have you given to the powerless,
what strength to the enfeebled arm?
What advice have you offered to the foolish,
and what great insight have you shown?
Who has inspired in you these words?
Whose spirit spoke from your mouth?

As surely as God lives, who denies my right,
the Almighty, who has made me bitter,
as long as I have life within me
and God’s breath in my nostrils,
my lips will not speak falsehood
nor my tongue utter deceit.

Never will I admit you are right,
nor deny my integrity till I die.
Never will I let go of my righteousness;
my conscience is not put to shame.
Let my enemy be as the wicked
and my adversary as the unrighteous.
For what hope has the godless
when God cuts him off,
when God takes away his life?
God will not listen to his call
when he is beset by trouble.
For he did not delight in the Almighty
or call upon him constantly.
See, I tell you the deeds of God
and do not conceal the ways of the Almighty.
You have witnessed this yourselves.
Why then these empty words?

God, the heritage of an oppressor
which he receives from the Almighty.
Though his children be many,
the sword is their destiny.
His offspring will go hungry.
The plague will bury those who survive,
and their widows will not mourn for them.
He may heap up silver like dust
and pile up clothes like clay,
but what he stores, the just will wear,
and the innocent divide his silver.
He builds his house like a cobweb,
or like the hut a watchman makes.
Once more he lies down rich
and wakes to see his wealth all gone.
Terrors rush upon him by day;
at night a whirlwind carries him away.
The east wind lifts him up, and he disappears
as it sweeps him out of his place.
People strike at him without mercy
as he flees headlong from their hands.
They clap their hands in mockery
and hiss at him from where they are.

There is a silver mine
and a place where gold is refined.
Iron is taken from earth
and copper is smelted from ore.
Trying to conquer darkness,
piercing to the uttermost depths
in darkness for the gloomy stone,

1. Job remarks ironically: What does all of this have to do with the point of the discussion?
strange people cut a shaft
in places remote and long forgotten,
and there they labor, dangling and swaying.

The earth which produces food
is plowed up as if by fire.

Sapphires come from its rocks,
gold nuggets from its dust.

No bird of prey knows the hidden path,
no falcon’s eye has seen it yet.

No proud beast has trodden it,
no prowling lion has passed over it.

Man attacks the flinty rocks,
upturns mountains by their roots.

Tunneling through earth’s layers,
he sees all its treasures.

He searches the source of rivers,
and brings hidden things to light.

But where does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell?

Man has known no way to wisdom;
it is not found in the land of the living.

The deep says, “It is not in me”;
the sea says, “It is not with me.”

It cannot be purchased with the finest gold,
nor can its price be weighed in silver.

It cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir,
nor with precious onyx or sapphire.

It is beyond comparison with gold or crystal;
its worth is unmatched by any golden vessel.

Not worth mentioning are coral and jasper;
the price of wisdom is above the biggest pearl.

The topaz of Cush cannot equal it;
it cannot be valued in pure gold.

Where then does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell?

It is hidden from the eyes of all the living,
concealed from the birds in the sky.

Destruction and Death can only say,
“We have heard of it.”

God alone knows the way to wisdom,
his eye enters its dwelling place.

When he looked to the ends of the earth,
and watched everything under the heavens,
when he gave the wind its force
and measured out the waters,
when he set a bound for the rain
and a way for the thunder and lightning,
then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
he established it, knowing it in depth.

28 And to humans he said:
The fear of the Lord is wisdom;
avoiding evil is understanding.

Whoever listened to me, spoke well of me

1 Job continued his discourse:

2 Oh, that I were in months gone by,
in the days when God watched over me,
3 when his light shone upon my head
and I walked with it through darkness.
4 Oh, that I were in my prime,
when God’s friendship blessed my home,
5 when the Almighty was still with me
and my children were around me,
6 when milk bathed my footsteps
and olive oil flowed from the rock.
7 When I went to the city gate
and took up my seat in the square
8 the young men stepped aside
and the old men rose to their feet;
9 the chief men dared not speak
but laid their hands on their mouths;
10 the princes were silenced,
their tongues stuck to the palate.
21 They listened to me and waited in silence
for my counsel.
22 Once I spoke they said no more,
but drop by drop my words kept falling on them.
23 They waited for me as people wait for showers;
they drank in my words as spring rain.
24 If I smiled at them, they did not dare believe it;
not a glance of mine was lost.
25 I pointed out the way, as a leader
and took a king’s place among the troops.
Wherever I led them, they went.
11 Whoever heard me, spoke well of me,
and those who saw me commended me,

• 29.1 In chapters 29–31 Job presents his defense and he assumes the role of the just one who is envied and slandered. As long as people are lucky they are esteemed, but if they run into misfortune, everyone suddenly looks at them differently. A secret instinct urges people to find a scapegoat in the midst of misfortune in the community. Inordinate respect returns and envy gives way to persecution.

Paradoxically, it is Job’s defense that shows the flaws in his integrity. I was wearing my honesty like a garment (v. 14). Job was delighted to do good. He was a “just” man, aware of being just and he gave thanks to God who made him good.

All this was nothing more than the justice and the merits of the Pharisee. Very respectful of a distant God, Job built up his life, his virtues and his good self-image alone. In the end, his perfection did not exist in God’s eyes because, without saying so, he made himself God’s rival.
for I rescued the poor who cried for help, 
the fatherless and the unassisted.

I was blessed by the dying man; 
I turned to peace the widow’s pining.

I was wearing my honesty like a garment, 
my integrity was my robe and turban.

I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, 
father to the needy, the stranger’s advocate.

I broke the jaws of the wicked, 
and from his teeth forced out the prey.

I said to myself: “I will die old, 
my days as many as the grains of sand. 
My roots will reach to the water; 
at night my branches will be wet with dew. 
My glory will remain fresh, 
the bow ever strong in my grip.”

And now I am the laughing-stock 
of people much younger 
whose fathers I considered unfit 
to put with the dogs of my flock.

Not even their arms were helpful to me 
for all their vigor had gone, 
worn out by hunger and want.
They roamed the parched wasteland, 
gathered salt herbs from the brushwood, 
their food was the roots of the broom plant.

They were banished by their fellowmen 
who shouted at them as if they were thieves.

They were forced to seek a home in caves, 
among the ravines and rock crevices.

They brayed among the bushes 
and huddled in the underbrush.

They were driven from the land 
for being base and senseless.

And now their sons sing of my disgrace; 
I have become a byword among them.

They do not hesitate to spit before me; 
they abhor me and keep their distance.

Seeing that God has unstrung my bow, 
they have cast off restraint in my presence.

On my right the rabble rise, 
build siege ramps and lay snares.

They attack, with none to restrain them. 
They advance, as through a wide breach; 
they come in waves amid the uproar.

Terror grips me; 
my dignity is blown by the wind 
my safety has vanished like a passing cloud.

And now my soul is poured out 
because of my days of grief and suffering. 
At night gnawing pain pierces my bones.

My veins have no rest.

With power God has caught my garment, 
binding me about as the collar of my coat; 
throwing me into the mire, 
where I am now like dust.

I cry to you, O God, but there’s no answer; 
I stand but you merely look on.

You have become cruel to me, you pursue me 
mercilessly with your strong hand.

You lift me up and make me ride 
till the storm tosses and throws me down like rain.

I know you will bring me down to death, 
the destiny of all the living.

I did not raise my hand against the poor 
when he cried for help in his disaster.

Have I not wept for those in trouble? 
Has not my soul grieved for the poor?

But when I looked for good, I encountered evil; 
when I waited for light, darkness came.

My heart in turmoil is never at peace, 
for days of distress have come upon me…

The Book of Job teaches us how much we need the coming of the Son of God. On one hand, as long as God does not present himself openly, we cannot avoid doubting and resenting him. On the other hand, as long as someone feels he alone is responsible for his own perfection, he cannot feel as a child of God does nor come into the reign of grace.
I go about darkened, but not by the sun; if I rise in council, it is to voice my grief.
I have become a brother of jackals, a companion of owls.

My skin blackens and peels; my bones burn with fever.
My harp is tuned to laments, and my flute to sounds of weeping.

Have I eaten my food alone?

1 I have made a covenant with my eyes not even to gaze at a virgin.
2 For what is man’s lot from God on high, his heritage from the Almighty above?
3 Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for the wrongdoer?
4 Does he not see my ways and number all my steps?
5 Have I walked in falsehood? Have my feet hastened towards deceit?
6 Let me be weighed in honest scales, that God may know I am guiltless.
7 If my steps have turned from the way and my heart’s desire has gone astray, if my hands have been stained,
8 then may others eat what I have sown, or may my crops be stricken down.
9 If I have been enticed by a woman, if I have lurked at my neighbor’s door,
10 then may my wife grind for another, and may other men sleep with her.
11 (For that is enough to make one ashamed, a crime that should be utterly condemned.)
12 For it is a fire that burns to destruction; it would have consumed all my possessions.
13 If I have denied justice to my servants when they had a grievance against me,
14 what would I do when confronted by God? What would I answer when called to account?
15 No less than I, they too were formed in the womb by the same God who formed us all within our mothers.
16 Have I denied anything to the poor, or allowed the widow’s eyes to languish?
17 Have I eaten my food alone, not sharing it with the fatherless?
18 No! since youth I have fostered him, and from my mother’s womb, I have guided the widow.

• Job looks at his behavior according to the law of God as it is presented in many pages of the Old Testament: a law of goodness and honesty centered on concern for one’s neighbor. In a world with a very modest standard of living, those lucky enough not to lack anything had the obligation of sharing with the less fortunate. The most serious sin was the lack of social solidarity. In Job’s examination of conscience the sin of
19 Have I seen a man cold and shivering, 
destitute, in need of clothing,  
who did not bless me from his heart 
giving him the warmth of my fleece?  
20 If I have raised my hand against the orphan, 
trusting in my power and influence, 
then let my shoulder fall from its socket, 
let my arm be broken at the joint.  
21 For I feared God-sent calamity, 
and how could I stand in his presence?  
22 If I have put my trust in gold 
or have sought my security from it, 
23 if I have gloated over my wealth, 
my fortune and accomplishments,  
24 if I have regarded the sun in its radiance 
or the moon in its splendor,  
25 and having been enticed offered them 
a kiss of my hand in homage,  
26 then these also would be sins to judge  
for I would have been unfaithful to God.  
27 Have I rejoiced at my enemy’s misfortune 
or gloated over disaster that came his way?  
28 I have not even allowed my mouth to sin  
by invoking a curse against him.  
29 Those of my household used to say,  
“Who has not been fed with Job’s meat?”  
30 No sojourner ever spent the night in the street, 
for my door was always open to wayfarers.  
31 If my land has cried against me  
and its furrows wept  
because I have eaten its fruits unjustly 
after getting rid of its owners,  
32 let thorns grow instead of wheat  
and weeds in the place of barley.  
33 Have I, out of human weakness, 
hidden my sins and concealed guilt in my  
heart,  
34 keeping silent by myself,  
35 because I feared the crowd and their contempt?  
36 Oh, that I had someone to hear me!  
Let the Almighty answer! This is my plea.  
37 Let my accuser write his indictment  
and I will wear it on my shoulder,  
or bind it round my head like a turban.  
38 I would give him an account of my every  
step,  
and go as boldly as a prince to meet him.  
This is the end of the words of Job.  

SECOND PART: ELIHU INTERVENES

The three men made no further reply to Job, because in their opinion, 
he was guiltless.  
But Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became 
angry with Job for justifying himself before 
God.  
He was also angry with the three friends for their failure to refute Job, because 
they had allowed God to be condemned.  
Because they were older than he, Elihu had bided his time;  
but when the three gave up beginning of a new part of the poems, inserted 
later and placed in chapters 32–37.  
Elihu’s discourses add little to previous discussion. Elihu has nevertheless his point of view. It
the argument, his anger burst out. 6 Thus Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, spoke:

I am young and you are quite old; therefore I was timid and afraid and dared not tell you of what I know. 7 Age should speak," I thought; "advanced years should teach wisdom." 8 But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. 9 It is not the old alone who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right. 10 Therefore I said: "Listen, let me also show my knowledge. 11 I waited for you to speak, listening for your reasons, as you searched for words. 12 I gave you my full attention but none of you has proved Job wrong, none has refuted his arguments. 13 Stop saying, "We have met wisdom; God has instructed us, not man." 14 I will not resume your argument or answer Job with your reasoning. 15 They keep quiet for they are dismayed and have nothing more to say. 16 Must I wait, now that they are silent, making no effort to reply? 17 I, too, will show my knowledge. 18 For I am full of words and prodded on by the spirit. 19 I am like bottled-up wine, or a wineskin bursting with wine. 20 I have to speak to find relief, open my lips and make reply. 21 I will be partial to no one and will not flatter anyone. 22 For if I were skilled in flattery, my Maker would soon do away with me.

Have you heard God's warning?

33 1 So now, O Job, hear my discourse, listen to everything I say. 2 My words are on the tip of my tongue, words from an upright heart, words full of knowledge and sincerity. 3 The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty keeps me alive. 4 Answer me if you can; draw up your arguments and take your stand. 5 Like yourself, I too have been taken by God from the same clay. 6 Thus no fear of me need alarm you, nor should my presence lie heavy on you. 7 But I heard what you said, none of your words escaped my hearing: 8 "I am clean and without sin; I am innocent, guiltless. 10 Yet God has found fault with me and considers me his enemy; 11 he shackles my feet, keeps watch of all my paths." 12 I tell you, you are wrong in this, for greater than man is God. 13 Why then do you complain that he will answer none of your words? 14 See God gives a warning but does not repeat it a second time. 15 In a dream, in a night vision, when deep sleep falls on people, while they slumber in their beds, 16 it is then he opens their ears and gives warning by terrifying them. 17 So he turns man from wrongdoing and keeps him away from pride, 18 God preserves his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.

19 Man is also chastened on his bed by pain and constant distress upon his frame, 20 so that he finds food repulsive, even the choicest meal loathsome. 21 His flesh wastes away to naught; his bones, once unseen, now protrude. 22 His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the place of death. 23 Yet if there is an angel by his side – a mediator, one in a thousand – to show him what is right for man, to give him justice once again, 24 God will have mercy on him and say, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found for him a ransom."

4:8 Dn 11:2 Is 13:45 Mt 4:8 Ps 104:30 seems that for him the discussion so far has been rather theoretical. For one part he insists on the pedagogical aspect of the divine work: many situations which seem unjust to us cease to be so provided we go beyond our first impressions. He also holds that even if God does not show himself, he knows how to communicate his counsels: 2 You ask where your faults are, but perhaps God has warned you in a thousand ways and you have not taken it into account (33:13-18).

- You despair in your illness, but perhaps God wants to teach you: you did not invoke him when all was going well (35:8-13).

Elihu senses that there is something false in Job's righteousness, but he does not know what it is. He looks for secret sins that Job might have committed. The fact is that what Job lacks is evangelical justice which is the humble love of God.

- 33.1 Elihu says to Job: you think you are innocent, but surely you have not paid attention to God's warnings. In spite of the fact that God cannot be reached by humans, he communicates through dreams, inspirations, encounters. God also corrects by way of the advice of other people who are his messengers, called here "angels," "mediators." We know that angel means messenger. The very one who complains about God fails to see, to listen and to accept the
25 Then his flesh will be renewed as a child’s, restored as in the days of his youth. 
26 He will pray and find favor with God; he will see God’s face and rejoice. 
27 He will witness to men and say, “I sinned and perverted what was right, but I was not punished as I deserved. 
28 He rescued my soul from going down into the pit, and gave me life to enjoy the light.” 
29 God does all this to man—twice, even thrice—to turn him back from the pit, to lead him with the light of life. 
30 Pay attention, Job, listen to me; be silent, and I will continue to speak. 
31 But if you have anything to say, say it then; speak up, for I wish to see you justified. 
32 If not, then do listen; be silent as I teach you wisdom.

34 1 Elihu continued speaking: 
2 Hear my words, you the wise; listen to me, you who know. 
3 The ear tests the word, as the palate tastes the food. 
4 Let us discern what is right, learn between us what is good. 
5 Job has said, “I am innocent, but God denies me justice and disregards my right. Though guiltless, my wound is hopeless.” 
6 Who is like Job, who drinks in blasphemies like water? 
7 He keeps company with evildoers and follows the path of the wicked. 
8 For he has not said, “It does not profit a man if he tries to please God?” 
9 So hear me, you men of understanding, far be it from God to do evil, far from the Almighty to do wrong! 
10 Rather, he repays man for what he has done; he gives him what his conduct deserves. 
11 How unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice! 
12 Who gave him charge over the earth? Who else laid out the whole world? 
13 If he were to take back his spirit, to withdraw his breath to himself, all flesh would perish together and man would return to dust.

Elihu shows how trials are a lesson in humility for all (36:1-21).
1 I will answer you and your friends as well.
2 Look up to the sky and see,
gaze at the clouds above.
3 If you sin, what is that for God?
4 Do your many offenses hurt him?
5 If you are just, what do you give him?
or what does he receive from your hand?
6 It’s a man like yourself that your sin touches,
a son of man that your justice affects.
7 Men cry out when greatly oppressed;
they plead for relief under the tyrant’s reign.
8 But no one says, “Where is God, my Maker,
whose songs of jubilation are heard in the night,
who teaches us through the beasts of the earth,
who makes us wise through the birds of the air?”
9 This is why he does not answer when they cry out:
because of man’s arrogance.
10 In vain! God does not listen,
the Almighty takes no heed of it.
11 How much less then will he listen
when you say you do not see him and wait,
for your case is before him!
12 And you say that though he is angry
he does not know how to punish
for he has taken no notice of wickedness.
13 This is why my heart pounds
and leaps from its place.
14 God is exalted in his power.
What teacher is there like him?
15 Who has prescribed his ways for him,
or said to him that he has done wrong?
16 Remember to extol his work,
of which many have sung.
17 Everyone has seen it;
all gaze on it from afar.
18 God is great beyond our understanding;
the number of his years is past reckoning.
19 He holds in check the waterdrops
which distill from the mist as rain,
then the clouds pour them down
and drop them upon the earth as showers.
20 This is the way he nourishes the land
that provides food in abundance.
21 Who can understand how he spreads the clouds,
how he thunders from his pavilion?
22 He unfurls his mists
and covers the expanse of the sea.
23 With both hands he lifts up lightning
and commands it to strike the target.
24 His thunder warns the shepherd
and the flock senses the tempest.
25 This is why my heart pounds
and leaps from its place.

A hymn to God’s greatness

22 God is exalted in his power.
Who is like him?
Who prescribed his ways for him?
23 Remember to extol his work;
of which many have sung.
24 Everyone has seen it;
all gaze on it from afar.
25 God is great beyond our understanding;
the number of his years is past reckoning.
26 He holds in check the waterdrops
which distill from the mist as rain,
then the clouds pour them down
and drop them upon the earth as showers.
27 This is the way he nourishes the land
that provides food in abundance.
28 Who can understand how he spreads the clouds,
how he thunders from his pavilion?
29 He unfurls his mists
and covers the expanse of the sea.
30 With both hands he lifts up lightning
and commands it to strike the target.
31 His thunder warns the shepherd
and the flock senses the tempest.

This second poem on the greatness of God concludes Elihu’s speeches just as the poem of the miners concluded the discourses of Job’s three friends.
admiration, he forgets that, first of all, he intended to show us that God exceeds our ability to understand and to judge. What do our protests and scandals mean: “if God existed…” They are mere childishness, idle words of those who have no idea of what the word “God” encompasses. If the entire universe is just the expression or the irradiation of divine Wisdom, who will dare tell God that his way is not reasonable?

2 Listen to the thunder of his voice as it comes rumbling from his mouth.
3 Under the heavens, he hurls his lightning, sending it to the ends of the earth.
4 Then comes the sound of God’s roar—the majestic peal of his thunder. He does not check his thunderbolts until his voice has fully resounded.
5 God thunders and his voice works marvels; he does great things we cannot perceive.
6 He says to the snow, “Fall on the earth”; and to the rainshower, “Be a strong downpour.”
7 So he keeps people under cover to let them acknowledge his work.
8 Wild beasts go back into their lairs and remain quietly in their dens.
9 The storm comes out from its chamber, and the cold from the driving winds.
10 The breath of God forms ice, and the broad waters become frozen.
11 With thunderbolts he loads the clouds, and through them scatters his lightning.
12 At his direction they do their rounds, upon the face of the habitable world, whether for punishment or mercy as he commands.

14 Listen to this, O Job: pause and consider God’s marvels.
15 Do you know how he controls the clouds, how he makes his lightning flash?
16 Do you know how the clouds hang poised, all these wonders wrought by his perfect knowledge?
17 You who swelter in your clothes when the earth lies still under the south wind,
18 can you, like him, spread out the skies, hard as a mirror of molten bronze?
19 Teach us then what we shall say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of darkness.
20 Does it take an angel to bring this to God’s attention?
21 A while ago we could not see the light and the clouds darkened the sky, but the storm has just cast them out.
22 A blaze comes from the north, a dreadful glory around God.
23 The Almighty is beyond our reach; exalted in power, great in judgment; the Master of justice oppresses no one.
24 Therefore, people revere him; the wise are nothing in his sight.

Yahweh answers Job

1 Then Yahweh answered Job out of the storm:
2 Who is this that obscures divine plans with ignorant words?
3 Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you and you must answer.
4 Where were you when I founded the earth?
Answer, and show me your knowledge.
5 Do you know who determined its size, who stretched out its measuring line?
6 On what were its bases set?
Who laid its cornerstone,
7 while the morning stars sang together and the heavenly beings shouted for joy?
8 Who shut the sea behind closed doors when it burst forth from the womb,
9 when I made the clouds its garment

• 38.1 Yahweh answers Job from within the storm clouds, as on Mount Sinai. He does not explain or justify; rather he does the questioning. He does not show off his own wisdom, but forces humans to admit that they do not know anything.

Here the author seems to be digressing somewhat from his theme. Carried away by his admiration, he forgets that, first of all he intended to show us God exceeds our ability to understand and to judge. What do our protests and scandals mean: “if God existed…” They are mere childishness, idle words of those who have no idea of what the word “God” encompasses. If the entire universe is just the expression or the irradiation of divine Wisdom, who will dare tell God that his way is not reasonable?
and thick darkness its swaddling clothes;

10 when I set its limits
with doors and bars in place,

11 when I said, “You will not go beyond these bounds;
here is where your proud waves must halt?”

12 Have you ever commanded the morning,
or shown the dawn its place,

13 that it might grasp the earth by its edges
and shake the wicked out of it,

14 when it takes a clay color
and changes its tint like a garment;

15 when the wicked are denied their own light,
and their proud arm is shattered?

16 Have you journeyed to where the sea begins
or walked in its deepest recesses?

17 Have the gates of death been shown to you?
Have you seen the gates of Shadow?

18 Have you an idea of the breadth of the earth?
Tell me, if you know all this.

19 Where is the way to the home of light,
and where does darkness dwell?

20 Can you take them to their own regions,
and set them on their homeward paths?

21 You know, for you were born before them,
and great is the number of your years!

22 Have you entered the storehouse of the snow
or seen the storehouse of the hail,

23 which I reserve for times of woe,
for days of war and battle?

24 What is the way to the place
where lightning is dispersed,
or the place whence the east wind
begins spreading over the earth?

25 Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a path for the thunderstorm,

26 to bring rain to no-man's-land
and to the unpeopled wilderness,

27 to enrich the wasted and desolate ground,
to make the desert bloom with green?

28 Does the rain have a father?
Who fathers the drops of dew?

29 From whose womb comes the ice,
and who gives birth to the frost from the skies,

30 when the waters lie as hard as stone,
when the surface of the deep is frozen?

31 Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loosen the bonds of Orion?

32 Can you guide the morning star in its season,
or lead the Bear with its train?

33 Do you know the laws of the heavens,
and can you establish their rule on earth?

34 Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and order their waters to pour down?

35 Will lightnings flash at your command
and report to you, “Here we are?”

36 Who has given the ibis foresight
or endowed the cock with foreknowledge?

37 Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?
Who tilts the water jars of heaven

38 so that the dust cakes into a mass
and clods of earth stick together?

39 Can you hunt the woods to appease
the hunger of the lioness and her whelps,
as they crouch in their dens

40 or lie in wait in the thicket?

41 Who provides prey for the raven
when its young cry out to God
and roam about desperate for food?
1 Do you know how mountain goats breed?  
Have you observed the hinds in labor,  
2 numbered the months they must fulfill,  
and fixed the time they must give birth?  
3 Have you watched them end their labor  
as they crouch and drop their young,  
4 how they wait for them to grow,  
until they leave never to return?  

5 Who has given the wild ass his freedom,  
and loosed the bonds of the wild donkey?  
6 I have given him the desert for a home,  
the salt plains for a shelter.  
7 For he scorns the city’s tumult,  
and is free of the driver’s shout and insult;  
8 he prefers the hills for his pasture,  
ranging for food in the rich verdures.  

9 Is the wild ox willing to serve you,  
to pass the night by your manger?  
10 Can you make him work with a plow or harrow  
if you provide him with the proper gear?  
11 Can you rely on his great strength  
and leave him to do your heavy work?  
12 Can you depend on him to come home alone,  
carrying your grain to your threshing floor?  
13 Can the wing of the ostrich be compared  
with the plumage of the stork or falcon?  
14 She lays her eggs on the ground  
and lets them warm in the sand,  
15 not knowing that a foot may step on them  
or some wild beast may crush them.  
16 Cruel to her chicks as if they were not hers,  
she cares not that her labor be in vain,  
17 for God has given her no wisdom  
nor a share of good sense.  
18 Yet in the swiftness of foot,  
she makes sport of horse and rider.  
19 Is it you who give the horse strength  
and clothe his neck with splendor,  
20 who make him leap like a grasshopper  
and his proud snorting strike terror?  
21 Rejoicing in his strength, he fiercely paws  
and charges into the fray,  
22 afraid of nothing, laughing at fear,  
not shying away from the sword.  
23 Against his side rattles the quiver,  
along with the lance and flashing spear.  
24 In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;  
there is no holding him when the trumpets sound.
25 He cries “Hurrah!” at each trumpet blast.
   He catches the scent of battle from afar,
   the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

26 Is it by your wisdom that the hawk takes flight
   and spreads his wings toward the south?
27 Is it at your command that eagles fly
   and build their nests on high?
28 They dwell on cliffs and spend the night;
   their stronghold is the rocky crag.
29 From there they look out for food,
   which they detect even from afar.
30 They and their young feast on blood,
   and where the slain lie, there they are.

1 Yahweh said to Job:
2 Must a faultfinder contend with the
   Almighty?
   Let him who would correct God answer.
3 Job said:
4 How can I reply, unworthy as I am!
   All I can do is put my hand over my mouth.
5 I have spoken once, now I will not
   answer;
   oh, yes, twice, but I will do no further.

Yahweh’s discourse continues
6 Then Yahweh addressed Job out of the
   storm:
7 Gird up your loins like a man;
   I will question you, and you must answer.
8 Would you deny my right
   and condemn me that you may be justi-
   fied?
9 Have you an arm like that of God,
   and can you thunder with a voice like this?
10 Then adorn yourself with glory and
   splendor,
   array yourself with grandeur and majesty.
11 Unleash the fury of your wrath;
12 look for every proud man and abase
   him;
   crush the wicked where they stand.
13 Bury them all in the dust,
   lock them in the dungeon.
14 If you can do this, I myself will praise
   you,
   admitting that your right hand can save
   you.
15 Just think about Behemoth,
   who feeds on grass like the ox.

16 What strength he has in his loins,
   what power in the muscles of his belly!
17 Like a cedar his tail sways,
   the sinews of his thighs are like cables.
18 His bones like tubes of bronze,
   his limbs like iron rods.
19 He is first among the works of God,
   created to dominate his companions.
20 The mountains give him their produce,
   as do all the wild beasts who play there.
21 Under the lotus trees he lies,
   hidden among the reeds of the marsh.
22 The lotus trees cover him with their
   shade;
   the poplar trees on the bank surround
   him.
23 He is not alarmed though the river rages
   and torrents surge against his mouth.
24 Who can capture him by the eyes,
   or trap him and pierce his nose?
25 Can you pull in Leviathan with a hook,
   or curb his tongue with a bit?
26 Can you put a ring through his nose
   or pierce his jaw with a hook?
27 Will he keep begging you for mercy,
   or speak to you with tender words?
28 Will you make him your slave forever?
29 Will you make a pet of him like a bird,
   or put him on a leash for your maids?
30 Will traders bargain for him?
   Will merchants sell him retail?
31 Can you fill his hide with harpoons
   or his head with fish spears?
32 Just try and lay a hand on him –
   you will not forget the struggle,
   and you will never do it again!

• 40.1 In questioning Job, Yahweh gets and
   gives us a few seconds of rest before beginning
   his second discourse in chapters 40–41.
   In chapter 40, Behemoth or the hippopotamus
   appears, enormous, terrible and ugly, eating
   only plants. Leviathan, the crocodile, whose
   skin resists arrows just like armor. What a plea-
   sure to find in a few pages of the Bible a poetic
   expression of the beauty of creation. For centu-
   ries prophets and priests had to protect Israel
   from the seduction of nature. Everywhere
   around them, the wonders of creation gave rise
   to the worship of natural forces. When the Jews
   became firmer in their fidelity to God – the
   Creator of nature but not identified with it – it
   became possible to sing the praise of nature.
41. Any hope of subduing him is vain, for the mere sight of him is overpowering. He grows so ferocious when aroused that no one dares face him. Who has attacked him and come off unharmed? No one under the sky. I need hardly mention his limbs, nor describe his matchless strength. Who can strip off his outer garment and penetrate his double breastplate? Who can dare open the gates of his mouth to confront the terrors of his rows of teeth? Rows of scales are on his back – rows of shields that are tightly sealed. So closely fitted are they that no space intervenes; so closely joined that they hold fast and cannot be parted. Light flashes forth when he sneezes; like the light of dawn are his eyes. Flaming torches and sparks of fire flash from his mouth. Smoke comes from his nostrils, like hot steam from a boiling pot. His mere breath sets coals afire, with the flame pouring from his mouth. Strength is in his neck, and terror dances before him. Tightly set are the folds of his flesh, firmly cast and immovable. His heart is hard as stone, as hard as the lower millstone. When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; the waves of the sea fall back. Should the sword reach him, it will not pierce him, nor will the spear, the dart, or the javelin. Iron is to him no more than straw; and bronze, no more than rotten wood.

42. This was the answer Job gave to Yahweh:

I know that you are all powerful; no plan of yours can be thwarted. I spoke of things I did not understand, too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I retract all I have said, and in dust and ashes I repent.

The end of Job’s poem

7. After Yahweh had spoken to Job, he turned to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken of me rightly, as has my servant Job. Now, take seven bulls and seven rams, go to my servant Job, offer a holocaust for yourselves and let him pray for you. I will accept his prayer and excuse your folly in not speaking of me properly as my servant Job has done.”
Then Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as Yahweh had ordered. Yahweh accepted Job’s intercession.

Here ends the traditional story of Job

After Job had prayed for his friends, Yahweh restored his fortunes, giving him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and his former friends came to his house and dined with him. They showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that Yahweh had brought to him. Each of them gave him a silver coin and a gold ring.

Yahweh blessed Job’s latter days much more than his earlier ones. He came to own fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-donkeys. He was also blessed with seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Dove, the second Cinnamon, and the third Bottle of Perfume. No where in the land was there found any woman who could compare in beauty with Job’s daughters. Their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. He died old and full of years.