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Chapter 6

TRIAL BY ORDEAL

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Investigation of the juridical dimension of the Book of Job has intensified of late, stimulated perhaps by current interest in legal aspects of Old Testament literature in general. Several dissertations are among the studies of this subject produced during the last decade.¹ Moving beyond the earlier recognition of forensic phraseology as a metaphor occasionally used by the various speakers in Job, some of the more recent studies find that judicial patterns are detectable in the form of the book. Such form-critical analysis may even reach the conclusion that not merely an individual section here and there but the central literary structure of the book exhibits a lawsuit form. Even where that is so, however, there seems to be little inclination to bring into the picture the juridical data found in the prologue of Job.

If we extend the analysis back into the prologue, we discover there a more ultimate level of legal conflict behind the judicial confrontation of God and Job that unfolds from the third chapter onwards. The present study will be concerned with the specific character of the judicial strife that emerges in the prologue—the controversy between God and Satan—and with its relationship to the subsequent lawsuit between God and Job. To have a grasp of this matter is to have the key to a satisfactory understanding of the fundamental meaning and message of the Book of Job.

In this "drama," as we shall see, the scene itself is all-important. How the legal conflict finally turns out is already implicit in the setting in which it takes place. The court of heaven, where the conflict first erupts, continues to be the setting for the action throughout. Though it is not always the foreground of the story and is not even continuously unveiled to our view, the scene of Yahweh's enthronement as Judge of all the earth remains the constant background of all that transpires. The judicial scene of the heavenly council, eternally sovereign

1. Cf. G. Many, "Der Rechtsstreit mit Gott (*Rīb*) im Hiobbuch" (Diss. Kath.-theol. Fakultät der Ludwig-Maximilian Universität, Munich, 1970); S. H. Scholnick, "Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1975); M. B. Dick, "Job 31: A Form-critical Study" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, the Johns Hopkins University, 1977).

and unshakably permanent, is the fixed panoramic backdrop behind the temporal stage properties in the changing foreground.

There at the throne of heaven the Adversary was obliged to present himself to hear the King set the bounds of his existence and freedom (Job 1:7). It was the Lord who initiated the battle by a self-glorifying, challenging claim: "Hast thou considered my servant Job . . . a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God . . . ?" (Job. 1:8). In effect, God was telling Satan that the ancient curse pronounced against him in Eden (Gen. 3:14, 15) was in process of inexorable fulfillment: out of mankind in its covenant of death with the Devil, God was reconciling to himself a new mankind, called to engage in holy war against the Serpent and promised in that warfare an ultimate absolute triumph. In the land of Uz lived a man who was, the Lord maintained, clear evidence that the promise of his primordial decree was sure and its word of doom on the Devil certain. Let Satan behold this trophy of divine redemptive grace, this true and faithful servant of the Lord, and admit that the enmity of the woman's seed against him had been effected, that their covenant with death had been annulled and their covenant with God renewed.

Challenged to confess the Lord's redemptive power and to acknowledge as the corollary of that his own inevitable destruction, Satan refused. Turning accuser instead, he called in question the genuineness of Job's religious commitment, thereby denying God's power to set free the captives of Hell (Job 1:9). Worse, Satan in effect charged the Judge himself with deceit and fraud (Job 1:10). Blasphemy flung at the very throne of God invited fearful retribution, but Satan is aware of the times and seasons. Contradictory spirit that he is, he must have recognized in the secret abyss of his being the infallibility of the decree declared in Eden, even while he publicly branded it an empty lie. He would, therefore, realize that his destined doom must be delayed until that particular seed of the woman who should engage him in the climactic battle had visited the earth in the fulness of time. He was accordingly prepared to meet any sign of premature judgment with the prayer he teaches his demonic disciples to pray: "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (cf. Matt. 8:29).

Meanwhile, Satan pressed this advantage (this boon of delayed doom) to his disadvantage by precipitating a struggle with the Almighty that could only speed forward the redemptive movement he denied towards the dreaded time of his own final torments. He proposed that God's claims concerning Job be put to the test (Job 1:11). And the Lord granted permission to Satan to begin the trial by ordeal. For such it was. The legal dispute that had arisen between them in the divine assembly was to be settled by resort to combat designed to demonstrate whose power actually prevailed in the life of Job.

In the ancient world the judicial impasse resulting from lack of evidence or

conflicting testimony might be resolved by an appeal to the gods. One could make such an appeal by an oath, exposing oneself to the oath-deity's curse on false witnesses. Dread of the curse would deter the guilty from taking the oath and his silence would betray and condemn him.² Insofar as an oath contemplates direct revelation of the divine verdict in an external act of judgment, it falls into the category of trial by ordeal.

A more spectacular form of this judicial procedure went beyond mere verbal description of the oath-curse or even the symbolic dramatization of the curse that frequently accompanied the oath. It prescribed a physical ordeal, pitting the oath-taker against some element which the deity would employ to punish the perjurer. A familiar example was the river ordeal, of special interest because it was part of the symbolic tradition behind the new covenant sign of baptism.³

Even more spectacular than an individual's undergoing of an ordeal by means of an impersonal power, like water or fire, was the technique of ordeal by combat, which required the legal opponents to face one another in a duel of some kind. A biblical illustration of this sort of thing is the judicial contest between Aaron and Korah's two hundred and fifty related in Numbers 16 and 17. All the disputants, censured with burning incense in hand, presented themselves before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting to see whom he would choose for his holy service. And Yahweh, God of ordeal judgment, revealed his verdict against Aaron's challengers in earthquake and fire, subsequently confirming his choice of Aaron in the supplementary contest of the budding rod. From outside the Bible another example of resort to combat to settle a dispute over a position of leadership is found in a mythological Egyptian text which is concerned with contention over the inheritance of the divine kingship of Osiris. The claimants are Horus, the son of Osiris, and the evil Seth, brother of Osiris. The struggle takes place in the presence of the divine tribunal, the Ennead. Before judgment is at very long last given in favor of Horus, the two rivals engage each other in a boat race, which quickly degenerates into a

2. For the biblical practice see Exod. 22:11(10); 1 Kings 8:31, 32; cf. Exod. 20:7; Eccles. 9:2; Heb. 6:16. This cultic-judicial procedure is reflected in Psalms that contain protestations of innocence and appeals for the heavenly Judge to rise up in judgment for the suppliant (e.g., Pss. 7:3ff. (4ff.); 17:1ff.; 26:1ff.).

3. Cf. my *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 55-60. In Israelite legal praxis the procedure is clearly illustrated by the jealousy ordeal of Num. 5:11-31. The similarity between the juridical techniques of Israel and other ancient nations is informative, but there was, of course, an essential difference too: while the effectiveness of the technique elsewhere lay in psychological conditioning by subjective factors, in Israel the living Lord, the God of creation and history, was pleased to render his judgment through the ordeal medium in accordance with the terms he had appointed.

novel sort of naval battle, and in a variety of other combat-ordeals.⁴

In the controversy between God and Satan over the question of Job's religious allegiance, the ordeal was in a sense an individual one for Satan. He had to encounter the ordeal power of God the Judge in the specific form of God's redemptive might at work in the life of Job. Satan must try to undo what God claimed to have done in Job—or make it appear that it had never been done in the first place. Viewed from this perspective, the strange fact emerges that as Satan stalked the saint of God, trying his soul, the tempter was himself under trial. Or, stated in terms of the general experience of the people of God, the history of the church is the arena of the Devil's trial by ordeal.

But since Satan had in reality directed charges against the Lord as well as Job, the Lord was one of the litigants in this case. Because of this dual role of the Lord as Judge and litigant, for Satan to struggle to prevail over the ordeal power of the divine Judge, the God of the ordeal, was at the same time to enter into personal combat against the one who was his legal adversary. In this lawsuit, then, Satan was engaged in a judicial ordeal by duel with the Lord God.

On the Lord's part, no inconsistency with his own divine nature was involved in his entering into a trial by ordeal-combat with Satan. For there was no temporary suspending of his absolute claims to be the God of truth while attempting to establish that identity on some other grounds. There was no entertaining of the possibility that his word might return to him void, not even while he was engaged in judicial ordeal with Satan to settle where the truth lay with regard to that very matter. For it was the very essence of this judicial process as an ordeal undertaken before the heavenly throne that it made appeal to the God of that throne for a sovereign revelation of judgment. The combat proceeded on the assumption of the absolute veracity, justice, and power—the divinity—of the enthroned Judge. The very possibility of contending over the question of whether God's word was truth depended on the acknowledgment that he was the true God, the God of truth. When the Lord swore the ordeal oath he swore by himself because he can swear by no greater (cf. Heb. 6:13). He can validate the truth of his judgment by no other name.

Deviously implicit in Satan's allegations that Job was a hypocrite and the Lord's claim concerning him a fraud was, of course, the ultimate denial that the Lord was God, the Judge of all the earth. But Satan's accusatorial innuendoes did not change the actual judicial realities. They did not alter the fact that this was an ordeal undertaken before the Lord, seated as God on his judgment

throne. And God did not step down from his throne in order to grapple with his adversary. When the Lord God engages in judicial apologetics, he does not bear false witness against himself. He does not put his Godhood in abeyance, not even for a little while in order to fight to win it back again—perhaps and somehow. The Judge does not play the Devil's advocate by denying himself, hoping it will not occur to the Devil—and the theologians—that there is a contradiction between this "God" who "is," the self-denying, emptied deity of the apologetics ordeal, and the eternal God who was and is to come, the unchanging Creator-Judge, Alpha and Omega. There is no abdication in heaven. In the ordeal by combat with Satan, God remained on the throne as the God of the ordeal, consistently maintaining from the outset on through the final subjugation of the dragon his true self-identification as God, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, the same today as yesterday and tomorrow.

By the same token, Satan did deny himself. He contradicted the contention he presented in court in the very act of entering into a trial by ordeal before the throne of God. The outcome was inherent in the fact that this was a trial by ordeal conducted before the eternal throne of the Lord God of heaven. That is what was meant by our earlier comment that in this drama of the Book of Job the scene is all-important.

As we trace the course of this great ordeal between God and Satan we come upon another ordeal, an ordeal within the first ordeal. The two are distinguishable and yet the second belongs to the first and the outcome of the second is determinative of the outcome of the first. Understanding the relation of these two ordeals to one another is a matter of seeing just where the figure of Job fits into the picture of the supraterritorial combat.

Ancient armies sometimes elected to let the issue of the day be settled by combat between their individual champions.⁵ What made this seemingly cavalier or even reckless manner of deciding serious causes seem altogether reasonable and appropriate was the notion that the gods were involved in the warfare. Since this divine aspect of the battle must be the decisive factor, it was of secondary importance whether the battle at the human level was between entire armies or individual champions. "The Lord saves not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands." So David, youthful champion of Israel, faithfully confessed before Goliath in the hearing of the assembled armies.⁶ It was a battle in the holy war of Yahweh, God of Israel, and because the judgment of Yahweh was sovereign, the champion of Israel must prevail as he went to the combat in the name of Yahweh of hosts. In

4. For a translation of some of this tale and a digest of the rest see J. B. Prichard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 14-17. Other varieties of trial by combat-ordeal of special relevance for the Book of Job will be mentioned later in this essay.

5. See Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), II:265-67.

6. Pertinent again at this point is the concluding observation in note 3 above.

the judicial ordeal of battle the Lord would render a verdict in favor of his people by blessing their champion—his champion—and by returning upon the giant from the ranks of the uncircumcised his own defiant oath-curse (I Sam. 17:44-47).

Like David (except that David was aware of his role), Job came to the field of battle as God's champion. In the ordeal of judgment into which the Lord had entered with Satan he had entrusted the honor of his holy name and the vindication of the validity of his redemptive work to this mortal. Job, the champion of God—no greater nobility than that!⁷

With whom then did Job contend in this ordeal? With Satan? Yes, of course with Satan. God had opened the gates of Hell and the great dragon that deceives the nations and accuses the holy brethren had been let loose upon the man from the land of Uz (Job 1:11). Of Job too it was true—his wrestling was not against flesh and blood, not against the Chaldeans and Sabaeans, not against the three friends, but against the rulers of darkness, the spiritual hosts of evil, against the wiles of the Devil (cf. Eph. 6:11, 12).

But if we stop with that we are still in need of making the discovery Jacob at last made at Peniel. In his night ordeal there Jacob learned that ultimately a man's wrestling is with God. Not by an unscrupulous bargain with Esau, not by crafty deception of Isaac, not at all by outwitting or overpowering man but by wrestling with God and prevailing with tears and supplications must Jacob win the name Israel and become patriarch in the succession of Abraham and Isaac in God's covenant of redemption (cf. Gen. 32:24-30; Hos. 12:3, 4). Likewise, Job's wrestling was in the last analysis not with man, nor with the lightning and the wind, nor with his festering flesh; it was not ultimately even with the Devil that Yahweh's champion must prevail but with the Lord God himself.

That is where our second ordeal comes in—the ordeal within the ordeal. For this wrestling of Job with God had the character of a judicial ordeal in that it led to a revelation of God's judgment with respect to Job, particularly over against the friends who, however unwittingly, had in effect been playing the part of the Devil's champions.

How curiously complex this interlocking, three-cornered combat becomes! In one way or another each of the three principals contends with both the others. God confronts Satan in ordeal and Job as God's champion fights against Satan too. But that ordeal of God and Job against Satan is to be decided by God's ordeal with Job: to subdue Satan by the hand of Job, God must subdue Job. Yet,

7. How undiscerning is the exegesis that sees here only what it describes with supercilious profanity as "the idea of a God who allows human suffering for the purpose of winning a heavenly wager"—so S. Terrien in his commentary on Job in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), III:888.

so entangled have victory and defeat become that if Job as God's champion is to overcome Satan he must prevail with God. However, Job can prevail with God only as he is brought to his knees in suppliant submission before God. Hence it is also true that Job can subdue Satan only by being himself subdued by God. Not Job but God is the real conqueror of the dragon.

As if things were not already sufficiently intricate, before it was all over God was to commission yet another champion to represent him in combat, but not this time against Satan (at least, not directly so). This second champion was to face none other than God's first champion, Job. That collision of champions was part of the trial in which Job's ordeal, the ordeal within the ordeal, came to its climax.

Though the trial turned out to be of a kind that Job had hardly anticipated, it was at his own clamant insistence that his ordeal struggle with the Lord eventually took on more particularly the character of a court trial. Throughout the debate with the three friends Job voiced ever more desperately his plea for such a trial. Let come what may, he must have the privilege of a judicial audience with God.⁸ Guilty Adam had hidden from the *parousia* of his Judge (cf. Job 31:33; Gen. 3:8), but innocent Job let it be known that he had no intention of behaving like Adam, if ever God would grant his request for a fair trial.

This clamor for a hearing issued in a final passionate protestation of innocence, an oath of clearance remarkable for both its form and content (Job 31). It is an unusually long oath but even more striking is its use of the complete oath form, including the apodosis specifying the curses, rather than the more conventional truncated oath formula.⁹ Still more noteworthy is the penetrating perception of the inward and spiritual depths of God's holy requirements that is displayed in the catalogue of sins of which Job declares himself innocent.¹⁰

Such an oath protesting innocence would sometimes accompany a defendant's appeal for a public trial before a third party when efforts towards achieving a private settlement had failed. The plaintiff would thereby be obliged to produce evidence to substantiate his accusations and to justify whatever coercive measures he might have meanwhile ap-

8. Cf., e.g., Job 13:13ff. The plea is so insistent it has been called a summons. See J. J. M. Roberts, "Job's Summons to Yahweh: The Exploitation of a Legal Metaphor," *Restoration Quarterly* 16 (1973):159-65.

9. S. H. Blank, "An Effective Literary Device in Job XXXI," *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 2 (1951):105-107, calls attention to the rarity of the complete oath-formula, citing Psalms 7 and 137 as further examples.

10. For a discussion of questions arising from the fact that Job's asseveration of innocence keeps pace with so spiritual a probing of sin, see my commentary on Job in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 482 (hereafter, Kline commentary).

plied.¹¹ Clearly, Job desired that God would specify the charges against him. He wanted to have the indictment in writing, and it was his boast that he would then be able to prove his innocence, charge by charge, and so turn the document of indictment into a crown of honor (Job 31:35-37).

And at last God did deign to come and speak to Job, the forerunner Elihu having first prepared the way for the advent.¹² God came as Judge. He had not stepped down from the throne to do judicial combat with Satan, and neither did he deny himself in the process of engaging in litigation with his servant Job. He came as the God of ordeal judgment in response to Job's ordeal-oath. He did not give any accounting for the mysterious treatment that had been accorded to his servant and there was therefore no opportunity for Job to defend himself against any imagined charges. There was instead simply the divine challenge: "Gird up now thy loins like a man" (Job 38:3a; cf. 40:7a).

According to the language of that challenge the encounter was evidently to be a belt-wrestling bout such as was employed at times in the ancient Near East as a form of legal procedure.¹³ Job must fasten the wrestling belt about his waist and set himself to grapple with God. He must become locked in the grip of the ordeal power and fight to prevail in judgment. However, unlike Jacob's struggle with the Angel, the combat in Job's case was not, of course, to be an actual physical wrestling. That imagery in the challenge was merely a literary figure by which the Lord pictured this judicial ordeal more graphically. As Job presently discovered, it was not by his prowess in physical combat that he was to be tried but by his ability to hold his own in a test of knowledge (cf. Job 38:3b; 40:7b).¹⁴

The wisdom contest was a popular ancient diversion. Josephus reports a royal exchange of riddles, with wagers on the side, between kings Solomon and Hiram.¹⁵ In the realm of literature a favorite type of fable consisted of a verbal clash of wits between personified creatures of various sorts. For example, the dispute between the ox and the horse or the contest between the tamarisk and the palm. In comparing these with the wisdom ordeal of God and Job it is of

11. Cf. Michael Brennan Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979):37-50.

12. For this interpretation of the Elihu section see Kline commentary, pp. 483-86.

13. For a discussion of a legal text from Nuzi in which the judges call for a belt-wrestling ordeal to settle a dispute brought before them see C. H. Gordon, "Belt-wrestling in the Bible World," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23, I (1950-51):131-36. Cf. Gen. 30:8; Job 31:22, 23.

14. At the same time, the questions addressed to Job are like the opening challenge with its belt-wrestling figure in that they imaginatively confront Job with situations in which the extent of his power as over against that of his Creator is brought under consideration. This is particularly prominent in the second round of the "wrestling." In this questioning, the possession of power to exercise physical control over the realm of nature is equally with the possession of knowledge about the world regarded as an expression of wisdom. Wisdom is power.

15. *Antiquities of the Jews* 8:5:3. Cf. also I Kings 10:1ff.

particular interest that according to the standard form of such fables the debate concluded with a judgment scene in which the god settled the question.¹⁶

Since wisdom was Job's forte, he might have been momentarily elated to learn that his ordeal would be of a kind that proved his mettle in that area. The opening words of the voice from the whirlwind were, however, disquieting: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). So Job was apprised that though he might point with pride to his performance as a counselor in his community (cf. Job 29:7ff.), in the probing of the question of his own sufferings his contribution had been less than consistently illuminating. Then, after depicting the imminent encounter as a belt-wrestling ordeal, as we have seen (Job 38:3a), the Lord set Job on guard for the thrust and parry of the wisdom contest: "For I will demand of thee, and answer thou me" (Job 38:3b).

Form-critical investigation of the questions that God proceeded to put to Job suggests that he was imitating the technique of a scholarly master instructing a student.¹⁷ It has been observed that the interrogative formulae used by the Lord are similar to those found in an Egyptian document of the late second millennium B.C., in which an official, one Hori, gives instruction in the geography of Syria by a catechetical method, evidently in a school for the training of government officials. There are, moreover, Egyptian treatises of an encyclopedic nature listing natural phenomena and objects, professions, etc., the kind of material a teacher would produce or consult when preparing to instruct his class.¹⁸ Interesting parallels in the selection and sequence of topics have been noted between one such text and the contents of Job 38:4ff.¹⁹ It would appear then that while Job had concluded his debate with his friends by adopting the posture of the teacher towards them (cf. Job 27:11), the Lord now assumed that role and assigned Job the place of a disciple. Since this ordeal presupposed that all wisdom belongs to God, and since its purpose was not to destroy Job but to establish and edify him, the master-disciple format was altogether appropriate.

God's questions ranged over the earth (Job 38:4-21) and heaven (Job 38:22-38) and the animal kingdom (Job 38:39-39:30), spanning the reaches of time from the singing of the morning stars at the laying of the foundations of the earth

16. See W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), pp. 150ff.

17. See G. von Rad, "Hiob XXXVIII und die Altägyptische Weisheit" in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East: Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), III:293-301; English translation in G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 281-91.

18. The genre of the noun list classifying phenomena in related groupings probably originated among the Sumerians. This process of classification is thought to have led to the comparisons of opposite pairs, and this in turn to the disputation fables.

19. The heading of this text reads: "Beginning of the teaching about all that Prah has created." See note 17 above.

to the shouting of captains in the latest tumults of human history. For his part, Job was quite unable to interrupt the stream of questions with any information that might support a decision in his favor in this wisdom contest. When eventually the questions ceased, he could only lay his hand upon his mouth (Job 40:1-5). God had prevailed in the first stage of the ordeal.

Then a second time the summons was issued: "Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me" (Job 40:7).²⁰ As the ordeal resumed Job was invited to exalt himself to the dignity of king of creation and to demonstrate his ability to deal with the world's problems, in particular, to subdue all the proud forces of evil (Job 40:10-14).²¹

It was of course unthinkable that Job should assay thus to fill the role of deity, and that suggestion was not developed further. But in order that Job might learn still better the lesson of his human limitations, God made another proposal, apparently a more feasible one, for it reduced the test from heavenly to earthly dimensions. He indicated that he was prepared to accept a handicap, as it were. Instead of continuing to engage Job in combat himself, God now commissioned one of his creatures, indeed, a creature of a lower order than man, to serve as his champion in the ordeal.

"Behold now behemoth, which I made as I made you" (Job 40:15). Here was a fellow creature of Job's—let him measure the competence of his wisdom-power over against it. Was not this an answer to his prayers? He had pleaded for a trial in which he would not be smitten with the paralysis of dread at the terrors of God's theophany (cf. Job 9:34, 35; 13:21). Here was his chance. All he need do is cope with a dumb brute. Surely Job should fare more successfully against a subhuman opponent, even though it was a king of the beasts, than he had hitherto against God, the King of kings.

That is how it happened that God's champion Job found himself with another champion of God arrayed against him in battle.²² For deity to be represented by a bestial champion in a quarrel was not unheard of in ancient literary tradition.

20. It is in keeping with the conduct of the sport of belt-wrestling that the Joban imagery suggests that the contest involved more than one "fall."

21. See again note 14 above.

22. I have assumed here the interpretation of behemoth and leviathan (cf. Job 41:1 [Heb. 40:25]) as two terms for just one creature, probably the crocodile (see Kline commentary, p. 488). Of interest for that identification is an Egyptian text that describes an oracular situation in which the penalty for infidelity in an oath was to be cast to the crocodile (see the account of the text by John A. Wilson in "The Oath in Ancient Egypt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7 [1948]: 137, 138). But the point that God used a champion in his ordeal with Job does not depend on the specifics of my interpretation of behemoth-leviathan. On the other hand, the fact that the role of behemoth-leviathan in the judicial ordeal was that of God's representative champion against Job is a serious difficulty for the interpretation of it/them as a mythological symbol for Satan. It is also a problem for the view that sees in it/them a consoling didactic image of the struggle Job had undergone in his sufferings. Cf. John G. Gammie, "Behemoth and Leviathan: On the Didactic and Theological

There is, for example, the well-known episode in the epic of Gilgamesh where the enraged goddess Ishtar constrains her father, Anu, to create the Bull of Heaven and commissions it to descend to Erech, there to do battle for her against Gilgamesh, who had spurned her romantic approaches. As it turns out, her champion proved no match for the dragon-slayer Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu. Though the Bull of Heaven achieved an auspicious beginning by annihilating armies with the mere blast of its nostrils, when it met up with the heroes they dispatched it with a well-directed sword thrust between the neck and horns.²³ There is more to the story, because offended goddesses do not give up too easily, but as for Ishtar's champion, the Bull of Heaven, it succeeded only in bringing disgrace upon its divine sponsor, while the human heroes gained honor at its expense.

It was quite otherwise with behemoth-leviathan, the champion of God. "Will he swear a covenant oath to you; will you take him as your permanent servant? . . . On earth is not his equal, created fearless. He looks upon whatever is haughty; he is king over all proud creatures" (Job 41:4, 33, 34 [Heb. 40:28; 41:25, 26]). Thus challenged by God, Job succumbed, acknowledging as too wonderful for him the wisdom of the Creator embodied in the champion that confronted him (Job 42:1-6).

Right here redemption springs its surprise. Overwhelmed in the divine ordeal, Job nevertheless receives a verdict of justification (Job 42:7-9) and the blessing of twofold restoration (Job 42:10-17). Job the vanquished is Job the triumphant. Like Jacob-Israel, Job triumphed by the tears and supplications of his vanquished, contrite heart. By the confession, "I abhor myself and repent" (Job 42:6), he prevailed with God.

The meaning of this repentance and the explanation of the mystery of this justification are to be found within that interpretation of the history of man and God revealed in the Book of Job's canonical context, with its pattern of creation, fall in the first Adam, and promise of redemption through the coming heavenly mediator. Such was the personal faith-framework of Job's repentance. At the close of his final oath, mankind's fall in Adam and the cursing of the earth were present in his thoughts (Job 31:33, 40). His believing apprehension of the promised eschatological deliverance from sin and from the curse of death through a divine Redeemer and by means of sacrifice for sin came to expression in his priestly ministry at the altar (Job 1:5; 42:8-10) and in the

Significance of Job 40:15-41:26" in *Israelite Wisdom*, ed. J. G. Gammie, W. A. Brueggemann, W. L. Humphreys, J. M. Ward (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), pp. 217-31.

23. An additional feature in the parallelism of this epic tradition with the Joban behemoth-leviathan context is that (as often in the portrayal of heroic combat with monsters) the conflict of Gilgamesh and Enkidu with the Bull of Heaven found iconographic depiction as a belt-wrestling bout.

prophetic insights to which he gave witness (e.g., Job 16:18ff.; 19:25ff.). That is the biblical world of ideas to which the faith of Job and of the Book of Job belong, and it is within that universe of theology that the outcome of Job's ordeal-combat with God must be understood. The justification of vanquished, confessing Job was in accordance with the redemptive wonder of the grace of the God who is just and justifies the ungodly who believe in Jesus (Rom. 3:26; 4:5).

In the trial by ordeal, God's claim that Job was his servant had been fully vindicated, the religious commitment of Job being judged by the terms of the ordeal precisely as defined by Satan himself at the outset.²⁴ According to those terms, genuine devotion to God was devotion that did not admit of any suspicion of its being prompted by interest in temporal benefits. It is, therefore, of the utmost significance that at the time of Job's repentant submission to the Lord he was still in a condition of unrelieved misery and without the hint of an intimation of any improvement in his temporal circumstances. Expecting only the continuation of his sufferings down to the grave, he nevertheless gave himself anew in unreserved commitment to his God and so demonstrated conclusively that Satan's allegations of hypocrisy in Job and fraud in God were false and that God's claim was true. Beyond contradiction, Job did in fact serve the Lord "for nought."

Throughout the course of the argument with the friends it becomes increasingly evident that what was of supreme import to Job was that the Lord God was his God. What was shattering to him was not his loss of temporal blessings but his fear (groundless though it was) that he had lost his God. The whirlwind theophany had not answered the question of the *why* of his particular sufferings or extended any hope of temporal relief, but it had served as a means of grace to confirm Job's assurance that, fallen son of Adam though he was, God was his God in the divine purpose and promise of redemption. And by his unconditional repentance Job showed that he was prepared to serve God for God's sake alone, purely and truly, in singleness of heart.

By his victory in his wrestling ordeal with Job, the Lord proved victor in his ordeal-conflict against Satan.²⁵ In this fateful ordeal, the Lord, the God of judgment ordeal, the Judge of all the earth, had spoken. He had revealed decisively through his champion Job's victory over the draconic adversary that his gospel-decree of Genesis 3:14, 15 was sovereign and true: God the Creator

would at last destroy the devil and by redemptive re-creation raise up a new mankind consecrated forever to the service of his glory.

The history of Job was not, of course, the end of the history of redemption, but the way the ordeal of this champion of God ends is the way the whole history of redemption ends. The issue of Job's ordeal was a triumphant reiteration of God's original claim concerning him. Here again, at the end of the ordeal, God calls Job, "my servant" (Job 42:7, 8)—and we hear no more from the silenced Accuser. That was a sign for all the promised seed of the woman who, with Job, resist the devil, steadfast in faith, that God, their God, will perfect, establish, and strengthen them, and shortly bruise Satan under their feet (cf. Rom. 16:20; I Pet. 5:9, 10). Likewise, the unannounced temporal restoration by which the Lord vindicated his faithful champion was a sign that in the end God will be clearly revealed as compassionate and of tender mercy (James 5:11).

A comprehensive study of the Book of Job from the legal perspective would have to deal with additional matters scarcely alluded to here, some of them rather large issues like the nature of the disputation with the three friends and the significance of the mediator figure in Job's speeches. In the foregoing analysis our purpose has been simply to bring forward into view and hopefully into the on-going discussion the usually ignored forensic realities of the Joban prologue. It is only as we are prepared to give a proper place to the basic legal controversy disclosed in that prologue, the trial by ordeal of God and his champion Job against the satanic Adversary, that we can expect to achieve a juridical reading of this Old Testament wisdom book that is true to it in its canonical literary wholeness and its canonical theological integrity as part of the redemptive revelation in the Scriptures.

24. On this point see Matitiah Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966):74.

25. It was a final irony for the defeated dragon, the old serpentine leviathan, that God vanquished him by using as his representative agent in overcoming Job a member of the animal kingdom (cf. Gen. 3:1), and indeed another leviathan.