

God's Justice in the Book of Job

By Jean Sheldon

To many readers of the biblical book of Job, the divine speeches, found in chapters 38–41, have little or nothing to do with the rest of the book, its main issue (the problem of the innocent suffering), or Job's *rîb*, or lawsuit, against God. Conclusions regarding their purpose range from Yahweh's extolling his power and wisdom in creation as beyond human understanding to a portrayal of God as a blustery tyrant who does not answer Job; from a diatribe that puts Job in his place to an admission of failure to deal with the problem of evil; from a depiction of Job as the Leviathan to a description of divine amorality.

I believe there is yet another option, one that shows Job 38–41 to be a partial answer to the questions of divine justice raised by other sections in the book. This possibility is suggested by a comparison of these chapters with two tablets (IV and V) of the Babylonian Creation Epic, sometimes called *Enuma Elish*, which shows how the poet uses his memory of them to clarify in part the reason why the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper.¹

The book of Job presents two basic but distinct worldviews—judicial justice and cosmology—that never fully harmonized (though they were often

fused together) in ancient Near Eastern thought. It is my belief that these two large metaphors are what make Job a uniquely Hebrew theodicy and actually form the two sides in the debate over the doctrine of reward and punishment. Though both “sides” of the debate may employ metaphors from both worldviews, their basic philosophy and overarching canopy of thought derive prevalently from one of the two constructs.

In the book of Job, these two sides form the work's spinal column, with Job opposing the doctrine of divine justice and his friends upholding it, each from his respective dominant worldview. Just



where Satan, Yahweh, and Elihu (or even Job's final statement) fit into the picture depends on the reader's own perspective. The result can be at least two very different interpretations of the divine speeches, particularly in regard to Leviathan.

Whereas the common traditions of ancient Near Eastern theodicy generally debate the problem of the innocent suffering without use of the combat myth (the conquest of a threatening monster by a heroic god), the book of Job appeals to that myth particularly in the divine speeches. Utilizing the two themes of cosmology and legal justice as the premises in the debate, the poet seems to push each to its logical conclusion, concluding with the divine speeches, where the focus is almost exclusively that of cosmology.

What necessitates a closer look at the cosmology of the divine speeches is my discovery that the structure and content of these speeches parallel Tablets IV and V of the Babylonian Creation Epic so closely that it seems clear that the author(s) had this work in mind as he wrote the divine speeches. How he utilized it clarifies the purpose of Yahweh's declarations to Job.

Job 38:4-38 and *Enuma Elish* IV:127-V:66

The first comparison can be made between Job 38:4-38 and *Enuma Elish* IV:127-V:66. The first section of each of these texts deals with essentially the same issue: the laying of the foundations of the earth. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk (the heroic god of the Babylonian creation) treads on the lower extremities of Tiamat (the chaos monster) and with his mace keeps beating in the top of her head. Next he severs her arteries and sends her blood to an unknown place via the north wind. All of this is preparatory to his creation of the world.

Similarly in Job 38:4-6, when Yahweh prepares to create the earth, he lays down its foundations and sets its measurements. He sinks its pedestals and casts its cornerstone. The imagery may actually be Canaanite and could allude to the Baal cycles in which Baal (the heroic god of Canaanite mythology) builds his palace after conquering Yam (the sea, here symbolizing a chaos monster). If so, it offers confirmation that the author is indeed utilizing the combat mythology, not just creating poetic images from it.

The next lines in the respective texts allude to celebration by the heavenly beings or gods. Their contents are so similar as to be almost startling. As the "fathers" of Marduk exult when they see his victory over Tiamat, just so the morning stars and sons of Elohim in Job rejoice upon Yahweh's creation of the

earth's foundations. Though the underlying element of triumphant victory is highlighted more in Job than in *Enuma Elish*, the context of each is similar.

The two sections that follow are not identically arranged but contain similar subject matter. The birth of Yam, as described, seems unique to the text of Job, yet both sections deal with primordial waters that must be ordered, limited, and enclosed. Significantly, just as Marduk draws bars and appoints a watchman, ordering him not to let Tiamat's waters escape, so Yahweh traces limits around Yam, sets bars and doors (bars specifically being stated in both texts), and says, "You may come to here and no farther, and here your proud waves shall stay." In keeping with divine governance in the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh appoints no watchman but oversees the boundaries himself.

The subsequent discussion involves the inner recesses of the primordial waters, often termed *Ṣhôm* in the Hebrew Bible. Here Yam parallels Apsû (a primordial god that represents water in *Enuma Elish*), though the descriptions are different for each. From this point on, the Hebrew text does not follow the work in sequence; one must reorder the Hebrew text in order to show the parallels. Nevertheless, the subject matter is clearly the same—the creation of the heavenly bodies and stars, the development of light (including the sun), as well as the formation of precipitation, clouds, and the waters.

Job 38:39-41:26 and Tiamat's Warriors

The next points of comparison disclose a surprising feature of both texts: the number of creatures or chaos monsters. At the outset of Tiamat's planning for war, she has created eleven monsters to fight on her behalf: the elevated serpent (I:134), the great dragon (I:137), the womb snake, the mušhuššu dragon, Lahamu (I:141), great lion, mad dog, scorpion man (I:142), mighty storm monster, fish man, and bison (I:143).

Yahweh likewise names eleven kinds of creatures in the book of Job: the lion (39:39), raven (39:41), mountain goat, hind (39:1), onager, wild ass (39:5), wild ox (39:9), ostrich (39:13), horse (39:19), hawk (39:26), and eagle (39:27). In contrast to Tiamat's army, rendered dysfunctional by Marduk, these parallel creatures are under Yahweh's care and some of them are even set free by Yahweh to roam with reckless abandon, unfettered.

Included in the list are both prey and predators, with human beings serving both as inferred prey and predators. Of particular interest to this study is the

fact that the first and last pairs of the list are predators; and the first and last creature—the lion and the eagle—when combined, create an allusion to the earlier Mesopotamian mythic forerunner of Tiamat, namely, the Anzû-bird (a chaos monster portrayed as a composite lion-eagle) slain by Ninurta (the heroic god of the Babylonian Anzû myth). Thus, the very framework of these creatures draws the reader into the imagery of combat mythology.

The purpose of the description of Leviathan is to make clear that God is more fierce, more terrifying than this, the most frightening of all monsters, and that he is the owner of everything, including the upstart Job (or all of humanity).

Given these elements and especially extensive similarities to just one form of the myth, it is clear that the author of the divine speeches has used Behemoth and Leviathan as parallels to two of the main opponents of Marduk: Qingu and Tiamat. These are surprisingly parallel: just as Behemoth is “the first of the ways of God” (40:19), so Qingu (by contrast) is Tiamat’s first-born, whom she elevates. Both Tiamat and Leviathan appear to be dragonlike creatures whose resistance to ordinary weapons is marked.

From this point to the end of the divine speeches significant parallels may be found indicating a concern for divine moral responsibility. Yahweh says of the Behemoth: “Let him who made him bring near his sword!” (40:19). In *Enuma Elish*, Anshar cries out to Ea, shortly after hearing the distressing news about Tiamat’s advancement against the gods, “The works you did by yourself; you bear (them) yourself” (II:54). The implication is clear: “This is your fault; you take care of it.” Of interest here is the contrast between the two different divine beings and their spheres of responsibility. Anshar charges Ea with having started the war; Yahweh offers to take on the responsibility for his creation of the Behemoth.

Other points of similarity can be noted. The mention of reed twine or thorns in the nose as a means of capture is found in both texts. Yahweh asks Job, “Who can open the doors of his [Leviathan’s] face, the terror surrounding his teeth?”—a clear allusion to Marduk’s use of winds to open Tiamat’s mouth in order to shoot the fatal arrow down her innards. Likewise, the line—“In his neck resides strength and before him dances despair” (41:14)—alludes to the line—“Tiamat cast her spell; she did not turn back her neck” (IV:71). The description of various weapons recalls the weaponry

Marduk uses to destroy Tiamat (Job 41:18-21; compare *Enuma Elish* IV:35-38, 101-4, 128-30; VI:82-91).

Finally, the concluding lines of Job 41 recall the overall description of Tiamat and her highhanded arrogance. However, one line stands out, to which Job alludes in 41:26. When Marduk confronts Tiamat, he asks, “Why are you rising up? Why are you lifted on high?” (IV:77). Similarly, Leviathan “sees everything high; he is king over all the sons of pride.”

Two sections remain to be dealt with because their significance is crucial to our understanding of the Joban author’s possible intent. These are Job 41:1-4 and 10-15, as well as some similar minor lines. The first of these two sections involves a radical departure from traditional translations; the second involves a strange twist of usage by the author of the divine speeches.

Translation of Job 41:1-4

The traditional way these particularly difficult lines have been interpreted is probably best represented by the Revised Standard Version:

Behold, the hope of a man is disappointed;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.
No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
Who then is he that can stand before me?
Who has given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.
I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
or his mighty strength, or his goodly frame.

This interpretation suggests that the purpose of the description of Leviathan is to make clear that God is more fierce, more terrifying than this, the most frightening of all monsters, and that he is the owner of everything, including the upstart Job (or all of humanity). By logical extension, then, Job was not only audacious to “stir God up,” but also downright foolish, and the surprise



for the reader is that God did not simply destroy him.

One can quite easily render these lines (without emending the text) so that Yahweh is showing the absurd arrogance of this creature in attempting to attack him:

Look! His hopes are proven false!
Was not even his countenance cast down?
I would not be loath to stir him up.
Who is he that he should take his position before me
Who is he that he should get one over on me
and that I should have to make it good?
Under the entire universe he is mine!
I will not be muted by his casting of spells or
claims to prowess or battle formations.

This translation is consistent with the traditional notion either that Yahweh has already defeated Leviathan or could easily do so, but it avoids the notion that Yahweh is merely more fearsome than this mythic figure for evil. From a literary standpoint, these lines are best read as a uniform description of Leviathan. Thus, they could be translated in a manner that maintains an underlying premise of the doctrine of divine retribution: that Yahweh is the slayer of all evil monsters, and thus evildoers are destroyed to show his supremacy. This interpretation fits neatly with one of the two positions being delineated throughout the book of Job—that which sees the work as a clear vindication of retributive justice, the doctrine under dispute.

By contrast, these same lines can be rendered to convey an entirely different (and almost opposite) sense, namely, that Yahweh has not yet conquered Leviathan.

Look, one's hopes are proven false.
Even a god is cast down when he sees him!
I would not be so despicable as to stir him up.
Who is he who can advance before him?
Who shall approach him? Then let me reward him!
Let him [Leviathan] be mine in exchange for
all the heavens!
I would not be muted by his incantations or claims
to prowess or battle formations.

With the imagery from *Enuma Elish* serving as the basis for this rendering, these lines suggests a less-than-decisive battle, in which Yahweh does not vanquish Leviathan summarily. The translation offered portrays a stage in the combat myth tradition well drawn out by both the Anzû myth and *Enuma Elish*. First, word comes back to the gods that a monster-deity is gathering forces to come up against them. Fear seizes the gods as

they deliberate about what to do. Several approach the monster-dragon, only to be forced to turn back. For a time the head god looks for someone who can defeat this foe. Who will take him on? Who *can* take him on? Even in the telling of Marduk's success, there is intimidation. When Marduk advances against Tiamat,

The lord drew near to her middle; he peered into Tiamat.
He sought of Qingu, her lover, his strategy.
As he was looking, his thinking became confused.
His intentions were disrupted; his actions became
disordered.

When compared to this mythic tradition that surrounds Tiamat, Leviathan can be interpreted as an unconquered monster of the deep. Yahweh notes that none of the usual combat weaponry can vanquish him—not even that normally used by conquerors in combat mythology. After describing Leviathan's daunting nature, terrifying to both heaven and earth, Yahweh concludes that “he [Leviathan] is king over all the sons of pride.” The “sons of pride” may allude—by way of antithesis—to “the sons of Elohim,” a term in the Prologue that designates the divine assembly. The “sons of Job” refer to humanity, but who are the “sons of pride”? Are they Leviathan's assembly?

In the Hebrew Bible and no less than in Job, the wicked are often characterized as “the proud” or “the arrogant.” Yahweh himself denotes evildoers as “the arrogant” in 40:10-11. It would follow, then, that Leviathan is king over all the unrighteous. Thus, further support is given to the idea that these chapters deal with the problem of evil.

If the divine speeches are indeed a hymn of praise to Yahweh's superior power over the forces of chaos, this ending is unexpected. No boasting of Yahweh's complete victory over Leviathan would likely conclude with such an assertion of this monster's might. One must either assume a textual lacuna or find another purpose for this emphasis on the formidable nature of this chaos power.

Leviathan as Tiamat

The present comparison of the divine speeches and *Enuma Elish* IV and V illuminates the Joban author's probable purpose and thus the function of Leviathan in Job 40-41. The initial and final sections of Job 38-41 are the reverse of the beginning and the ending of Marduk's confrontation of Tiamat and the creation of the world. The following chart illustrates this reversal:

ENUMA ELISH

Tiamat is a formidable terror to the gods
Marduk prepares for war
Marduk conquers Tiamat
Marduk captures Tiamat's eleven warriors
Marduk creates the world from Tiamat

THE DIVINE SPEECHES

Yahweh creates the world (including Yam)
Yahweh provides limits for Yam
Yahweh prepares the order of the universe
Yahweh provides for eleven wild creatures
Leviathan is a formidable terror to all

Whereas in *Enuma Elish* the creation of this world is the result of slaying the monster Tiamat, in Job, Yahweh lays the foundation of the earth, following which Yam is brought to birth. Leviathan enters the picture *after* the order of creation has been established (Job 38). The chaos powers are not slain before creation takes place, but rather remain a part of it. Thus the Joban poet, by utilizing the Akkadian combat myth in this reverse order, has revealed one of his main points: the chaos monsters, symbols of evil, are not utterly slain (that is, Yahweh does not destroy all of the wicked); rather, evil remains in the world yet unconquered.

In this interpretation, an obvious conclusion may be made: not all who suffer because of chaotic forces do so because they are wicked, but because the king of all the sons of pride still rules, and evildoers, like the untamed creatures and monsters of Job 38-41, still roam the earth unwilling to submit to the righteous. This accords with the evidence that surrounds Job himself. He has ardently argued that the wicked linger on and die, like the righteous, in old age (21:1-34). Evildoers continue to abound on the earth and the innocent such as Job still suffer. The question obviously left unanswered for the reader is whether Yahweh (or someone he designates) will yet conquer these powers of chaos.

If one compares *Enuma Elish* with the divine speeches further on, the pivotal lines (41:1-4) could refer to the stage in the general combat myths where the high god looks for someone to be the hero of the battle. In ancient Mesopotamian mythology, the person who conquered the chaos monster was originally supposed to melt back into ordinary life. But eventually it seems that the exaltation and power a hero gained from his victory was too tempting to surrender so easily. Thus in the Anzû myth, Ninurta keeps the Tablets of Destiny to himself after wresting them from Anzû; in *Enuma Elish* Marduk flatly demands supremacy over all the gods in exchange for his victory on their behalf before he even goes forth to conquer Tiamat.

Perhaps a hint of this is evident in the words, "Let him [Leviathan] be mine in exchange for all the heavens!" Could this passage not be compared with

the gods' proclamation to Marduk in *Enuma Elish* IV:13-14 as they send him off against Tiamat?

Marduk, you are the one who will avenge us.
We give you kingship of the entire universe!

Likewise, Yahweh will give his all just to deal with this monster and to silence his prideful attacks. He will reward whoever can do it. The question remains, Who can?

In Job 40:1-14, Yahweh once again invites Job to prepare himself as a hero. As part of his defense against Job's lawsuit (*rîb*), Yahweh asks him if he (Job) were God whether he could eliminate all evildoers. Three options are possible: Yahweh may be asking Job to trade places with him, as it were, to see if he could effectively bind the wicked permanently in the Netherworld; he may be asserting that Job is an arrogant



Theologian Jean Sheldon's interest in Job dates from her undergraduate days, when she suspected that the Leviathan might be significant for understanding the Old Testament book.



rebel (namely, Leviathan) vis-à-vis Zophar's comment; or this is a satirical address to Job as a mortal fallen in battle. Although the immediate context would seem to support the second position of Job as the rebel, the overall framework of combat imagery favors either the first or third positions.

It appears, then, that the poet is closely following the section of *Enuma Elish* Tablet II where Anshar looks for a worthy warrior who can conquer Tiamat. All the previous attempts—including that of Marduk's own father, Ea—have ended with the god being forced back in terror. Now Marduk, who has agreed to go against the monster, enters. Before sending him out, the gods must determine his ability to meet the formidable Tiamat. They achieve this by a series of tests.

In a similar manner, the series of questions in 40:7-13 and 40:24-41:6 may be read as Yahweh's examination of Job to see if he is qualified to take on Leviathan. Yahweh invites Job to tour the universe with him and to view his creation—particularly with all its chaos elements and evil creatures—through divine eyes. This defensive posture by Yahweh toward Job is appropriate because of Job's lawsuit (*rib*) against Yahweh. Let the one who insists that Eloah does not single the wicked out for punishment take on the evildoers himself; let the one who argues with God deal with the wicked. If he can succeed, he is worthy of praise. It appears, however, that Yahweh concludes that Job is incapable: "There is no one of dust his rival, one made without fear" (Job 41:25).

This raises the issue, once again, of just which reading to accept for 41:1-4. Is Yahweh looking for a warrior-hero, such as Job, to take on Leviathan? Or is he showing Job his inadequacy due to his lowly mortal nature? Either reading is plausible, and neither one negates the evidence that Leviathan is yet to be tamed or slain.

Nevertheless, it appears that the issue does not center around merely *who* will take on Leviathan, but *how*. This is a major question in both Mesopotamian combat myths, Anzû and *Enuma Elish*, in which several advances are made against the chaos monster only to be aborted as gods flee in terror. In the end, though, it takes not only the right god (Ninurta, Marduk), but also the right weapons and strategy. This is especially highlighted in *Enuma Elish* when Marduk invents the bow with which he manages (with the aid of wind and club) to slay Tiamat.

In Job 41, the poet seems to follow this part of the myth as well. Shortly after discussing who will go against this monster, Yahweh turns to a peculiar

description of Leviathan for which a parallel may not be found anywhere in the portrayal of Tiamat or her army. Verses 10-13 may be translated as follows:

His sneezings shine light;
His eyes are like the eyelids of dawn.
From his mouth eject flashing torches;
They shower down sparks of fire.
From his nostrils goes forth smoke
Like a pot boiling and glowing.
His breath fans the coals
And a flame shoots out of his mouth.

Nevertheless, we are not without a parallel from *Enuma Elish*, and surprisingly it comes from I:96-98, 102-4 and IV:39-40, a remarkable description of Marduk:

When his lips parted, fire was constantly kindled.
They were great—each of the four ears, with
respect to understanding
And his eyes in like manner inspected everything....
My son of the Sun, Sun of the heavens!
Clothed with the splendor of ten gods, he was
loftily crowned.

He set lightning from his face;
His body was filled with a blazing flame.

It appears that the Joban poet deliberately merged the two rivals—Marduk and Tiamat—into one, Leviathan. Marduk himself becomes an opponent to be conquered by Yahweh. Furthermore, none of the weapons normally used in war and in the combat myth—including those used by Marduk—can render Leviathan slain. Indeed nearly all of the traditional combat weaponry is included here, and none of it can prevail.

The sword reaches him, but cannot succeed
whether spear, dart, or javelin.
He likens iron to straw and bronze to rotten wood.
The bow's arrow does not make him flee; to him,
slinging stones are turned into stubble.
He considers the club as stubble and mocks the
threatening javelin.

When one includes verses 5-9, especially verse 6—"Who can open the doors of his face, the terror surrounding his teeth?"—the description is complete; that is, Marduk's winds would fail to open the mouth of this creature in order to shoot the arrow. One can note that Marduk's other weapons, the bow and the club, would be useless as well.

Thus, Yahweh mocks the weaponry of Marduk, Anzû, and all the other conquerors of chaos. None of them can penetrate this creature, about whom, alone out of the other twelve, Yahweh makes no claims of creating, supporting, or maintaining. There could be no more trenchant way to denigrate Marduk completely than to amalgamate him with his victim!

Similarly, when the Hebrew poet focuses on Leviathan he elaborates on his prowess, describing him as the most powerful of all the creatures in the divine speeches. Worse yet, he is described vis-à-vis Marduk, as the great conqueror of Leviathan-like monsters. Who, then, can take on this Leviathan? And with what kinds of weapons?

Once again, one is faced with two possible options. One might conclude that the point of the poet was to ensure that Yahweh had even more power than Marduk himself. Thus, Yahweh is indeed superior to all rivals including the one who slew Tiamat.

The other position is not so simply stated. Elsewhere in the book of Job, divine power is not questioned, but divine justice is. Indeed this is the overall concern of the book of Job, and it becomes the main point of variance between Job and his three friends. Job maintains that the wicked remain and prosper; the three friends contend that God punishes all of them. Clearly this is the issue emphasized in the opening lines of Yahweh's second speech in Job 40:6-14:

Yahweh answered Job from the storm and said:
Gird up your loins like a hero.
I will ask you and you will inform me.
Will you even annul justice,
Will you condemn me in order to vindicate yourself?
If you have an arm like God's
And you can thunder with a voice like his,
Then adorn yourself with pride and highness
And clothe yourself with majesty and splendor.
Disperse the overflowings of your anger
And look on all the arrogant and abase them.
Look on all the arrogant and humble them
And tread down the wicked in their place.
Hide them in the dust together;
Bind their faces in the nether regions.
Then indeed I will praise you
Because your right hand has come to your aid.

This description of how Job is to take on the wicked is reminiscent of Marduk's strong words in *Enuma Elish* IV:77-86 as he challenges Tiamat to a duel:

Why are you rising up?
(Why) are you lifted up on high?
Your heart is plotting to muster the battle.
The sons went far away; they treated
their fathers with disrespect.
And you their begetter, you hated compassion.
You appointed Qingu for your consort.
You appointed him inappropriately for the office
of Anuship.
You sought evil against Anshar, king of the gods.
And you established your evil against the gods,
my Fathers.
Let your troops be drawn up; let them be girded
with your weapons.
Come here! I and you, let us have a duel.

The difference, however, is also marked: Unlike Marduk, Yahweh does not accuse Job, but challenges him to rise up against the wicked just as Tiamat rose up against the gods. Yahweh's words also fit the Babylonian examiner's questions; they allude to concerns about whether or not Job was a warrior fit enough to take on the wicked. The final verse (40:14) fits neatly with the second translation of 41:1-4, where Yahweh offers to reward whoever can successfully vanquish the wicked. The parallel of the gods testing Marduk's ability to take on Tiamat and their willingness to reward him with supremacy cannot be missed. Yahweh even offers to praise Job if he can successfully eliminate all evildoers.

The testing of Job's ability as a hero includes more than mere power. In almost all the combat myths, the hero-gods who conquer the enemy do so after several tries and with specific weaponry that finally succeeds. In the Baal Cycles, Baal makes a failed attempt at killing Yam before actually doing so. In each instance, Kothar-wa-Hasis, his advisor, must make special weapons and give them names.

In the Anzû myth, several gods go against this birdlike monster and only Ninurta succeeds. He makes several attempts before gaining the upper hand. In order to kill the evil creature, Ninurta's weapons alone are not enough; he must first tire him and then use a special implement to get the bird's wings off so he cannot fly away before the weapons reach their mark. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk is the last of several gods to make the attempt to conquer Tiamat. In order to do so, he invents a special bow and creates twelve storm



winds. It is these weapons alone that vanquish the dragonlike monster and relieve the gods.

Though several interpretations are possible for the divine speeches, the one most consistent with the trajectory that follows *Enuma Elish* is that Yahweh is likewise testing Job's ability to be the warrior-hero who will take on Leviathan. He wants to know if he has the weapons needed in order to conquer the

Yahweh's invitation to Job to wipe out the wicked is thus extremely well timed by the poet in preparation for the following descriptions of the Behemoth (Qingu) and Leviathan (Tiamat). Yahweh is asking Job to play the role of Marduk in taking on Leviathan but without his weapons—only with retributive power and justice.

The most obvious result, then, would be the interpretation that Job, who is obviously not divine but

Has Job ... annulled the divine justice? Has he made Yahweh out to be evil?

wicked, and, in the opinion of this study, their ruler, Leviathan. But with what weapons can Job do this? The description of Behemoth and Leviathan has ruled out all of the usual combat weaponry: Marduk's flood fails to take out the Behemoth (40:23), and *Ωhôm* (the Hebrew term for "the deep," a form of chaos) becomes Leviathan's residence (41:24); the wind Marduk used to open Tiamat's mouth will not penetrate Leviathan's armor (41:7); the arrow that Marduk shot into Tiamat's mouth will not make him flee (41:20); he mocks Ninurta's javelin (41:21); and considers Baal's club and Marduk's mace to be mere stubble (41:21).

Superficially, it would seem that Yahweh offers Job no weaponry at all to take the place of these powerless implements of war. Instead he merely suggests that Job trade places with Yahweh, dispatching the wicked according to the ancient doctrine of justice. At this juncture one may either conclude that Yahweh has no solution to the weaponry needed or that this struggle does not belong to the physical but rather the ideological realm. If one does look for physical weapons in Yahweh's response to Job's lawsuit in 40:1-14, the list is as follows: his divine arm, his voice of thunder, the power of an abasing look, feet that can tread down the wicked (40:9-12). In addition to these more anthropological aspects are the elements of ancient perceptions of divinity: pride, highness, majesty, splendor, and anger (40:10-11).

An analysis of these lines (40:9-14) can net a couple possible interpretations: (1) they are reminiscent of Marduk's advance against Tiamat in *Enuma Elish* IV:39-104, and thus Yahweh offers Job the position of Marduk if he can so demonstrate his prowess; or (2) they generally depict divinity, and thus Yahweh is asking Job to wipe out the wicked with Job's own "divine" power.

If the conclusions of this study are valid—that the divine speeches show marked and deliberate affinities to *Enuma Elish*—the first proposal is most appropriate.

rather a mere mortal ("one upon dust") is not up to Marduk's power, let alone Yahweh's. This is one of the options left to the reader of the book of Job. If this position is the best one, then the divine speeches fall short of solving one of the problems raised by the dialogues: Why does God *not* eliminate evildoers according to the ancient tradition of divine justice?

Many assume that this is Job's question, but actually it is more likely the reader's. Job's defense of his innocence rests upon the establishment of the fact that God does not destroy the wicked any more often than the righteous. He states it in two ways: God destroys the righteous and the wicked together (Job 9:22) and the wicked prosper and live to mature age (Job 21). Nevertheless, Job does not understand why God treats him so extremely cruelly when he created him in the first place (Job 4). The question for readers (especially ancient ones) is why God does not eliminate the wicked. Is he really just? Since Job's concerns, taken together, strongly imply this question, Yahweh addresses it in Job 40:8, in the lines just before his invitation to Job to play Marduk's role:

Would you even annul justice?

Would you condemn me in order to vindicate yourself?

The overriding questions are: Has Job, by stating that God does not eliminate evildoers any sooner than the righteous and that God has mistreated him, annulled the divine justice? Has he made Yahweh out to be evil? The claim of the three friends and, most particularly, of Elihu (a fourth contender of Job) is that Job has annulled God's justice. The temptation of modern readers is to take the divine speeches out of their court setting and assume that Yahweh is only addressing Job's own claims, not the claims of his opponents.

But in any typical court case, the claims of *all*—defendant, prosecutor, and witnesses—must be

addressed. Thus, Yahweh is addressing all of the claims together in these words by voicing the complaints of the friends and Elihu that Job has indeed misrepresented God as unjust. He then invites Job to take Marduk's divine role and eliminate the wicked according to the traditional view of divine retribution—contrary to Job's own perceptions about God's justice that *formed the basis of his own claims to innocence*.

If this is merely an attempt to silence Job's implied accusation that God is wrong not to destroy the wicked and spare the righteous, it most certainly works. It puts Job in a double bind and forces him to realize that if his claims to innocence are valid, he simply cannot do this. If he agrees to this kind of justice—the justice of Marduk, ancient Mesopotamia, many in ancient Israel, and Job's three friends and Elihu—he has eliminated whatever hopes he has of obtaining a clear vindication of his innocence. If divine justice is retributive—and God *should* wipe out (or has wiped out) the wicked—then Job has merely suffered what he deserved. His claims to innocence are gone.

Job's silence at this point can be taken as his recognition of this fact or as indication of the rhetorical nature of Yahweh's "wisdom teaching" or examination style. On the other hand, Yahweh's invitation along with Job's silence could actually be the beginning of Job's vindication. Rhetorically speaking, the purpose of the divine examiner would not be merely to show Job his ignorance but also to make an important point. Either Yahweh is here defending the doctrine of divine retribution as the basis by which evil is or has been dealt with or he is attempting to show Job and the friends that such a doctrine simply does not exist in the reality of the universe.

Several indications may be found in the invitation and subsequent descriptions of Behemoth and Leviathan to indicate that Yahweh's purpose is to denounce retributive justice as his *modus operandi* and to replace it with a different kind of justice, one cosmological in nature. In the first place, one cannot but notice the irony of Job's adornment of himself with pride in order to put down the king over all the sons of pride. Would he not, then, become a "son of pride" himself?

In the ancient Near East, any king worthy of the title was known for his pride. The greater the arrogance of a king, the better able he would be to defend his subjects; and the reverse was more likely, that a conqueror was more likely to be described as haughty. Yet, as has been shown above, the Hebrew Bible uses this attribute as a metaphor for the wicked. In the Joban setting, the pride that would allow Marduk or any divine being to take on

Tiamat and thus execute retributive justice could make Job one of her sons (*vis-à-vis* Leviathan).

Therefore, in my opinion, just as Marduk's divine *numina* (special rays around a deity representing divinity) are later assimilated in the description of Leviathan, so Job would become a member of the "sons of pride." The principle alluded to here seems to be that one cannot use oppression to put down oppressors without becoming an oppressor. The use of violence leads to counterviolence and oppressors are often replaced by the oppressed or other oppressors, who then rise up against them and counteroppress them.

A second reason that supports the likelihood of Yahweh's rejection here of the doctrine of divine retribution lies in the pragmatic argument that weapons of force simply do not seem to work. This is suggested by the questions Yahweh raises in Job 40:25-32 about Leviathan:

Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?
Can you suppress his tongue with a rope?
Can you put a reed twine through his nose
or pierce his jaw with a thorn hook?
Will he multiply supplications to you or speak gently
to you?
Will he form a covenant with you so that
you may take him for a slave for ever?
Will you play with him as with a bird or tie him up
for your girls?
Do guildsmen barter over him or divide him up
among the traders?
Can you fill his skin with spears or his head with a
fishing harpoon?
Place your hand on him—remember the battle?
You won't do it again!



At first glance it appears that Yahweh is reminding Job of his power and ability to slay Leviathan and Job's corresponding inability to do so. Indeed this is one possible reading of these lines.

One cannot but wonder, on the other hand, whether Yahweh really assumes Job would take Leviathan on with fishhook, rope, reed twine, or thorn hook. Would any human being consider using these "weapons" against the monster of the Deep? A very different interpretation, then, is possible. The suggestion here is not that Leviathan can only be slain by Yahweh and not by any human being, but rather that he cannot be *tamed* by applying *force*.

The implied notion of "slaying" this monster follows the idea of taming him and gaining his willing servitude. The words *Remember the battle? You won't do it again* suggest that any attempts to humble this arrogant monster will only lead to a counterreaction. Instead of speaking gently to Job, he would only retaliate against oppressive measures. Even an attempt to slay him using force against force will lead to an unforgettable no-win battle that one will never wish to repeat. The issue here seems to include not merely doing away with evildoers, but also attempting first to gain their submission.

This interpretation can be extended to encompass the entire divine speeches. At the outset, Yahweh takes Job on a tour of the universe and asks him if he knows on what its foundations were laid. Does he know who set the limits around chaos (Yam) as he came bursting from the womb? Has he been the one who ordered justice (the sun) to expose the guilty? Has he been throughout the limits of chaos and evil (darkness) to examine them? Does he know the way to the origin of justice (light)? Does he know the kind of weapons Yahweh keeps in storage? Does he know who sends rain on the desert (a region of chaos as well), where no one lives and where no one needs rain? Could he set up the order of the great universal systems such as the planets? Could he establish the laws that govern the heavens on the earth? Could he achieve the "obedience" of the natural world?

Cosmological Justice

It appears that the divine speeches involve the nature of divine governance and justice. They suggest that the journey of Yahweh has been a turbulent one, with hostility and chaos lurking everywhere, and that the constant issue has been *how* to get order out of chaos,

how to bring the wicked into line. For the righteous, who observe the interchange of good and evil, the question was, "If God could destroy, or at least abase, the wicked, why does he not do so?" The ancients had long since given up on these questions and consigned the wicked to their deserved and arbitrary fate, yet they are raised in the divine speeches. Yahweh's response to these questions, implicit in the book of Job, contains no simple solutions, but instead suggests a very different approach.

As noted above, the eleven creatures that follow belong to the corpus of Leviathan's sphere of chaos. They are parodies of Tiamat's convoy of monsters, the ones that Marduk captures in his net and leaves bound, ready to be destroyed, or, later, to be forced into slavery. Yahweh's treatment of these creatures is diametrically opposite that of Marduk. Instead of capturing them, putting them to forced labor, or slaying them, Yahweh treats them the same way as he treats his obedient offspring. He feeds the young of the predators, protects the mountain goats and hinds when giving birth, and lets their offspring multiply.

The lion and the ass are particularly significant because they are featured in the Babylonian Theodicy (a Babylonian work in which a sufferer argues with his friend about the gods and human suffering) and elsewhere as metaphors for the wicked. In a very crucial section of the dialogue between the sufferer and the friend (I:48-51), the following conversation ensues:

The sufferer speaks:

The wild ass, the onager who satisfied itself—
Did it give its ear to the guarantor of the god's thinking?

The angry lion who devoured good flesh—
Did he carry his container of oil to relax the goddess's wrath? . . .

The sufferer is protesting, much like the biblical Job, that the rich neglect their offerings to the gods and still prosper. Unlike Job, however, he asks what good it does to worship the gods (I:59-62).

The friend responds:

Observe on the steppe, the noble wild ass,
The arrow will turn back the gorer who overruns
the pasture lands.

Come, look at the foe of cattle herds, the lion
which you considered,
For the crime the lion did, the pit lies open for him.

The friend—much like Job's friends—claims that ultimately the evildoer will be wiped out; as for the rich who neglect their gods, "the king will burn them in the fire" at an unexpected time.

In contrast to this view of divine control, the Yahweh of Job responds to the lioness by providing for her whelps and lets the wild ass go free. When it is captured, he even loosens its bonds so that it can run

who love to gorge themselves on the dead and dying on the battlefield) to find places in his creation. This may serve to highlight the purpose of the poet—to show that Yahweh treats the predators and their victims alike (that is, the wicked and the righteous), without showing deference for any over another.

Perhaps this is what has led to the conclusion that the Yahweh speeches provide an amoral view of the uni-

The poet seems to imply that Yahweh's justice is neither retributive nor merely distributive, but rather cosmological.

about in the steppe. Thus, Yahweh treats the wicked with care and gives them freedom. Similarly, just as Job would have difficulty getting the wild ox to *want* to be his servant—getting him to board at his crib, to be willing to follow him in the fields, and then bring the produce home without coercion—so Yahweh has difficulty obtaining a willing response from rebellious oppressors.

Yahweh next defends rights of the stupid (ostrich), the powerful in war (horse), and the high (thus proud) and bloodthirsty (the falcon and the hawk,

verse, where there is no justice. If retribution is the only kind of divine justice possible, this is true. If the doctrine of divine retribution and reward is the basis of cosmological order, the divine speeches may be read as validations of this doctrine. But the poet seems to imply that Yahweh's justice is neither retributive nor merely distributive, but rather cosmological. Indeed, once the divine speeches are understood against their counterpart in *Enuma Elish* IV and V, as well as Job's own *riḇ* (case) against God (40:2), they may be viewed as Yahweh's

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defense of *cosmological* justice in the face of evil.

Cosmological justice is different from judicial justice; it is derived from the sphere of creation in which its maker not only brings creatures into existence, but also maintains their care. In it, according to Job 38, chaos/evil is not slain before creation takes place. The foundations of creation are formed first; afterward chaos and evil emerge to be contained by Yahweh within their confines as a part of the natural world. Cosmological justice deals with all of creation, not merely cases of dispute; it seeks to establish truth rather than to arbitrate; it deals with persons, not merely with their actions.

Ultimately evil has existed from primordial time, before human beings came into being. Yahweh therefore does not operate from considerations of reward and punishment or retribution, but rather, as creator of all living elements, takes care of all his creatures—good and bad alike. Yahweh will treat all of his creatures the way he wants and will not necessarily slay them. Like parents who consider their bad dependent offspring their children just as much as their good offspring, Yahweh provides an appropriate environment for the peculiar needs of *all* his creation—both prey and predator.

Taking responsibility for the disorderly conduct of some, he puts limits around chaos, oversees the interactions of warring elements, traces their routes and ways, provides for the young of evildoers, lets the obdurate go free, and allows the monarch of evil to move unconquered through the deep and to rule over all those who are arrogant.

Conclusion

Normally, one would expect Yahweh to end on a triumphant note rather than upon the glorification of Leviathan. Where is the poet's closing doxology extolling Yahweh's victory over this fearsome monster? Like the central figure in the story, the Joban poet seems content to end in the bowels of chaos in which not all the questions are satisfactorily answered. Yet, this is the reality of Job, the sufferer. Why foist on him a meaningless tradition that evil had already been rendered impotent by Yahweh in order to make the world a well-ordered place? The reality of the inhabited world is—and Job notes it—that the wicked do seem to prosper and that both the wicked and the righteous suffer the same end: death.

Perhaps the Joban poet responds to the view offered by the Sumerian and Babylonian theodicies to the problem

of suffering—that the gods were indeed incomprehensible, no one could understand their ways, or what displeased them. By attempting a cosmological answer, the poet has tried to portray Yahweh as a *morally* supreme deity in contrast to ancient Near Eastern gods, whose ways could not be explained ethically.

Furthermore, by including in his cosmological scheme the combat myth through his parody of *Enuma Elish*, the Joban poet attempts to provide—though probably not to everyone's satisfaction—a partial answer to the questions of divine justice raised in the book of Job. To him Yahweh's cosmological justice provides a far more realistic portrayal of life within the context of good and evil. Though cognizant of popular beliefs, and although fair to their hearing, he is reticent to accept wholesale the prevailing view that suggests only the wicked suffer. Rather, evil remains a part of God's universe and thus the innocent may suffer also.

In the effort to reconcile reality with belief in divine power, the poet of the Yahweh speeches turns away from retributive justice to the cosmological sphere. Unlike Marduk, Yahweh does not create the foundations of the world from the carcass of the slain foe, but rather evil emerges from within primordial creation. Within the boundaries he sets, Yahweh maintains the care of *all* his creatures, whether good or evil. In the cosmological frame of the book of Job, Yahweh presides over the sons of Elohim while Leviathan rules over the sons of pride.

Notes and References

1. The text of *Enuma Elish* used is that of W. G. Lambert and copied by Simon B. Parker, *Enuma Eliš: The Babylonian Epic of Creation; the Cuneiform Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

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