

**Job as Proto-Apocalypse: A Fresh Proposal for Job's Governing Genre  
Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism and Early Christianity Group  
Society of Biblical Literature; San Antonio, TX; November 22, 2004**

Timothy J. Johnson  
Marquette University

All rights reserved; for discussion only  
This paper is not to be reproduced without the permission of the author.

**Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to initiate a conversation within this study group concerning the substance of my recent dissertation. I argued that the book of Job exhibits sufficient literary characteristics associated with apocalypse to warrant challenging the conventional “wisdom” designation so commonly assumed in scholarship.<sup>1</sup> In the end, I suggest that Job is closer to a nascent form of apocalypse than many have yet acknowledged. Based on feedback in various settings, it is clear that the burden of proof is no simple matter. However, the weight of evidence supporting my contention seems too substantial to dismiss, and it seems that Job should at least be included in the corpus of works that contains literary characteristics common to both wisdom and apocalypse such as Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon and Hebrews, to name a few. I am therefore immensely grateful and honored to have the opportunity to review the most salient features of my research with this study group.

---

<sup>1</sup> Several studies have sought to challenge wisdom's privileged status, but none that I am aware of have argued that Job is akin to apocalypse. Westermann's classic investigation proposed that Job's literary genre was a “dramatized lament,” Claus Westermann, The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981). More recently, both Katharine Dell, The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature (BZAW 197; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) and Bruce Zuckerman, Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), argue that Job's genre is a form of parody, though they argue from distinct perspectives. There are numerous proposals for Job's genre, many of which are surveyed by Dell.

I certainly do not claim to have the last word on this idea, nor can I claim to be the first to suggest that Job conforms to a form of apocalypse. During my studies at Bethel Seminary, Duane Garrett's stimulating lectures first alerted me to the idea. Further research demonstrated that major contributors to both sapiential and apocalyptic studies also noticed apocalyptic features in Job. For example, John Collins noted that Job "has the greatest affinities with apocalyptic."<sup>2</sup> Collins further contended that Job, like other apocalypses, "arises out of a failure to find order and justice in the world," and the "supernatural revelation" from the whirlwind assists Job in overcoming the problem.

Christopher Rowland dedicated two pages of his classic study on apocalyptic literature to Job's apocalyptic features and argued, "the whole structure of Job offers an embryonic form of the later apocalypses."<sup>3</sup> Ithamar Gruenwald used Job as an example of a text that demonstrated where the wisdom tradition of ancient Jewish apocalypticism provided revelations of "cosmological secrets and its relation to the problem of theodicy."<sup>4</sup> Finally, in an article where Job is characterized as a new voice that brought Israel's ancient religion to an end, F. M. Cross thought it interesting that the Qumran community preserved Job in paleo-Hebrew and noted that it was "intriguing that Job's importance was not forgotten in apocalyptic circles."<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately for me, none of these scholars investigated Job's relationship with apocalyptic more fully, which I hope to begin via my dissertation and the work of this

---

<sup>2</sup> John J. Collins, "Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age," History of Religions 17 (1977): 140, see fn 74 where Collins states, "The Hebrew wisdom book which has the greatest affinities with apocalyptic, the Book of Job..."

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Rowland, The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 206-7.

<sup>4</sup> Ithamar Gruenwald, Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism (Leiden/Köln: E. J. Brill, 1980),

<sup>5</sup> F. M. Cross, "New Directions in the Study of Apocalyptic," JTC 6 (1969): 162-163.

study group. My work concentrates on the final form of the MT version of Job and does not seek to address or explain the proposed “disturbances” to the story of Job.

### **A Word on Genre**

A central conviction for my research is that genre matters greatly in the hermeneutical process. While caution should carry the day when claiming to identify the genre of such an enigmatic book as Job, John Collins argues that “there can be no understanding without at least an implicit notion of genre.”<sup>6</sup> It is well known that Job is notorious for its lack of a clear interpretive framework. With respect to genre, Job is one of, if not the most, diversely composed and disparate books in the Hebrew Bible. Compounding that fact is the difficulty of the Hebrew itself. It is therefore not entirely surprising that interpretations of Job vary greatly.

Thus, as noted earlier, several researchers have proposed a variety of potential genres for Job, but all fail to fully account for Job’s multifarious qualities. Most are forced to acknowledge that the particular elements of Job that do not accord with their proposal are simply late additions to the story. In the midst of these unfulfilling proposals, one should avoid completely retreating from the endeavor altogether by simply accepting that Job is wisdom. Instead, scholarship is wise to heed E. D. Hirsch’s poignant insight that, “the central role of genre concepts in interpretation is most easily grasped when the process of interpretation is going badly or when it has to undergo revision.”<sup>7</sup> My work adds to an already long list of proposals. However, my proposal

---

<sup>6</sup> John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 8.

<sup>7</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 71. I also find Hirsch’s contention that meaning is genre-bound quite compelling, 71-77.

seeks to demonstrate that reading Job through proto-apocalyptic eyes can result in a coherent reading of the book without recourse to hypothetical emendations and textual developments.

### **Apocalyptic Paradigm**

My primary task is to demonstrate that several literary features found in Job compare nicely to the characteristics typically affiliated with an apocalypse. While there may be several ways of accomplishing this task, I chose to rely heavily on the “master paradigm” that was developed by the Society of Biblical Literature’s Genres Project and published in Semeia 14.<sup>8</sup> (A copy of the paradigm is attached as an appendix) The paradigm is divided into five major divisions, each containing subcategories. Due to time and space, I will address Job’s affinities with apocalypse via the “master paradigm” rather broadly.

Before directly addressing the paradigm, I have found it valuable in an even broader sense, to compare Job to the general definition of apocalypse offered by the SBL study group that developed the “master paradigm.” (See appendix) It reads:

Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.<sup>9</sup>

Most accept that the whirlwind speeches represent a divine revelation. I will address this in greater detail shortly. Job also is written within a narrative framework, and the revelation comes from an otherworldly being, albeit directly from God instead of from a

---

<sup>8</sup> John J. Collins, ed., Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre (Semeia 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,

mediator. Job certainly is a human recipient, and the nature of God's revelation offers, at a minimum, a peek into the heavenly realm. Prima facie, the one key element from the definition that seems to be missing from the story of Job is the picture of eschatological salvation. More will be said on this later.

Thus, a brief comparison between the study group's definition and the major features of Job suggests that Job could possibly conform to some kind of apocalypse, at least in literary structure. A more detailed analysis seems warranted, and I will now turn to that via the "master paradigm."

#### Division One: Manner of Revelation

Starting with the most fundamental apocalyptic trait, it is clear that Job contains at least one significant revelation. As noted earlier, John J. Collins considers the Yahweh speeches a "supernatural revelation."<sup>10</sup> Christopher Rowland concurs and argues that the whirlwind revelation "transforms" the book of Job from a human-centered search for answers to the questions of unjust suffering to an appreciation of the import contained in God's dimension.<sup>11</sup>

In my dissertation, I argued that the Eliphaz vision of Job 4:17-21 and the "revelation" of wisdom in Job 28:23-28 also served as apocalypses. The former is easier to defend because many detect the apocalyptic impulses contained within the passage such as Katharine Dell who considers it an "apocalyptic form."<sup>12</sup> The text in full context reads:

---

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>11</sup> Rowland, 206.

<sup>12</sup> Katharine Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (BZAW 197; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 104.

Job 4:12-21(NRSV)<sup>13</sup>

- 12 Now a word came stealing to me,  
my ear received the whisper of it.  
13 Amid thoughts from visions of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on mortals,  
14 dread came upon me, and trembling,  
which made all my bones shake.  
15 A spirit glided past my face;  
the hair of my flesh bristled.  
16 It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance.  
A form was before my eyes;  
there was silence, then I heard a voice:  
17 ‘Can mortals be righteous before God?  
Can human beings be pure before their Maker?  
18 Even in his servants he puts no trust,  
and his angels he charges with error;  
19 how much more those who live in houses of clay,  
whose foundation is in the dust,  
who are crushed like a moth.  
20 Between morning and evening they are destroyed;  
they perish forever without any regarding it.  
21 Their tent-cord is plucked up within them,  
and they die devoid of wisdom.’

My argument for Job 28:23-28 is more problematic and is based on the intriguing, though admittedly speculative, analysis of Stephen Geller, who considers verse 23b “almost as much a theophany as the divine speech out of the whirlwind.”<sup>14</sup> The text reads:

Job 28:23-28 (NRSV)

- 23 God understands the way to it,  
and he knows its place.  
24 For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
and sees everything under the heavens.  
25 Then he gave to the wind its weight,  
and apportioned out the waters by measure;  
26 when he made a decree for the rain,

---

<sup>13</sup> All citations from the NRSV.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Geller, “‘Where is Wisdom?’: A Literary Study of Job 28 in its Settings,” in Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel (eds. J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, E. S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 163.

and a way for the thunderbolt;  
27 then he saw it and declared it;  
he established it, and searched it out.  
28 And he said to humankind,  
'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding.'

Whether or not the case can be made for Job 28 as a revelation, which I will not dwell on for this paper, research at least suggests that Job contains the essential literary element required for membership into apocalyptic literature by way of the whirlwind speeches and the Eliphaz vision. Thus, Job complies with the key "revelatory" component of the study group's definition, and the various formulations of the revelation(s) comport in one way or another with the subgroups found in section one of the paradigm.

With respect to section two of the paradigm, clearly Job receives his revelation directly from God in the whirlwind speeches, but there is an obvious mediator in the Eliphaz speeches who presents himself as some kind of unformed spirit (Job 4:15-16).

In section three of the paradigm, the human recipient's disposition receives particular attention. Both Eliphaz and Job offer convincing proof that they have received some kind of "otherworldly" message; Job and Eliphaz tremble.

Thus, the book of Job accords well with all three sections of this division.

#### Division Two: Content of Revelation Regarding the Temporal Axis

Section four of the paradigm suggests that the content of an apocalypse treats creation. Most recognize that Job 38-41 serves as one of the most profound creation revelations in the Hebrew Bible. Less convincing, but worth reference, is Eliphaz's question in Job 4:17b, "Can human beings be pure before their Maker (wh# (m))?"

Norman Habel suggests that, “the substance of this mysterious revelation received by Eliphaz...is simply that all humans inherit the ills of their creaturehood,” and he argues that the specific creation image conjured by this revelation is found in Gen 2:7.<sup>15</sup>

Sections five and six really do not pertain to Job, and the emphasis on eschatology in sections seven through nine pose difficult, though not insurmountable, problems. While no obvious eschatological crisis appears to exist in Job, I argue that Job undergoes persecution from his friends. Furthermore, Job’s egregious suffering represents a complete upheaval in his world. While neither the persecution nor the upheaval is eschatological, per se, they are the manifestations of a cosmological crisis. Thus, even though eschatological referents are not employed, an apocalyptic pattern exists via similar literary phenomenon as apparent in a cosmological context instead.

A similar approach is taken in sections eight and nine. Section eight calls for eschatological judgments in Job, which do not clearly exist. However, several judgments do occur. For example, Job judges his wife, God judges Job, God judges the three friends, and possibly God judges the Satan due to Job’s “victory.” In section nine, no eschatological salvation is disclosed, but Job’s “double blessing” functions literarily in a similar manner.

Thus, the absence of overtly eschatological language does offer the most serious drawback to my proposal, which is one reason I suggest a proto-apocalyptic designation for Job. However, I dedicate an entire chapter to tracing tradition’s treatment of the story of Job, and starting with the LXX of Job, demonstrate that an eschatological redaction of the story seems to have happened. More will be said on this shortly.

---

<sup>15</sup> Norman Habel, *Job* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 128-129.

### Division Three – Content of Revelation Regarding the Spatial Axis

Section ten of the paradigm expects otherworldly regions or beings to emerge in apocalypses. Of course, the book of Job begins in God's heavenly court with the appearance of the Satan, and it ends with Job before God himself. In between, Eliphaz seems to be in an otherworldly place, and chapter 28 also depicts otherworldly imagery. In short, Job is full of otherworldly characteristics that mark it as a book beyond typical.

### Divisions Four and Five – Paraenesis and Concluding Elements

The theophanic speeches contain examples of eclectic admonitions to Job. Job 40:2 is an excellent example, "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond." I have argued elsewhere that the Hebrew lends itself to the following interpretation, "the one who reproves God must answer the reproof."<sup>16</sup>

The friends receive instructions from God concerning their fate, that is, they are to offer sacrifices and seek Job's intervention on their behalf. And finally, the story does end in a narrative conclusion.

On balance, it is hard not to suggest that Job contains literary patterns that are generally associated with apocalypses, even if clearly eschatological terms and concepts are not overtly present. I certainly do not argue that Job represents a "mature" apocalypse, but I do feel that apocalyptic patterns present themselves in such a way that a search for an apocalyptic framework is justified.

## Tradition

As noted, a likely objection to my proposal is the lack of overt eschatological features in the MT of Job. However, as the story of Job was retold and modified through the centuries, it seems clear that eschatological imagery was either added, or understood to be a latent phenomenon of the story. Thus, I argue that data furnishes evidence for my claim that MT Job represents a nascent form of apocalyptic literature that ultimately lent itself to the kind of apocalyptic features that are so prevalent in later interpretations. A few examples will demonstrate this tendency.

The most striking evidence that the story of Job had substantial affinities with eschatological notions is the resurrection “plus” found in the LXX version. Most feel that the resurrection feature materialized as a Christian addition, or, at best, as the product of an apocalyptic fervor present during its translation from the Hebrew.<sup>17</sup> Based on textual evidence, it is impossible to prove either claim. The plus found in LXX Job 42:17 explicitly states that Job will be resurrected:

Job 42:17 αα γέγραπται δε αὐτὸν πάλιν ἀναστήσεσθαι μεθ’ ὧν ὁ κύριος  
ἀνίστησιν.<sup>18</sup>

And it is written that he will rise again with those the Lord raises up.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Timothy J. Johnson, “Implied Antecedents in Job XL 2B and Proverbs III 6A,” 52 *VT* (2002): 280.

<sup>17</sup> H. B. Swete. *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902; rev. R.R. Ottley, 1914; repr., New York: KTAV, 1968), 256. See also Driver and Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1921), lxxi.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ziegler, *Iob* (Septuaginta; Vetus Testamentum Graeca; Vol 12.4; Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 412.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Claude Cox for generously offering his pre-published translation of LXX Job, which is to be published shortly in the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS) series. For information on this series see A. Pietersma, “Varia.” *BIOSCS* 31 (1998): 26-30.

Judith Baskin ascribes importance to the resurrection plus in 42:17, stating that it contributed to the “growth of the figure in popular legend.”<sup>20</sup>

Produced around the same time as the LXX, the scrolls discovered at Qumran reveal a puzzling, though perhaps telling, piece of evidence aligning Job with apocalypse. Fifteen texts found were written in the ancient paleo-Hebrew script, of which three belong to Job. As noted earlier, F. M. Cross thought it interesting that the Qumran community preserved Job in paleo-Hebrew and thought that it was “intriguing that Job’s importance was not forgotten in apocalyptic circles.”<sup>21</sup> All of the other clear texts employing paleo-Hebrew were from Torah, which is not hard to explain. Given the apocalyptic worldview characteristic of Qumran, it may be that Job was preserved alongside of Torah in paleo-Hebrew because of its latent apocalyptic characteristics.

Some time later, the Testament of Job (T. Job) emerged and also contains several apocalyptic elements. Scholarship generally recognizes that (T.Job) is reliant upon LXX Job and was produced somewhere within the 1<sup>st</sup> Century B.C.E and 1<sup>st</sup> Century C.E.<sup>22</sup> However, it also possible that T.Job influenced LXX Job or later versions of LXX Job.<sup>23</sup> Many apocalyptic characteristics are emphasized and expanded in the pseudepigraphal work T.Job. And yet, it is important to note that T.Job is one of a few works from the Testament corpus considered exclusively Jewish.<sup>24</sup> If the resurrection “addition” to LXX Job is considered a Christian redaction, one would have to explain

---

<sup>20</sup> Judith Baskin, Pharaoh’s Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition (Brown Judaic Studies 47; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 29.

<sup>21</sup> F. M. Cross, “New Directions in the Study of Apocalyptic,” JTC 6 (1969): 162-163.

<sup>22</sup> R. P. Spittler, “Testament of Job,” in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (ed. James H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1:831.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:831-833. Irving Jacobs, “Literary Motifs in the Testament of Job,” JJS 21 (1970): 1, notes that early research suggested a 75 B.C.E. date for the terminus ad quem. He notes also that some (R.H. Pfeiffer, History of the New Testament Times; London: 1949, 70) argued that T.Job actually preceded LXX Job.

<sup>24</sup> Collins, Apocalyptic Imagination, 128. Spittler, “Testament of Job,” 833, concurs.

why such a so-called corruption would remain in the Jewish T.Job.<sup>25</sup> If Jewish writers emphasized apocalyptic features in T.Job, it is even more likely that the story of Job at least lent itself to such an interpretation. For example, resurrection (4:9; 52:1-12), Satan's greater role in the story, angelic presence (chapters 2-5) and cosmic imagery (33:3; 47:3) contribute to an apocalyptic atmosphere. Important theological motifs of dualism (33:3-4, 8) and perseverance also weigh heavily in showing that T.Job bears significant apocalyptic features. On this last point, T.Job is even thought to resemble the literary style martyria, which was common to both Jewish and Christian writers.<sup>26</sup>

Collins also agrees with the apocalyptic nature of T.Job stating that it "shows certain affinities with Jewish apocalyptic. Job's interest in heavenly realities and the manner in which they support his endurance are typical of apocalyptic."<sup>27</sup> Collins cites examples such as individual eschatology, mediated revelations, a picture of heavenly Jerusalem and heavenly realities as indicative of apocalyptic.

There is only one explicit reference to the figure of Job in the New Testament,<sup>28</sup> which is found in James 5:11; "Indeed, we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

This verse closes a passage, James 5:1-11, which is commonly identified by scholars of James as one that contains multiple eschatological and apocalyptic elements.

The passage reads:

---

<sup>25</sup> Spittler acknowledges that "Christian editing is possible" but declares that "the work is essentially Jewish in character," 833.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs, 1. See also Cees Haas, "Job's Perseverance in the Testament of Job," Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series: Studies on the Testament of Job 66 (ed. Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. Van Der Horst; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 117-154.

<sup>27</sup> John J. Collins, "Structure and Meaning in the Testament of Job," SBLSP (1974): 49.

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.<sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten.<sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days.<sup>4</sup> Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.<sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.<sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming (παρουσίας) of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.<sup>8</sup> You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming (παρουσία) of the Lord is near.<sup>9</sup> Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!<sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

In the text given above, I have underlined several instances where eschatological and/or apocalyptic phrases clearly appear.<sup>29</sup> Patrick Hartin suggests that “eschatology provides the horizon for the letter’s paraenetical wisdom advice.” Beyond this, Hartin acknowledges that “James does share some of the thought patterns that are found in an apocalyptic worldview.”<sup>30</sup> In support of this contention, he identifies James’ knowledge

---

<sup>28</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, “St. Paul’s Quotations of the Book of Job,” *Theology* 53 (1950): 250-253, argues unconvincingly that Paul refers to Job in Romans 11:33-35 and Colossians 2:14.

<sup>29</sup> For a thoroughgoing investigation into an eschatological interpretation of James, see Todd C. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology: Re-reading an Ancient Christian Letter* (JSNT 121; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). Penner draws a distinction between apocalyptic and eschatology, the definitions of which, he contests, have become too blurred in recent research. But Penner’s resolution is merely a synchronic division, which considers eschatological anything referring to end times motifs appearing in Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament. Then he distinguishes between a “vertical” and “horizontal” eschatological feature without articulating how an apocalyptic account can be seen, 106-114.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick J. Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 11, 54-55 fn 51. See also Hartin’s, “Who is Wise and Understanding Among You?” (James 3:13): An Analysis of Wisdom, Eschatology, and Apocalypticism in the Epistle of James,” 494, where he suggests that James and his readers are “aware of the apocalyptic imagination.” See also, Douglas J. Moo, *James* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986): 43-44, James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 27 and Ralph Martin, *James* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1988), 197, who all point out the eschatological component. Additionally, Matt A. Jackson-McCabe identifies James as apocalypse via the presence of dualism as manifested between God and the world, “A Letter to the Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora: Wisdom and ‘Apocalyptic’ Eschatology in the Letter of James,” in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 504-517.

pertaining to devils (2:19); to the future judgment that separates good and evil (5:1-11); to the future judgment as slaughter (5:5); to the final Judge (5:9); and to the “crown of life” for those who remain perfect.<sup>31</sup>

That Job would be considered a paragon for an apocalyptic message suggests that his story may have been heuristically valuable for the eschatological/apocalyptic context underlying the message of James. Peter Davids connects the eschatology of James with the “world of intense apocalyptic expectancy” as found in Mark 13, Matthew 24-25, 2 Thessalonians 2 and the book of Revelation. He suggests that James’s recipients would easily recognize the “apocalyptic teaching” as part of the “basics of the faith.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, Job’s presence in this foundational teaching seems to indicate that Job, and his story, were associated with “apocalyptic” images by the community to which James was written.<sup>33</sup>

Since a primary message for apocalypses is to encourage communities to persevere in a hope for future reward, James and his audience considered the message of Job an example of writing that we now refer to as apocalypse. Zuckerman also suggests as much, “Thus, for the author of the Epistle of James, Job can be a paradigm, the perfect example of how to endure persecution and suffering.”<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Hartin, 54-55. Hartin does not suggest, however, that James should be considered an apocalypse. Instead, the eschatological and apocalyptic elements “function in the service of the protreptic discourse, and not as an end in themselves.”

<sup>32</sup> Peter H. Davids, The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 39. Davids is also careful to note that eschatology is not the “burden” of the book, but is instead the context. This in no way detracts from the importance of Job in this eschatological context. Particularly intriguing is Davids’s suggestion that early church resistance to James may have been due to its eschatology, which seemed to be why the book of Revelation received similar treatment from the early church.

<sup>33</sup> Regardless of the dating one holds for James, this community is clearly one that follows Qumran and precedes much of the early Christian pseudepigraphal writing emerging after the apostolic period. See Reicke, 5-6, who suggests 90 C. E. is the most appropriate date, while Moo contends an earlier date of 45-48 C. E. is closer to the mark, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Zuckerman, Job the Silent, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 33.

In still later traditions such as the Apocalypse of Paul, Job is cast in apocalyptic imagery, which continues the trend. It seems that the suffering of Job results in fewer challenges to God than one might associate with MT Job, instead, tradition increasingly emphasizes Job's virtuous perseverance.

### **Reading of Job**

Given both the eschatological readings and the prominence of perseverance that tradition associates with the story of Job, perseverance during persecution might play a larger role in Job than is typically acknowledged. Such a theme is central to apocalyptic notions. David Noel Freedman states:

In times of crisis, as we know, apocalyptic becomes more relevant: it offers to the faithful hope for despair, courage for weakness, certainty for doubt, commitment for vacillation, and assurance about the nature and destiny of man in the cosmos.<sup>35</sup>

While space does not allow a complete reading of Job through apocalyptic eyes, I will offer a brief outline of what a proto-apocalyptic reading of Job might entail.

Treating Job as proto-apocalyptic, I suggest that a broad literary structure that is based on the revelations is more appropriate.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, dividing Job in this way yields a structure that is similar to traditional outlines. Thus, I offer the following broad outline:

---

<sup>35</sup> David Noel Freedman, "The Flowering of Apocalyptic," JTC 6 (1969): 174. Earlier, 166, he offers that the apocalyptic literature mirrored

sharply the vicissitudes of the Jewish community during that period of unusual instability and upheaval in the Near East (in marked contrast with the preceding Achaemenid and Ptolemaic periods of comparative tranquility); similarly, they brought a message of hope and comfort, of courage and strength, and above all of zeal in the Lord.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond E. Brown divides the book of Revelation broadly in somewhat similar fashion; Prologue (1:1-3); Letters to the Seven Churches (1:4-3:22), Part I of the Revelatory Experience (4:1-11:19), Part II of the Revelatory Experience (12:1-22:5), Epilogue (With Concluding Blessing) (22:6-21), An Introduction to the

Job 1 -- 4:11	Job's Demise and Challenge
4:12 – 28:22	Revelation of Humanity's Unrighteousness: Job Persecuted
28:23 – 37:24	Revelation of Humanity's Lack of Wisdom: Job Encouraged
38:1 – 42:17	Revelation of Humanity's Powerlessness: Job Rescued

In the first section the Satan reveals the primary storyline. Before the presence of God, the Satan suggests that Job fears God for nothing, and twice he asserts that Job “will curse you to your face” (1:11, 2:5). The reader then wonders about Job’s true loyalty and whether or not he will actually curse God to his face. Job’s wife immediately initiates the “earthly” attempt to influence Job by insisting that Job “curse God and die.” In Job’s rebuke, it is not insignificant that the writer states that, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10).<sup>37</sup> Job’s self-lamentation in chapter three only heightens the reader’s curiosity since Job comes precariously close to actually cursing God, but even if one argues that Job does somehow curse God, it is not “to his face.”

The arrival of the friends signals the beginning of the second section, which formally begins with Eliphaz’s revelation. Eliphaz intimates that the message of the vision was for Job, never considering that he, the actual recipient, was perhaps the intended recipient of the message, namely, that mortals are not righteous before God. God’s reproof in the epilogue seems to confirm this possibility.

The cycle of three speeches then serve as an intense period of persecution for Job. In the midst of his suffering, he steadfastly resists the friends’ insistence that he has done something to merit his egregious suffering. If the friends are able to convince Job that he

---

New Testament (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 780-795. He further subdivides the larger sections into more manageable units.

has done something wrong, even though he has not, the Satan will be proven correct. Instead, Job maintains his integrity, challenging God to be sure, but he ultimately never repudiates God. Still, his severe level of questioning continues the plot, and the reader wonders if given the chance, whether Job might actually curse God to his face.

Commonly considered a later addition, chapter 28 actually reveals divine wisdom in such a way as to encourage Job, who knows that humans, including himself, but especially his friends, are not capable of understanding God. He is therefore encouraged all the more to pursue a meeting with God. Job's ensuing lamentation and self-justification in chapters 29-31 indicate a repeating of the overall literary pattern of the story, which is concluded with Elihu's questioning. Elihu therefore represents the Satan's last "earthly" chance to persuade Job to admit of some sinful act, which again, would suggest that Job had served God for his own gain thereby proving the Satan correct.

The whirlwind speeches mark the final revelation that completes the suffering and persecution that Job has experienced from the Satan, his wife, the three friends, Elihu and himself. Thus, God's intervention into the events ultimately rescues Job from the Satan's overall schemes. Most importantly, the speeches provide the opportunity for Job to curse God to his face, which is the moment that the reader has been anticipating. But instead of cursing God to his face, Job actually repents and blesses God.

In the epilogue, Eliphaz, the recipient of the night vision, is singled out for judgment evidently because he is viewed as the leader of the three uninformed friends. Job's wife is not mentioned, but Job rebuked her earlier. The Satan is implicitly reprovved because Job's perseverance is complete.

---

<sup>37</sup> Underline added.

Thus, on the one hand, Job did not capitulate to his friends' persecution and falsely repent of some sin. On the other hand, he did not, in fact, curse God to his face. Thus, Job perseveres in both the earthly and spiritual persecution preserving both his integrity and fidelity to God.

## Setting

Much has been said regarding the probably setting from which the biblical story of Job emerged. According to Ellen Davis, the story of Job seems to concentrate on Job's personal struggle to develop into a more worthy man of integrity. And while Job is the individual struggling, he is also "Israel in exile: radically alienated from God, and yet unable to separate himself from this God who seems bent on destroying him."<sup>38</sup> Davis' remark that "Job is Israel in exile" is intriguing. Blenkinsopp seems to share her position and also considers the Captivity as a probable setting. "The likelihood is increased that the book deals with the crisis not just of an individual but of the nation."<sup>39</sup> Cross also holds this position first by establishing that the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. served as the origin for apocalyptic because of the "catastrophe of the exile," where the crisis led to the collapse or transformation of Israel's institution."<sup>40</sup> Cross points out that Job was a new voice that "attacked the central theme of Israel's religion," and ultimately "brings the ancient religion of Israel to an end."<sup>41</sup> The catastrophe lead "proto-apocalyptists" to "salvage the ancient faith, but in new forms," where "Job was a major force in the evolution of Israel's

---

<sup>38</sup> Ellen F. Davis, "Job and Jacob: The Integrity of Faith," in *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* (ed. Stephen L. Cook, Corrine L. Patton and James W. Watts; JSOTS 336; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 101, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (OBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 57.

<sup>40</sup> Frank Moore Cross, "New Directions," 161.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

religion.”<sup>42</sup> It is at this point in Cross’s argument that he expresses his intrigue with the fact that “Job’s importance was not forgotten in apocalyptic circles.”<sup>43</sup>

The exile then seems to offer the most appropriate setting from which the biblical story of Job emerged. Given the possible development of proto-apocalyptic impulses, it is not unwarranted to suggest that Job was influenced by these nascent forms of apocalypse during Israel’s crisis. The biblical story of Job may actually represent a text that is crafted in this proto-apocalyptic milieu.

## **Conclusion**

I have claimed that Job contains sufficient evidence to warrant a new designation of “proto-apocalyptic.” Quite recently, Ben Witherington III acknowledged as much:

[Job] also shares something of the apocalyptic perspective we find in books of the Bible like Ezekiel and Daniel. This worldview in essence asserts--there are many things wrong with the world, which humans themselves cannot remedy, but God still cares for his people and in the end God will personally intervene and set things right. This seems to be the perspective of the author of Job.<sup>44</sup>

More research is required to further establish this point, but I hope to have at least demonstrated that Job contains sufficient literary features to be included in the corpus of works that display the intersection of wisdom and apocalypticism.

Above all, Job offers encouragement to those in distress. In the new post 9-11 world order where fear is routinely used by a militantly fringe expression of Islam, the reverence that Job receives in all three of the great Abrahamic faiths might serve to remind us that the more traditionally peaceful expressions of Judaism, Christianity and

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ben Witherington III refers to Howard Dean in “Long Suffering Job: Does the Book of Job Have a Happy Ending?”, n.p. [cited 8 Jan 2004]. Online: [http://www.beliefnet.org/story/138/story\\_13817.html](http://www.beliefnet.org/story/138/story_13817.html).

Islam are better ways to ground our mutual desire to live in harmony with one another. For that matter, as a decidedly non-Israelite figure, the story of Job is capable of crossing many other religious and cultural barriers as well. In this universal context, the book of Job will always be relevant and mined for the endless lessons it holds.

## APPENDIX

### Society of Biblical Literature's Genres Project<sup>45</sup>

#### Definition of Apocalypse

“Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”

#### Master Paradigm

##### Manner of Revelation

1. Medium by which the revelation is communicated
  - 1.1 Visual revelation in the form of:
    - 1.1.1 Visions, or
    - 1.1.2 Epiphanies (describing apparition of mediator)
  - 1.2 Auditory revelation usually clarifies the visual by:
    - 1.2.1 Discourse (uninterrupted speech by mediator), or
    - 1.2.2 Dialogue (between mediator and recipient)
  - 1.3 Otherworldly journey (heaven, hell, remote places)
  - 1.4 Writing (revelation contained in written document)
2. Otherworldly mediator communicates revelation
3. The human recipient
  - 3.1 Pseudonymity
  - 3.2 Disposition of recipient (circumstances, emotions)
  - 3.3 Reaction of recipient (often awe and/or perplexity)

---

<sup>45</sup> John J. Collins, ed., Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre (Semeia 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

## Content of Revelation: Temporal Axis

4. Protology (pre-history or beginning of history)
  - 4.1 Theogony and/or Cosmogony (origin of God/Pleroma, and/or cosmos)
  - 4.2 Primordial events having paradigmatic significance
5. History, viewed as:
  - 5.1 Explicit recollection of the past, or
  - 5.2 Ex Eventu prophecy
6. Present salvation through knowledge (in Gnostic texts)
7. Eschatological crisis, in the form of:
  - 7.1 Persecution, and/or
  - 7.2 Other eschatological upheavals (disturbing the order of nature or history)
8. Eschatological judgment and/or destruction upon:
  - 8.1 The wicked, or the ignorant (in Gnostic texts)
  - 8.2 The natural world
  - 8.3 Otherworldly beings
9. Eschatological salvation, may involve:
  - 9.1 Cosmic transformation (renewal of entire world)
  - 9.2 Personal salvation
    - 9.2.1 Resurrection in bodily form, or
    - 9.2.2 Other forms of afterlife (such as exaltation to heaven with angels)

## Content of Revelation: Spatial Axis

10. Otherworldly elements
  - 10.1 Otherworldly regions (described usually in otherworldly journeys)

## 10.2 Otherworldly beings (angelic or demonic)

### Paraenesis

#### 11. Paraenesis (by mediator to the recipient)

### Concluding Elements

#### 12. Instructions to the recipient

#### 13. Narrative conclusion