BRILL

Biblical Interpretation 17 (2009) 320-361

Biblical Interpretation

brill.nl/bi

Seeing is Believing: On the Relative Priority of Visual and Verbal Perception of the Divine

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Abstract

In comparing the modes of perception of the divine in the Bible, one finds a clear preference for hearing the word of God. The idea of seeing God in a variety of different manifestations is noticeably present, but is generally seen as less important than auditory perception. In theophany narratives this is often expressed in the order of events—a visual manifestation is followed by some spoken word of God. However, in a number of cases where seeing and hearing are both present, seeing is presented as the preferable mode. This dynamic is explored in three texts. In Exod. 24:1-11 seeing is contrasted with the reading of the Book of the Covenant to the people in order to bring out the superior nature of the experience of Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders. In Num. 22 Balaam first hears from God twice in night auditions, but seeing the angel of the Lord in a daytime manifestation brings home the message to him in a way that the spoken word did not. In a somewhat different fashion, Job's ideas about seeing God are contrasted with the attitude of the friends toward direct revelation. This distinction points to the significance of his statement in 42:5 about the superiority of seeing God to hearing. Job's statement here is not intended to describe a vision of God, but rather an appreciation of the perspective of the divine which Job did not possess prior to the whirlwind theophany.

Keywords

theophany, seeing, hearing, Job

While the sensory perception of the divine in the Bible may engage the full range of human senses, seeing and hearing are mentioned far more than any other agency.[1] At times these modes of reception blend

[1] See the extensive study of the modes of perception in the Bible by Meir Malul,

DOI: 10.1163/156851508X302042

together, indicating the permeability of the boundaries between various sensory experiences. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the apparent synesthesia at Sinai: "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking" (Exod. 20:18).[2] While "to see" may connote a more general sense of perceiving,[3] in this case the text seems to indicate simultaneous sensory awareness.[4] The interrelationship of (and the difficulty of drawing clear lines between) the audial and the visual of verbal prophecy and visionary experience, reveals a basic truth of biblical religious experience. Contact with the divine is often described by invoking a variety of modes of expression, all of which are but limited approximations of the experience. On the one hand the aniconic tradition gives the impression that God will not tolerate being confined to a single static image. Yet at the same time the Bible abounds in descriptions of the divine "body," however that may be conceived.[5]

Knowledge, Control, and Sex: Studies in Biblical Thought, Culture and Worldview, (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 2002). Malul tends to focus on the legal and anthropological aspects of perception rather than on the theological and literary ramifications which will concern us here. While seeing and hearing are by far the most common ways of perceiving the divine (Malul, pp. 144-151), taste is invoked only in a metaphorical sense in Ps. 34:9 ("O Taste and see that the Lord is good") or in Ps. 119:103 ("How pleasing is your word to my palate, sweeter than honey"); cf. Malul, p. 130. Smell is recalled primarily in relation to the cult with reference to the ריח ניחוח (but cf. also Is. 11:3 and I. Ritchie, "The Nose Knows: Bodily Knowing in Is. 11:3," *JSOT* 87 [2000], pp. 59-73). There is also occasional touching by the divine, as in Jacob's fight with the angel in Gen. 32:24-32, and YHWH touching Jeremiah's mouth in Jer. 1:9. Cf. G. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 81-2.

2) See Malul, *Knowledge, Sex, and Control*, p. 424.

3) Cf. *HALOT* s.v. ראה; *TDOT* vol. 13, pp. 214-16.

4) Cf. Ibn Ezra ad loc.; M. Carasik, "To See a Sound: A Deuteronomic Rereading of Exodus 20:15," *Prooftexts* 19 (1999), pp. 262. In his fuller discussion of seeing and hearing (*Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel*, [New York: Peter Lang, 2006], pp. 32-43.), Carasik argues persuasively that "seeing was so basic that it was used as a metaphor" (43). While I would not argue with this basic insight, in the texts to be discussed below "seeing God" seems to be understood as having a literal sense as well.

5) On the aniconic tradition see T.N.D. Mettinger, "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins," in K. van der Toorn (ed.), *The Image and the Book* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), pp. 173-204; J. Kugel, *The God of Old* (New York: Free Press, 2003),

Taken together, the double tradition of invisibility and palpable presence highlights the ambivalence of the biblical writers about representing God. The lack of consistency in biblical descriptions of theophany is in itself an indication of the limitations of language to capture the experience. Yet, despite this ambiguity, there is no small significance in the language chosen to represent this event. And when the Bible does distinguish clearly between visual and verbal perception of the divine, it seeks to indicate something about the nature of the encounter itself. It is not accidental that the narrator of Exod. 20:18 did not say that "all the people *heard* the thundering and the lightnings," but deliberately chose a verb of seeing to describe the people's impression of the Sinai theophany.

In the realm of general perception, most biblical texts describe a dynamic tension between seeing and hearing, the two modes combining to complement and complete one another. In narrative texts, for example, Laban's hearing and seeing in Gen. 24:30 taken together convince him of the importance of inviting the unknown servant to his home. In 2 Kgs. 19:16 (Isa. 37:17) YHWH is implored to incline his ear *and* open his eyes. And in 2 Kgs. 20:5 (Isa. 38:5) Isaiah tells Hezekiah that YHWH has both heard his prayer and seen his tears and will therefore grant him longevity. In poetic texts, seeing and hearing are often parallel, with no preference for one over the other as illustrated by these examples from Isaiah:[6]

Isa. 11:3 He shall not judge by what his eyes behold
Nor decide by what his ears perceive

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pp. 71-107. On the physical presence of the divine see J. Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," *VTS* 7 (1960), pp. 31-38; M.S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 86-93, and Benjamin Sommer's forthcoming book *God's Bodies: Recovering a Lost Theology from Ancient Israel*.

6) Cf. Is. 33:19; 37:17; 42:18; 42:20; 52:15; 64:3; 66:8; 66:19; Jer. 4:21; 5:21; 42:14; Ezek. 12:2; 40:4; 44:5; Ps. 45:11; 48:9; Prov. 20:12; Song 2:12; 2:14; Lam 1:18; Qoh. 1:8; Dan. 9:18; Job 13:1; 29:11. The exceptional number of cases in Isaiah in relation to the motif of hardening the heart has been studied by J.L. McLaughlin, "Their Hearts Were Hardened: The Use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Book of Isaiah," *Biblica* 75 (1994), pp. 1-25.

Isa. 21:3 I am gripped by pangs like a woman in travail
too anguished to hear, too frightened to see

Isa. 33:15 He who stops his ears against listening to infamy
Shuts his eyes against looking at evil

By contrast, in theophany narratives seeing God and hearing God are usually described as two separate events. While certain texts speak unequivocally of a primary visual experience of the divine with no verbal element attached (e.g. Exod. 24:9-11, but see below), discrete descriptions of both modes of perception are more common.[7] Here we find a normative pattern of initial seeing, followed by hearing. The divine is first glimpsed or perceived in some visual manifestation—a dream, a *mal'akh*,[8] a chariot, or a throne—which is followed by a ver-

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7) E.g. Gen. 28:10-22; Exod. 3:1-6; Jud. 6:11-24; 13:2-25. Cf. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 49-89. One can trace the development of a clear preference for hearing rather than seeing the divine, see H.J. Kraus, "Horen und sehen in der althebräischen Tradition," *Biblisch-theologische Aufsätze* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), pp. 84-101. This is most pronounced in the polemical statements in Deut. 4:12, 15-19 and in the Deuteronomic recasting of the Sinai experience as an exclusively audial encounter. See Stephen Geller's insightful discussion of this dynamic in *Sacred Enigmas*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 30-61; and its role in the development of what he calls "new wisdom" in Deut. 4, which privileges hearing over seeing. This can also be observed quite clearly in the prophetic literature, in the relatively few visual encounters (visions, etc.) in comparison with the overwhelming number of verbal oracles which attest to no visual component. While visual experiences, particularly in the form of visions, continue to occur in post-exilic literature, the dependence on audial explanation of those visions in texts like Zech. 4:1-14 and Daniel 10:1-12:3 attest to the growing significance of the verbal, to the point where it becomes the preferred form of revelation in rabbinic literature. Visual experience continues to occur occasionally in rabbinic literature but finds its expression more fully in early mystical texts. Cf. E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 33-51.

8) In the texts to be addressed here I will not draw a sharp distinction between the perception of a *mal'akh YHWH* and that of YHWH, as there is much evidence that early biblical writers themselves did not see such a pointed contrast between the two. See for example the situations described in Gen. 18:1-15 and in Jud. 6:11-24 where there is an unpredictable shift from the representation of YHWH in human-like form (Abraham's visitors, Gideon's *mal'akh YHWH*) to the presence of YHWH himself. While the situation is not entirely straightforward, von Rad may well have been on the right track in seeing the *mal'akh YHWH* as a subjective manifestation of YHWH

bal message which spells out the meaning and purpose of the theophany. Thus Jacob's dream in Gen. 28:10-22 begins with the visual perception of a ladder, angels, and of YHWH, and is followed by an oracle describing YHWH's intentions for Jacob. In Exod. 3:1-6 Moses sees a *mal'akh YHWH,* here indistinguishable from the fire in the bush; only subsequently is he addressed by God directly in words. Gideon (Judg. 6:11-24) and Manoah's wife (Judg. 13:1-24) see a *mal'akh YHWH* in human form, who then gives them explicit instructions concerning the future. While hearing and seeing are described consecutively as separate actions, they are brought together in order to represent the fullness of the encounter with the divine.

In each of the above cases seeing and hearing are clearly complementary, describing two distinct modes of perception of the divine which have been brought together to convey more of the fullness of the theophanic experience. But the diachronic relationship between the two, the order in which they occur, is itself highly significant. While the fact that seeing precedes hearing in these narratives may be simply a result of narrative sequencing,[9] it creates the impression that the visual element serves as an introduction to the divine word. In certain cases it may well be a reflex of the anthropomorphic representation of the Deity. Like a human visitor who appears on the scene before he speaks, he is apprehended first by sight. Thus, in Judg. 6:11, Gideon is accosted by a *mal'akh YHWH*, whom he takes to be a human visitor. Only subsequently in 6:14 does YHWH appear[10] and speak, giving the impression that the human form of the *mal'akh* serves as an

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on earth, and not as a fully separable entity. See G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; San Francisco: Harper, 1962), vol. 1, p. 287, n. 13, and the discussion in Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, p. 65 and the literature cited there in 76.

9) The paratactic connection between these two elements is generally more implicit than explicit, as in the question of just how YHWH's message to Jacob in Gen. 28:13-15 is dependent upon the vision of the ladder and the angels. In theophany narratives there is generally no explicit statement that the verbal element is dependent upon the visual, although in some cases this seems most likely—see my discussion of this in *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 49-89.

10) Insofar as the word וּיֵּפֶן indicates appearance. Cf. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, p. 128.

introduction to divine speech. A similar course of events occurs in Gen. 18:1-15, where Abraham's three visitors are first encountered visually and are taken to be human—at least until the divine speech in 18:10.[11] Initial seeing is also associated with a sense of awakening, and serves to startle the protagonist and to arouse perception. The primary purpose of the *mal'akh YHWH* which appears in Exod. 3:2 in conjunction with the burning bush is to attract Moses' attention. The visual introduction excites Moses' curiosity, and this leads to divine speech and to a more intimate dialogue with YHWH, which lays out the boundaries of the relationship between Moses and the divine.[12] In these cases seeing is an essential first step, which opens the way for subsequent deepening of the experience by means of hearing.

Yet another explanation for the sequence of seeing followed by hearing is the need for explication. In order to take in the significance of the object which has been glimpsed there often must be clarification, and this is best accomplished through words. The meaning of an initial vision is often not self-evident, and the details of the message necessitate verbal clarification in order to convey the central import of the theophany. For example, the chariot vision which precedes Ezekiel's call to prophecy is open to different symbolic interpretations. W. Zimmerli sees the vision as exemplifying "the freedom of the divine appearing in an unclean land," while Moshe Greenberg finds in it proof of

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11) This may also be the case with Hagar's angelic interlocutor in Gen. 16:7ff. Her reaction in 16:13 indicates that at some point she has become aware of the presence of the divine as a result of the speech of the *mal'akh YHWH.*

12) Eichrodt derives certain theological conclusions from this developmental model, namely that the visual element is a residue of an earlier, more primitive stage of the religion, a stage which is succeeded by the revelation of a more abstract, non-corporeal deity. See W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J.A. Baker; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), vol. 2, p. 23. While this theory is often taken as normative, it is by no means unchallenged, as Wolfson has argued convincingly with regard to the continued visual manifestation of the deity in post-biblical literature would indicate. Cf. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 23-33. See also my discussion of this question in *Encountering the Divine*, p. 99, where I argue that YHWH's address to Moses in Exod. 3:4ff. could not have taken place without the prior visual encounter in 3:2-3.

YHWH's support for a discouraged prophet.[13] But YHWH's negative description of the people in the subsequent commissioning of the prophet intimates that what might have been seen as an optimistic token—a sign that the exiles in Babylon are not completely cut off from YHWH—takes on a much more ominous cast.[14] The need for verbal explication of the visual is especially noticeable in prophetic texts, where receiving and transmitting an oracle constitutes the central aspect of the prophet's work. Here the spoken message of YHWH assumes greater importance, and the visual usually receives a less prominent place. Prophetic visions rarely stand alone and are most often accompanied by explanatory texts. The visions of Jeremiah 1—the almond branch and the bubbling pot—demonstrate the need for verbal explication of what has been seen.[15] Perhaps the most salient example of this is to be found in the visions of Zechariah, where the prophet is unable to interpret the visions he sees without the assistance of his angelic interlocutor.[16] All these texts contribute to what eventually becomes the dominant biblical position: hearing is to be the primary mode of perceiving the divine, as reflected most clearly in the Deuteronomic retelling of the Sinai theophany, and especially in Deut. 4. In this text, which represents a later stage in the give and take between the

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13) W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1-2* (trans. R.E. Clements; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), vol. 1, p. 140; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 80.

14) See the detailed treatment of the issue in L. Allen, "The Structure and Intention of Ezekiel I," *VT* 43 (1993), pp. 145-161; also see my discussion of the similes in Ezek. 1:24-28 in *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 56-58.

15) On prophetic visions see J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), pp. 122-137; B.O. Long, "Reports of Visions among the Prophets," *JBL* 95 (1976), pp. 353-365, and S. Niditch, *The Symbolic Vision in Biblical Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

16) A striking reversal of this understanding of the modes of seeing and hearing, which is indicative of just how central hearing becomes in later Judaism, can be seen in the interpretation of Exod. 20:15 by Judah ben Barzillai: "When the voice emerged [at Sinai] they were able to look and gaze upon the light that was in the end [of the glory]." (*Perush Sefer Yeṣirah*, p. 49). That is to say, because they had heard the voice, they were then able to see the manifestation of the divine. See the discussion of this in Wolfson, *Through A Speculum*, p. 160.

audial and the visual, seeing is actually negated in favor of hearing in order to combat the very possibility of idolatry.[17]

Seeing, however, is not always overtaken by hearing, for sometimes the visual experience stands alone. This is true in the case of those psalms which speak of seeing God with no reference to hearing, as in Ps.17:15: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."[18] Texts like Pss. 27:4, 42:3, and 63:3 may well imply a cultic setting, but such a context is not inimical to a religious experience of unique power at the sanctuary. Likewise, however we understand the cultic demand to see (or be seen by) God at the sanctuary in Exod. 23:15, 34:20 and Deut. 16:16, there is no mention of a verbal element which accompanied the seeing.[19] In still other cases the verbal element is present, but it lacks the intensity of the visual encounter. In Exod. 33:12-23, Moses' dialogue with YHWH about the fate of Israel is followed by his request "Let me behold your Presence." Here the appeal to a visual experience raises the contact between Moses and YHWH to a new level, for the denial of

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17) See the discussion in S. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, pp. 39-49. In a similar vein, Ed Greenstein has drawn my attention to "the move from divination by *urim* and *thummim*, where the yes-no replies are discerned by vision, to prophecy, where God tends to speak (private communication)."

18) Compare also Pss. 11:7; 17:15; 27:4; 42:3; 63:3. While Ps. 50 describes the visual aspects of theophany followed by quotation of the divine voice, Ps. 11 offers no divine oracle, contrasting divine seeing in heaven (vv. 4-6) with the righteous seeing God in v. 7. See further M.S. Smith, "Seeing God" in the Psalms: The Background to the Beatific Vision in the Bible," *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 171-183; J.D. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), Vol. 1, pp. 32-61. On the other hand, the presence of oracular elements in certain psalms seems to indicate both that a verbal experience of the divine may have been part of cultic worship. See the discussion in R. J. Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp. 160-198.

19) Although MT understands "be seen" here, a majority of scholarly opinion supports reading the verb in the *qal* conjugation as "to see." The phrase recalls the Akkadian expression *amaru pan ili*, "to see the face of the god," which refers to visiting a sanctuary. Cf. B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. 451; J.H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society, 1996), p. 159; M.S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 101-102.

this request points to an experience of much greater intensity than simply hearing the divine voice.[20] In Num. 12:8, it is Moses' exceptional ability to see YHWH face to face which is indicative of his unique status. Here also we find the visual and the verbal brought together—"With him I speak mouth to mouth....and he beholds the likeness of the Lord"—but it is the visual which makes Moses' relations with YHWH unequaled. In the account of covenant-making in Gen. 15, YHWH clarifies the promise to Abraham by means of the vision of the burning torch passing between the pieces in a manner which anticipates YHWH leading Israel out of Egypt through the split halves of the sea.[21] After Abraham doubted YHWH's promises, it is only by means of seeing that the point is brought home.[22] Here seeing is believing, in a way which anticipates the response of Israel at the Reed Sea in Exod. 14:31: "And Israel saw the wondrous power [literally "hand"] which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD, and in His servant Moses."

It is precisely because of the intensity of the visual encounter with the divine that the lethal potential of this experience is nearly always expressed in terms of seeing.[23] After Jacob's physical encounter with his angelic adversary in Gen. 32:24-32 he exclaims, "I have seen God face to face and remained alive!" In Exod. 24:11, after Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders "saw the God of Israel" on Mt. Sinai,

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[20] The visual intensity of Moses' experience is mitigated in the reacted form of this theophany in Exod. 33-34 as a result of the intermingling of the verbal and the visual. In 34:5-6a YHWH descends and passes by (though no visual element is described), but the climactic moment of the theophany is YHWH proclaiming his attributes to Moses in 34:6b-8. On the redaction of the pericope as a whole see the discussion in R.W.L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983), pp. 182-86; Childs, *Exodus*, p. 610.

[21] Note the use of גזרים in Gen. 15:17 and in Ps. 136:13.

[22] This is true in both halves of the chapter—seeing the stars in 15:5, and seeing the flaming torch in 15:17. On the structure of the chapter cf. F. Polak, "*Genesis 15, Theme and Structure*," in Y. Avishur, J. Blau (eds.), *Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Rubenstein, 1978), pp. 319-27 (Hebrew).

[23] Exod. 20 and Deut. 5 are the exceptions to this, where the people's fear is framed as a reaction to hearing the divine voice. See the discussion of this in Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 190-203.

we are told that "He did not send forth his hand" against them, as might have been anticipated. Isaiah is convinced that he is marked for certain death for having glimpsed YHWH enthroned in the heavenly temple (Is. 6:5). And in Exod. 33:20 YHWH states unequivocally that "no person can see me and live." Divine incomparability and human frailty being what they are, seeing God is understood here as metonymic for the most powerful and intimate contact with the divine which the Bible can admit to.[24]

It is thus clear that there are instances in which the divine is apprehended in its plenitude primarily by the sense of sight, and in which the verbal element is secondary at best.[25] I would like to explore the literary dynamics of the language of seeing God as described in different ways in three texts. In the first, Exod. 24:1-11, the verbal element is absent entirely, or more precisely, speaking is relegated to a secondary scene. In the second instance, Num. 22:2-35, we find a reversal of the order of speech and seeing which upsets the usual pattern, for Balaam first speaks with YHWH and only subsequently gets a glimpse of the divine in the form of a *mal'akh YHWH.* The final instance is Job's statement about the superiority of seeing God to hearing (Job 42:5), where the sense of seeing God is of a somewhat different cast.

A. Exodus 24:1-11

This is one of the few theophany narratives in which YHWH does not speak during the theophany itself. In fact only part of the narrative deals with theophany; there is a clear scholarly consensus about the editing of this text, distinguishing between vv. 1-2, 9-11 (the theophany) and vv. 3-8 (the covenant ceremony).[26] The theophany recounts how Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 elders ascend Mt Sinai for the purpose of worship, while the covenant ceremony details a

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24) On the connection between the prohibition against seeing the divine and making images of the divine form see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 24-28.

25) See, for example, the comment of the Queen of Sheba about Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kgs. 10:7—"I didn't believe the [verbal] reports until I came and saw with my own eyes." Cf. also Gen. 45:27 and Ps. 48:9.

26) Childs, *Exodus*, p. 500; T.B. Dozeman, *God on the Mountain* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 106ff.

public reading of the book of the covenant and the ritual sprinkling of blood upon the people. The depiction of the theophany in vv. 9-11 is unlike any other, both in its description of what they saw and in the actions which accompany the experience ("They saw God; they ate and they drank").[27] The intensity of the encounter is emphasized in 24:10 by recounting their immediate view of the deity ("They saw the God of Israel") followed by a description of the heavenly throne ("a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven in purity"). To this is added a statement of what did not happen to them—their lives were spared by YHWH (24:11). As mentioned above, the lethal element is attributed not to the subjective viewpoint of the characters but to the authoritative narrator as a further intensification the power of the experience. While the motif of the lethal quality of the encounter is found in a number of narratives, in each case it points to the uniqueness of the experience, indicating that *this time only* their lives were spared.[28]

Taken by themselves these elements would be sufficient to bring out the superiority of seeing to hearing, but there is an additional factor. The interweaving of the theophany account with the covenant ceremony in 24:3-8 adds a further perspective to the text.[29] In contrast to the critical consensus on the pericope, it has been argued that it is pos-

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27) For different interpretations of this act cf. Dozeman, *God on the Mountain*, p. 113; Smith, *Pilgrimage Pattern*, p. 241; Childs, *Exodus*, p. 507.

28) E.g. Gen. 16:13; 32:30; Exod. 33:20; Judg. 6:22;13:22; Isa. 6:5; Cf. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp.190-203. The intensity of the experience emerges even more sharply when compared to the initiation of the 70 elders in Num. 11. There, too, one finds a divine encounter, but it is far less direct than Exod. 24. There is no indication of ascent or of a visual experience, only of a spirit descending upon Moses, and through him, to the elders.

29) For discussion of Exod. 24:1-11 cf. T.W. Mann, *Divine Presence and Divine Guidance in Israelite Traditions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 154-56; E.W. Nicholson, "The Antiquity of the Tradition in Exodus XXIV 9-11," *VT* 25 (1975), pp. 69-79; Idem, "The Interpretation of Exodus XXIV 9-11," *VT* 24 (1974), pp. 77-94; Idem, "The Origin of the Tradition in Exodus XXIV 9-11," *VT* 26 (1976), pp. 148-160; T.C. Vriezen, "The Exegesis of Exodus xxiv 9-11," *OTS* 17 (1972), pp. 100-133; Dozeman, *God on the Mountain*, pp. 106ff.; C. Houtman, *Exodus* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), vol. 3, p. 281ff.; T.D. Alexander, "The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exod. 19:1-24:11," *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 2-20. Most recently, see the analysis of 24:1-11 by J.A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 113-137.

sible to read the chapter as a continuous account: Moses receives instructions (vv. 1-2) conducts a covenant with the people (vv. 3-8) and then ascends the mountain as per the earlier instructions (vv. 9-11). When read in this way the chapter becomes an account of "different stages in a series of ascents up the mountain"[30] with Moses as the central character. But the details of the covenant ceremony clearly interrupt the narrative of ascent. There is nothing in the instructions given to Moses in vv. 1-2 which anticipates this ceremony,[31] which in and of itself disturbs the narrative flow of the text. Whatever the editor's intention may have been in combining these two traditions in this way,[32] the result is a heightened contrast between the two sections of the narrative. The theophany is an elite experience of the divine, a visual encounter in which a chosen few are placed in great danger by their proximity to the divine, yet enjoy a extraordinary event. In the covenant ceremony, on the other hand, the people simply hear Moses read from the Book of the Covenant, which is understood variously as the Decalogue, the laws of Exod. 21-23, or a summary of the terms of the covenant.[33] While the Bible may consider the material which he proclaims to be divine in origin, it is read aloud by Moses, and not recited by YHWH. Spatially, the distance between the two experiences could not be greater: the people are at the foot of Sinai, while Moses and company ascend the mountain. There may be a symbolic connection between the people's initiation into covenant by the sprinkling of the blood and the elders' eating and drinking,[34] but the experience of

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30) Childs, *Exodus*, p. 502. Cf. also M. Buber, *Moses*, (New York: Harper, 1958), pp. 114-118; U. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1952), pp. 216-218.

31) In fact, in 24:2 the people are explicitly excluded.

32) It would have made more sense to relate the events of vv. 1-2, 9-11 together, followed by (or preceded by) vv. 3-8. Thus Moses could have been seen to perform one task, and then the other. But in the present editorial framework we have little choice but to read the two pericopae in a contrasting fashion.

33) Childs, *Exodus*, p. 505 understands it as referring to Sinaitic law (so too Ibn Ezra); Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 218 sees here a precis of the terms of the covenant (cf. also Hizquni ad loc). Rashi, on the other hand, prefers to see here a reference to the biblical account from creation through Exod. 18.

34) Cf. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, pp. 134-35, who argues for such an equivalence, maintains that the 70 elders stand in for the people here. However one views the

Moses and the elders is far more intense and intimate; they partake, where the people are merely the bearers of the blood sacrifice. In contrast to the lethal element in 24:11, there is no danger attached to the people's experience, since there is less proximity to the divine. Finally, the envelope structure of the section, with the theophany framing the popular experience, highlights the lack of congruence between the two sections.

Exod. 24:1-11 makes a clear statement about the superiority of seeing over hearing—in terms of the experience of the leaders, the relative proximity to the divine, and the contrast between the singular experience of seeing with the more ritualized behavior of reading the words of the Book of the Covenant to the people and the sprinkling of the blood.[35] In spite of the fact that no verbal message is attached to this theophany, the redaction of the entire pericope of Exod. 19-24 marks this experience as the climax of the Sinai theophany.[36] When taken together with the people's refusal to hear God in 20:18-21, Exod. 24:1-11 points clearly to the superiority of seeing over hearing. YHWH can be seen directly—albeit only by a select few; the divine word, however, will be transmitted primarily through Moses' voice.

B. Balaam (Num. 22:2-35)

In contrast with most other theophany narratives, Balaam has verbal contact with YHWH prior to seeing a *mal'akh YHWH* in Num. 22:31. Moreover, the verbal message he has received from God in 22:20 contains the essential information he needs to know, and these words are simply repeated by the *mal'akh* in 22:35. It seems that the visual revelation is meant to bring out a point which is somehow not transmitted

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literary parallel, it is clear that the experiential difference between the two groups is clear.

35) On the nature of the ritual see the analysis of R.S. Hendel, "Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism on Exodus 24:3-8," *ZAW* 101 (1989), pp. 366-390. On the relationship between theophany and ritual see Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 176-189.

36) Cf. T.D. Alexander, "The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exod. 19:1-24:11," *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 2-20; G.C. Chirichigno, "The Narrative Structure of Exod. 19-25," *Biblica* 68 (1987), pp. 457-79.

by the verbal message. This is unusual in and of itself, for as we have seen, hearing is the usual vehicle used to drive home a specific meaning. Perhaps for this reason the precise meaning of the visual event, and its relationship to the verbal encounter, has long puzzled interpreters.[37] Balaam's night-time communications with YHWH (twice, in 22:10-13 and 22:20) are themselves somewhat contradictory.

In the first Balaam is told explicitly not to go with the Balak's messengers, for Israel is blessed and cannot be cursed. But in the second consultation he is told "If the men have come to call you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do" (22:20). The first part of the statement is immediately significant for Balaam in that it reverses the earlier directive, and ostensibly allows him to enter into Balak's service. But the second part of the message, the command to obedience, is less than clear, for YHWH has not specified how Balaam is to conduct himself with his new employer. That it contrasts with the first section is brought out strongly by the term ואך, but at this point it is unlikely that Balaam understands just what YHWH intends by this call to obedience. While there have been various attempts to explain the change in YHWH's position,[38] it seems that the episode of the ass comes primarily to emphasize the *second* part of the statement, and through that, to explain why Balaam has been allowed to proceed. This explanation comes in the form of a visual image which conveys YHWH's intentions to Balaam. The vision of a *mal'akh* with sword in hand, coupled with the attempts of the she-ass to escape the angel and Balaam's explicit anxiety in the face of this vision, make it clear that Balaam is acting under threat of death. This

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37) A similar uncertainty surrounds the relation between the visual and verbal elements in Gen. 15 and in 1 Kgs. 19. On Elijah's vision and its context see Y. Zakovitch, "'A Still Small Voice': Form and Content in 1 Kings 19," *Tarbitz* 51 (1982), pp. 329-346 (Hebrew). On the meaning of Abraham's vision of the fiery torch cf. G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 188; Polak, "Genesis 15," pp. 119-127.

38) See the comments of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban and Abarbanel on Num. 22:20, as well as the remarks of J. Licht, *A Commentary on the Book of Numbers* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), vol. 3, pp. 5-6 (Hebrew); A. Ehrlich, *Mikra Ki-Pheshuto* (New York: Ktav, 1969), vol. 1, p. 283, and R.W.L. Moberly, "On Learning to Be a True Prophet: The Story of Balaam and his Ass," in Harland and Hayward (eds.), *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millenium* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 5-8.

has the effect of giving YHWH's command to "speak only what I tell you to speak" a stringency and an urgency which was less apparent in its earlier formulation in v. 20.

The point is brought home to Balaam and to the reader not by hearing, but by seeing. After the dramatic introduction of the *mal'akh YHWH*, and in light of the ass's strenuous efforts to avoid it, we expect this messenger to be bearing some new and important message which Balaam has not yet heard, perhaps a specific oracle to deliver to Balak, or even instructions to retrace his steps and return home. Yet surprisingly, the *mal'akh* has nothing new to tell Balaam. He simply repeats what YHWH has said to Balaam earlier: "You must say nothing except what I tell you."[39] His whole purpose here is simply to be seen and recognized by Balaam, for seeing the divine emissary convinces Balaam that this command (and not YHWH's permission to go) is the essential component of this revelation. Some critics have suggested that the narrative could proceed directly from 22:21 to 22:36, omitting the entire episode of the ass and the *mal'akh,* since it is not mentioned elsewhere in the Balaam story.[40] But by eliminating the visual encounter with the deity we would exclude the very thing which ultimately convinces Balaam of the significance of what he has already heard. The apparent anomaly of this episode has been explicated nicely by Alter and others, particularly in terms of the analogous relationship between Balaam and the ass in Numbers 22, and that between Balaam and Balak in the subsequent narrative. Balaam finally comes to see what he had not understood earlier and to recognize the limitations of his own powers, just as Balak eventually comes to "see" that he cannot curse Israel.[41]

We should note that Balaam's reaction to this "seeing" is different from the matter-of-fact manner in which he responds to hearing. In vv. 13 and 21 we are told simply that "Balaam arose in the morning"

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39) This statement, repeated with slight changes in 22:20,35,38; 23:12,26; and 24:13, acts as a type of refrain in the Balaam story, bringing home the essential point about the limitations of the power of the seer.

40) See the survey of critical opinion in Y. Licht, *Book of Numbers*, vol 3, pp. 13-15.

41) Cf. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 104-07; G. Savran, *Telling and Retelling* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 90-92.

to report the results of YHWH's words, with no indication of the impression these words have made upon him. But in his reaction to the appearance of the *mal'akh* in v. 31 he bows low, makes a confession of sin, and announces his willingness to return home. His fear is palpable in a way which was not sensed earlier. It is clear that seeing has made an indelible impression upon Balaam, one that is deeper and much more consequential than simply hearing the divine command. When the *mal'akh* repeats the command "You must say nothing except what I tell you," the words have ultimate significance for Balaam, and it is not surprising that this phrase is repeated by him no less than four times in the continuation of the story, rather like a mantra.[42] Perhaps Balaam the seer, with his ability to converse with many different deities, is not terribly moved by the verbal messages he receives from them. But seeing the divine emissary places YHWH's words in a new light, illustrating once again the overwhelming power of the visual.

C. Seeing and Hearing in Job

When, in 42:5, Job says לשמע אזן שמעתיך ועתה עיני ראתך ("I had heard you with my ears, but now I see you with my eyes") it comes as something of a surprise, for there has been no explicit mention of direct visual contact with the deity. While it cannot be established definitively whether or not Job actually saw God in the whirlwind,[43] it appears that Job's experience of the divine has been primarily verbal. The long speeches of God in chapters 38-41 abound in visual imagery, but there is no reference to the type of theophanic experience we see elsewhere in the Bible.[44] Thus we must ask: in what way

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42) Num. 22:38; 23:12, 26; 24:13.

43) N.H. Tur Sinai (*The Book of Job* [Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957], p. 577.) holds that this implies actual theophany and that an earlier version of the story "spoke in more detail of God's appearance to Job," but M. Pope (*Job* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973], p. 348) rejects this as unlikely and understands Job's statement as reflecting an internal conviction rather than an external seeing.

44) The storm is associated with theophanic appearances in other biblical texts like Pss. 18, 29, and Hab. 3; cf. J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965), pp. 162ff.; S. Loewenstamm, "The Upheaval of Nature During Theophany," in *Oz Ledavid* (ed.)

is this a statement about the superiority of seeing to hearing? Dhorme, along with the majority of commentators, understands שמעתיך as "hearing about" rather than direct verbal revelation.[45] What Job has heard concerning God refers primarily to what has been stated by the friends in their speeches. Job is contrasting their secondhand comments about the ways of God with the firsthand understanding he has just gained from the speeches in 38:1ff. Received wisdom about the divine, which is all the friends know of God, is set in opposition to the actual experience of revelation which Job has now undergone.[46] "Seeing God" is shorthand for experiencing the divine first-hand, in contrast with "hearing" which is a secondary, or passed on by tradition.

An interpretation of this sort requires a metaphoric interpretation of ראה here, less "beholding" than "understanding." This would certainly be an accurate portrayal of Job's state of mind, for he has indeed arrived at a new perception of the divine. But in every other occurrence of ראה with עין the reference is to actual sight, and when it is used together with an expression for hearing, the sense is usually parallel or complementary. Thus, for example, in Deut. 29:3, "Yet the LORD hath given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day,"[47] the relationship of seeing and hearing is cumulative, especially when taken together with the understanding heart (mind) in the beginning of the verse. But in Job 42:5, on the other hand, the sense is

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(Jerusalem: Society for Biblical Study, 1964), pp. 508-520 (Hebrew). Alex Luc ("Storm and the Message of Job," *JSOT* 87 [2000], pp. 111-123.), examines a number of possibilities inherent in the storm imagery in Job, and points to the storm as a motif elsewhere in the book, both in Eliphaz's vision in 4:15 and in Job's complaint in 9:17. On the latter text see the argument presented in J.G. Williams, "Deciphering the Unspoken: The Theophany of Job," *HUCA* 49 (1978), p. 65; also the counterargument in E.L. Greenstein, "A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind," in M.V. Fox et al. (eds.), *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 257-8.

45) E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), p. 646; Pope, *Job*, p. 348; N. Habel, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 582; R. Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 492.

46) Cf. S. Terrien, "Job," *Interpreters Bible* (New York, 1954), vol. 3, p. 1192.

47) Cf. also Is. 6:10; 11:3; 37:17; Jer. 5:21; Ezek. 40:4; 44:5; Ps. 115:5; 135:16; Prov. 20:12; Job 29:11; Qoh. 1:8.

contrastive, similar to the appreciation of Solomon by the Queen of Sheba in I Kg. 10:7, "But I did not believe the reports until I came and saw with my own eyes, that not even the half had been told me; your wisdom and wealth surpass the reports that I heard." Job too draws a distinction between past and present, between prior hearing of a certain sort and what he has now experienced, but seeing here seems to mean something more than mere understanding.

While "seeing with the eye" refers unambiguously to sight, "hearing with the ear" is less clear. The term שמע in the sense of hearsay is well established,[48] but the entire phrase שמע אזן is found elsewhere only in Ps. 18:45, where it could mean either direct hearing[49]or hearing about.[50] Edwin Good translates the verse "With ears' hearing I hear you, and now my eye sees you."[51] In his reading, שמע אזן indicates direct hearing, but the tense of שמעתיך includes the hearing of God in the whirlwind speeches. He seems to be saying that the quality of Job's hearing has changed at some point during the whirlwind speech, to such an extent that he can now speak of seeing God,[52] and through that experience of understanding Him in a different way. In Good's reading the two phrases are non-contrastive, with the result that seeing and hearing have equal force here. While he is correct in noting that the form of the two verbs does not necessarily indicate a temporal difference, he ignores the force of ועתה here, which most often marks a shift in time or in the speaker's point of reference. The term is used most frequently at the beginning of a clause to indicate a change in subject or focus.[53] Its occurrence in the middle of a poetic couplet is relatively rare, but where it does occur it is always contrastive, as in Is. 1:21 ("righteousness

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48) Cf. Exod. 23:1; Num. 14:15; 1 Kgs. 10:1; Is. 66:9; Ps. 132:6.

49) Cf. Radak ad loc; A. Hacham, *Sefer Tehillim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986), p.93.

50) This is the sense of the parallel expression in 2 Sam. 22:45, but it is far from clear which version is more correct. Cf. the discussion in P.K. McCarter, *II Samuel* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 461-462.

51) E. Good, *In Turns of Tempest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 373.

52) Good, p. 340, sees the mention of the whirlwind as an indication that there has been a visual theophany.

53) Cf. *HALOT* s.v. עתה; *TDOT* vol. 11, p. 445; H.A. Brongers, "we'attah im Alten Testament," *VT* 15 (1965), pp. 289-99.

lodged in her, but now murderers") and Ps. 119:67 ("Before ...I did err, but now I observe thy word"). Moreover, in these verses the contrast is also temporal, opposing the past to the present. Thus it should be understood here to indicate that what Job had heard up to this point was insufficient, by contrast with what he now sees.[54] It thus seems most likely that Job's experience of the divine contained a visual component.[55] But even if we accept the argument that "seeing" here means "perceiving," we must still ask why Job uses the language of seeing, if what he really means is a different level of hearing?

We suggest that Job's reference to seeing here is part of a larger issue in the book, of a contrast between the language of seeing God with the language of hearing.[56] The friends consistently speak of indirect contact with the divine, for the most part referring to things spoken by or about the divine, or to traces of the divine in the world of human experience. Job makes reference to these things as well but also speaks of his desire and need for seeing God, that is, for a degree of contact with the divine which is not present in the friends' speeches.

D. The Perception of the Divine According to Job's Friends

Job's friends rarely speak of direct revelation.[57] Rather, as in most wisdom literature, they expound the idea that the will of God is perceived

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54) Newsom, "Job," *NIB*, p. 628, adopts a similar line to Good, understanding the two stychs of 42:5 as non-contrastive. She translates "I have listened to you with my ears, and now my eye sees you;" in other words, as a result of hearing, Job now "sees." While this reading is certainly possible, it also ignores the contrastive sense of ועתה and does not fully appreciate the resonances of seeing for Job.

55) Ed Greenstein phrases this succinctly: "I do not lightly dismiss the interpretation that Job had a visual perception of God's appearance—storms are seen, Job saw a storm; God, he saw, was in the storm" (private communication).

56) In his article ("The Speech from the Whirlwind," p. 247), Greenstein has argued that YHWH's appearance in Job. 38ff. is a reflection of the juridical trope which shapes Job's argument. While one should not gainsay the importance of this theme, in my opinion seeing God here must be read in light of the larger theophanic theme which informs the book. The image of the whirlwind and the language of seeing in 42:5 are closer to the traditions of theophany than to those of the courtroom.

57) See, however, Job. 5:8 and 11:5-6.

through the workings of the world.[58] Eliphaz spells this out in his first speech, most explicitly in 5:8-16. The divine plan is made manifest in the processes of nature and in the remarkable reversals of fortune suffered by the mighty and the weak; the wicked are undone, the poor are exalted, "and evil has to shut its mouth." The natural world and the moral universe combine to form a seamless whole, where the very same force that "puts rain on the face of the earth" also "traps the shrewd in their own cunning." Contact with the divine is not understood as an I-Thou encounter, but is primarily perceived through obedience to the "natural law" of this wisdom universe. Job may cry out to God, but the very thought that one such as he could expect a direct response from God is rejected by Eliphaz in 5:1: "Cry out—but who will answer you? Which of the angels would you implore?" If Job can expect no reply from a heavenly associate, how much less likely is the possibility of such a direct response from God? When Eliphaz lays out the terms of God's positive response to Job in 5:17-27, it consists entirely of the elements of the good life as defined by wisdom literature: protection from evil, peace and prosperity for his family.

In 15:8 Eliphaz facetiously remarks that Job may have heard something from the gods in council, but it is inconceivable to him that Job has a direct channel to the divine.[59] And in arguing in the very next

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58) See the classic formulation of the issue by G. von Rad (*Wisdom in Israel* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972]). In his discussion of the call of wisdom, in pp.157-166, von Rad speaks of the "self-revelation of creation" as a central idea in Israelite wisdom. This is to be differentiated from prophetic revelation as something which "emanates from the power of order which is held to be self-sufficient" (p. 175). For more recent discussions of the idea of revelation in wisdom literature see R. Albertz, "The Sage and Pious Wisdom in the Book of Job," in L.G. Perdue and J.G. Gammie (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 243-261, esp. pp. 251-52; E. Greenstein, "'On My Skin and in My Flesh'—Personal Experience as a Source of Knowledge in the Book of Job," in K.F. Kravitz and D.M. Sharon (eds.), *Bringing the Hidden to Light* (*The Process of Interpretation Studies in Honor of Steven A. Geller*) (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007); J.L. Crenshaw, "The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature," *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1995), pp. 292-299.

59) Eliphaz argues that only the primal human had this sort of access to the divine, though prophetic literature does admit to it—cf. D. Clines, *Job 1-20* (Dallas: Thomas

verse that Job does not possess greater wisdom than the friends do, he is admitting that they too do not have such access. Note here that Eliphaz refers to hearing the divine, not to seeing: "Did you *overhear* the Gods in council?" So too when Eliphaz reveals what he has "seen" in 15:17,[60] he does not describes a vision, but only the transmitted wisdom of the elders about the fate of the wicked in 15:20-35.[61] Throughout this speech Eliphaz appeals to the primary sources of authority in wisdom literature, which are age and consensus.[62] In his third speech Eliphaz describes a distant God who derives no benefit from human behavior. In 22:12-14 he imputes to Job the claim that since the deity is enshrouded in clouds, God therefore cannot see him.[63] While this is clearly an overstatement (Job in fact claims that God places him under intense scrutiny in order to punish him),[64] it is typical of Eliphaz to

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Nelson, 1989), p. 351; A. Hacham, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1984), p. 112 (Hebrew).

60) Eliphaz is not here quoting Job in order to refute his claims, but is repeating his own arguments from chapter 4 (following Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 255). The idea that the account of the revelation in 4:12ff. is to be attributed to Job instead of Eliphaz was first set out by Tur Sinai (*Book of Job*, p. 89), developed further by H.L. Ginsberg ("Job the Patient and Job the Impatient," *VTS* 17 (1969), pp. 98-107) and G.V. Smith ("Job IV 12-21: Is it Eliphaz' Vision?," *VT* 40 [1990], pp. 453-63), and expounded most fully by E. Greenstein ("The Extent of Job's First Speech," in S. Vargon, et al. (eds.), *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* [Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2005], pp. 245-262). While Greenstein's position is certainly a possible interpretation of the similarities between 4:12-21 and 15:14-16, it is by no means obligatory. Rather, the assignation of the speech to Job creates additional problems regarding the editing of the text. Greenstein's suggestions about identifying quotations in the biblical text are edifying, but the task itself remains extremely difficult, with the result that it is often impossible to discern between quotation and allusion. As such we accept Gordis' argument that the claim of human imperfection before God (4:17) conflicts with Job's stance throughout the book (*Book of Job*, 518-19).

61) Habel, (*Book of Job,* p. 257), sees the appeal to ancient authority in 15:18 as giving support to what has been revealed to him personally.

62) C. Newsom, "Job," *New Interpreters Bible*, vol. 4, p. 450.

63) This is spoken to counter Job's ostensible claim that he is hidden from the deity, as Eliphaz (incorrectly) interprets 3:23. Cf. also 35:5-6—Elihu implores Job to look heavenward and see that his actions do not affect the deity—presumably saying that since he cannot see God, neither can he expect to see a divine reaction to his claims.

64) Cf. 7:17-20; 10:4-6.

discount the visual aspect of God throughout, whether seeing or being seen. Rather, Eliphaz focuses on hearing; in 5:27 Eliphaz instructs Job שמענה—"Hear this!"[65]—as the way to gain wisdom. In the final analysis it is God's words which are important, "Take instruction from his mouth; set his commands inside your heart" (22:22). While this is ostensibly similar to the language of divine revelation, the sense is actually much closer to the traditions of wisdom teaching as found in Prov. 4:2 and 7:1-2.

In his first speech in 11:3ff. Zophar seems to be more optimistic about a divine response to Job, saying that he wishes that God would speak to him and reveal to him "wisdom's mysteries."[66] But would God actually communicate with human beings?[67] In the very next breath Zophar claims that the discovery of the divine, its limits and its mysteries, is virtually unattainable.[68] This standard wisdom formulation is followed by a description of God passing by[69] in so forceful a way that none could stop him. In a divine epiphany such as this there is no mention of an actual encounter between the human and the divine. Zophar's point about the power of the deity is closely tied to the human inability to perceive the presence of the divine in any direct way.[70] As the ultimate power of the deity is tied to God's impeccable

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65) It is tempting to follow Duhm and others and revocalize the text to read "we have heard it." This sort of privileging of hearing as the dominant mode of perception in the eyes of the friends would provide a striking counterpoint to Job's comment in 42:5. But, as Clines remarks (*Job 1-20*, p. 119), the presence of the second person pronoun at the end of the verse fits better with the imperative form of the verb in the MT.

66) R. Scheindlin, *The Book of Job* (New York: Norton Press, 1998), p. 77.

67) Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 261: "He does not for a moment imagine that God will actually address Job."

68) Cf. the discussion by I. Slotki, "Job 11:6," *VT* 35 (1985), pp. 229-30. On the characterization of God in this chapter see S. Carmy, "God is Distant, Incomprehensible: A Literary-Theological Approach to Zophar's First Speech," *Tradition* 38 (2004), pp. 49-63.

69) Job 10:10. Gordis (*Book of Job*, p. 122) suggests reading יחטף with the sense of "seize," but Job 9:11 uses precisely this verb to describe God's presence.

70) In Dhorme's description of God's absolute freedom here, not only is God not susceptible to human control, but His immediate presence cannot even be perceived correctly (*Book of Job*, p. 162.).

judgment, so the inability of mortals to stop God is also a reflection of the limits of their knowledge. This contrasts with Job's description of God passing by in 9:11, where he uses the same verb, but with a different emphasis. On the one hand Job repeats Zophar's claim of human powerlessness before God. But when in 9:11 Job complains that *he* cannot see God, it is not a reflection of any intrinsic human inability. Rather, Job is obsessed with the idea that God can be both heard and seen by humans, and that his vindication must come in the context of an actual encounter with the divine.[71] A major difference between Job and his friends lies precisely in this disparity in perspective. For the friends God cannot be seen, and can be perceived only indirectly, but Job understands that his ability to sense the deity's presence is closely connected with understanding the ways of God.

Elihu continues many of the themes of the earlier comforters, but he does envision greater possibilities for divine human communication.[72] He speaks of being inspired by a divine breath in 33:3-4, but he is not referring to divine revelation, simply to the spirit inside every created being.[73] In contrast to the friends, Elihu does maintain that God communicates regularly with humans beings, by means of dreams and by imposing suffering. While he does not spell out the nature of these dreams,[74] these communications as not altogether rare, for in 33:14 he claims that God does speak to people multiple times. Yet, despite these repeated attempts, they remain unaware, unseeing, or at very least unmoved. While Elihu's focus here is primarily on the human inability (and Job's unwillingness) to recognize a message from the divine, the corollary to this statement is that for Elihu revelation is ver-

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71) See the discussion below of Job 19:25-27.

72) On the difficulties created by the Elihu speeches see the discussion in Dhorme, *Book of Job,* pp. xcix-cv. For an exploration of the perspective of Elihu as a dissatisfied reader relative to the rest of the book of Job see C. Newsom, *The Book of Job* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 200-233.

73) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 451. On the basis of this verse Newsom (*Book of Job*, p. 206) sees Elihu as possessing a "quasi-prophetic understanding," but the rest of his speeches give little support for this.

74) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 467 sees the term שור as indicating oneiric dreams, but the term can have a wider variety of meanings.

bal and not visual.[75] He speaks of "opening the ear," not the eye.[76] At the same time he is not referring to message dreams in which God transmits a straightforward disclosure, but to terrifying visions which give the recipient a warning of what is to come.[77] The second means of divine messaging is more indirect in its method, but more immediate in its effect upon the human, for the onset of sickness and pain is a sure sign of the displeasure of the deity.[78] Elihu also makes reference to angelic mediators, but they do not serve as a conduit for a divine message like the biblical *mal'akh YHWH*, nor do they speak with men. Their role is solely that of intercession with God.[79] But whatever message is passed on by God to humans it is clear that this is only an auditory expression. Elihu expands upon this model further in 36:8-15, where he speaks of divine instruction of humans without specifying the means of revelation. In 36:9-10 the message received is described

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75) Cf. Tur Sinai, *Book of Job*, p. 468. Following the Syriac and the Vulgate, Dhorme translates "God speaks once and he does not repeat his word" (*Book of Job*, p. 493), but the sense of the passage is that communication from the divine *does* recur, whether directly or indirectly. Moreover, 33:29 concludes the chapter by reference to such multiple occasions of divine communication. See the discussion of the section in A.E. Steinman, "The Graded Numerical Saying in Job," in A.B. Beck et al. (eds.), *Fortunate the Eyes that See* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 292-294. Gordis suggests that the numerical gradation indicates that God communicates with man numerous times before taking more severe action against him, as he does in vv. 19ff. (*Book of Job*, p. 374).

76) Greenstein notes correctly that dreams in the Bible and the ANE contain an implicit visual element by dint of their being "seen" (private communication). But in certain contexts (e.g. Solomon's dream at Gibeon in 1 Kgs. 3:4-15) it is clear that only the verbal element is recorded.

77) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 468.

78) Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 325, finds two additional types of divine instruction here, by means of an intercessor and a messenger. In his reading these are not an extension of the trial of suffering, but separate modes of contact with the divine. But it is far from certain that the messenger has contact with humans, and the activities of both intermediate figures imply a great distance between God and the human world.

79) The meaning of 33:23 is unclear—does the angel speak with the sufferer, or only with God? J. Ross ("Job 33:14-30: The Phenomenology of Lament," *JBL* 94 [1975], pp. 38-46) maintains that the interceding angel actually counsels the human sufferer, while Habel (*Book of Job*, p. 469) sees the angel's role as limited to heavenly intervention. See also the discussion in Newsom, *Book of Job*, p. 212.

as verbal language—the text specifies "opening the ears" and "hearing" though it is unclear exactly how this is accomplished. In 36:15 one gets the impression that the message is passed on indirectly through לחץ, here understood as "adversity." In the continuation of the same speech Elihu uses Job as an example; the lesson to be learned is gleaned from Job's fate, and not from any specific revelation by God. When in chapter 37 Elihu speaks more directly of God as the framer of the universe, his final point is that mortals—even wise men—simply cannot see God. Just as one cannot look at the sun (37:21), God cannot to be perceived except by his actions in the world.[80]

Shaddai: We cannot find him out—
sublime in power and judgment;
great master of justice.
He will never answer.[81]
Therefore, mortals, fear him
whom even men of wisdom cannot see.[82]

More than the other three friends, Elihu sees communication from God to humans as an integral part of the fabric of their relationship. The role of the divine intercessor described above comes closer to Job's understanding of various heavenly mediators who will act on his behalf—the 9:33) מוכיח), the 16:20-21) מליץ) and the 19:25) גאל). But the importance of this figure in 33:14-30 only emphasizes the lack of direct contact between human beings and God in Elihu's theological

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80) So Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 501, in accordance with LXX and Peshitta. Pope *(Job*, p. 287) understands God to be the subject and translates "He will not see all the wise of heart;" cf. also Dhorme, *Book of Job*, p. 573. Gordis (*Book of Job*, p. 434) prefers to read "fear" in place of seeing, which Newsom sees as typical of Elihu's moralizing. Perhaps both "fear" and sight" are intended; one cannot see God, yet one must fear him, a notion which recalls the final sentiments of chapter 28.

81) Habel (*Book of Job*, p. 516) argues that Elihu acts as Job's respondent in place of God, and that this is "a direct response to Job's summons for Shaddai to answer." But the Hebrew syntax favors a single clause, favoring something like "He does not torment" (NJPS) or "[He] oppresses not" (Dhorme, *Book of Job*, pp. 572-3).

82) Job 37:23-24 as translated by Scheindlin (*Book of Job*, p. 142.) following LXX and Syriac here. For a different reading cf. Pope, *Job*, p. 287; Hacham, *Book of Job*, p. 287.

universe. Elihu has a well-developed sense of divine mystery, and much of his final speech in chapters 36-37 anticipates God's speech from the whirlwind. But his descriptions of the divine are not about seeing God. They simply offer reflections on the presence of the divine in nature, and on the human inability to grasp the divine. Indeed, according to 37:20, human words simply cloak God further. And in 37:24 he concludes that, since even the wisest of men cannot see him, the only correct response is the fear of God. For Elihu the knowledge of the divine is limited to dreams, to words overheard, to analogies with creation and nature, and to conclusions deriving from the fate of the individual.

On the face of it, Eliphaz's description of his unusual night vision in 4:12-16 flies in the face of much of what we have just argued. The reception of such a frightening vision would seem to argue that Eliphaz has been privy to direct communication with the divine which includes a significant visual element. Indeed, the event described vv. 12-16 has much in common with the theophanic tradition.[83] Eliphaz describes his revelation as a *davar*, which, among other things, is the standard term for a prophetic oracle. Like most biblical theophanies it seems to be directed specifically at him (אלי). The experience itself occurs at night, and the use of the expression חזיונות לילה recalls other nighttime revelations. In Daniel chapters 2 and 7 similar language is used,[84] and Abraham's night-time vision in Gen. 15 is termed a מחזה.[85] The use of תרדמה also may have semi-prophetic associations, as in Gen. 15:12 and in Isa. 29:10. The description of פחד... ורעדה sounds very much like the experience of fear and trembling associated with theophany in the experiences of Abraham,[86] Jacob,[87] and Daniel,[88]

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83) Cf. Jeremias, *Theophanie*; Hiebert, "Theophany" *ABD* vol. 6, pp. 505-511; Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 131.

84) Cf. Dan. 2:19 חזוא די ליליא; 7:2—חזוי עם ליליא; 7:7,13—חזוי ליליא.

85) R. Fidler ("*Dreams Speak Falsely*"? *Dream Theophanies in the Bible* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005], p. 323 [Hebrew]) argues that this indicates a higher form of contact with the divine than mere dreaming.

86) Gen. 15:12.

87) Gen. 28:17.

88) Dan. 10:11.

as well as non-prophetic figures such as Gideon and Manoah.[89] The description of the attendant רוח in 4:15 and the mysterious קול ודממה in 4:16 (which recalls Elijah's theophany in 1 Kgs. 19) seem to hint at a theophanic experience in which God approaches the protagonist in order to vouchsafe a message, or to appoint him to a special task.[90] The description of the scene reaches its climax with the piling up of additional theophanic vocabulary in v. 16. מראה is often used to indicate an essential visual component of the theophanic encounter.[91] The sense of יעמד is not far removed from another *terminus technicus* of theophany—התיצב/נצב—which may describe the presence of the deity in theophanic moments.[92] Finally, not only does the term תמונה imply a visual image,[93] but it also recalls the description of Moses' prophetic revelation in Num. 12:8. The text suggests that Eliphaz is the recipient of an explicit visual revelation and not simply a משל or a חידה.[94]

Despite these associations there are many indications that the narrator has deliberately undercut the theophanic power of Eliphaz's experience.[95] For one thing, Eliphaz never identifies just who is relating this message. Is the heavenly figure described here related to the pantheon described in the frame story?[96] Does it speak in the name of God, or at

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89) Jud. 6:22; 13:22. In this context one might recall the sense of *angst* in the prophetic calls of Isaiah and Ezekiel as well.

90) Cf. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 54-89.

91) Cf. Exod. 3:3; 24:17; Num. 9:15-16; 12:6,8; Jud. 13:6; 1 Sam. 3:15; Ezek. 1:13-16,28; 8:2.

92) Gen. 18:2; 28:13; Exod. 34:5; Num. 22:22; 1 Sam. 3:10; Is. 3:13; Amos 7:7; 9:1; Ps. 82:1; 119:89. Cf. *TDOT* vol. 9, p. 528.

93) Cf. Exod. 20:4; Deut. 4:16, 23, 25; 5:8; cf. *HALOT* s.v. תמונה.

94) Cf. Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 131.

95) The presence of ambiguity in Eliphaz's speech has been remarked upon often, beginning with K. Fullerton, "Double Entendre in the First Speech of Eliphaz," *JBL* 49 (1930), pp. 320-74. See also Y. Hoffman, "The Use of Equivocal Words in the First Speech of Eliphaz (Job IV-V)," *VT* 30 (1980), pp. 114-119; D. Cotter, *A Study of Job 4-5 in the Light of Contemporary Literary Theory*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 176-198.

96) Cf. Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely*, p. 326. In contrast to what we noted earlier about the essential similarity of YHWH and his *mal'akh*, with Job we have entered a world of myriad heavenly figures who are quite distinct from God in function and in essence.

its own initiative? The fact that the speaker of this message never identifies himself is highly unusual in itself. In theophany narratives the manifestation of the divine may not at first be recognized as such, for there is often a moment of hesitation or confusion, but it is always resolved with the protagonist's clear acknowledgment of the identity of his interlocutor.[97] Here it seems that Eliphaz himself does not know the source of this revelation, which in turn calls into question the authority of what he says in vv. 17-21. Secondly, what shall we make of the fact that this "word" is coupled with the uncomplimentary verb גנב?[98] While we need not assume a scenario like the stealing of prophetic words as described by Jeremiah 23:25ff., the association does not speak well for Eliphaz.[99] The verb occurs in the context of revelation only in Jer. 23:25, and is used elsewhere to describe kidnapping (Gen. 40:15), theft (Gen. 30:33) and deception (Gen. 31:20,26), and somewhat less pejoratively, a stealthy entrance in 2 Sam. 19:4.[100] According to 4:14 Eliphaz caught only a small portion of this *davar*, indicating that he may have overheard fragments of a conversation between angelic figures as in Daniel 8:13, or like Micaiah ben Yimlah in 1 Kgs. 22:19-22. While the former is a positive association, the latter invites less than positive connotations, including intimations of false prophecy and deception.

No less disturbing is Eliphaz's inability to see clearly here.[101] Eliphaz[102] is unable to identify the entity which stands before him, and presents

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97) For example, Gideon in Jud. 6; cf. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 119-140; J. Kugel, *The God of Old*, pp. 5-36.

98) Cf. Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely*, p. 327.

99) Jer. 23:30 is the only other occurrence of גנב and דבר together in the Bible, but R.J.Z. Werblowsky ("Stealing the Word," *VT* 6 [1956], pp. 105-6) goes too far in claiming that this is a case of stolen prophetic speech. Cf. J.E. Harding, "A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15?" *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005), pp. 141-42.

100) Even here there is a sense of shame attached to the verb, as it describes the abashedness of David's troops in the face of their king's lament for Absalom.

101) Cf. Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely*, p. 328.

102) While the majority of commentators see vv. 17-21 as the words of this voice, the text contains no clear markers of quotation or of direct speech. E. Greenstein identifies a number of techniques used in the book of Job to mark quoted speech ("The Extent of Job's First Speech," pp. 253-57), but see above, n. 59.

it as a semi-disembodied form. Through the use of the language of דממה וקול Eliphaz's vision is contrasted with Elijah's theophany in 1 Kg. 19, where the "still small voice" is clearly identified with the presence of YHWH.[103] But in Job 4 it is never clear just who is "standing" here, for the verb יעמד has no subject, reinforcing the lack of clarity surrounding the entire experience. While in other theophany texts there is deliberate obfuscation of the *description* of the divine, nowhere else do we find that the protagonist himself cannot identify the divine speaker.[104] Although Eliphaz wishes to claim divine authority for the message he would pass on to Job, the narrator has deliberately obscured those elements which he would lend oracular authority to this description. Despite the visual markers noted above, there is only a cloudy image of Eliphaz's interlocutor. Moreover, the content of the message he receives in vv. 17-21 is strikingly unoracular. Given the dramatic character of the reception of the vision in vv.12-16 one would imagine that Eliphaz is about to reveal a matter of great import to Job, yet the platitudinous quality of the speech subverts the sense of its divine origin.[105] The question it poses, "Can mortals be righteous before God?" is remarkably commonplace, and the revelation of discord in heaven sounds like a comment from an embittered courtier. The reader is left with a sense of uncertainty about Eliphaz's perceptions, both for the partial quality of what he has heard—"my ear only caught a snatch of it" (4:12),[106] and the fogginess of his vision—"I cannot recognize its appearance" (4:16). It is likely that Eliphaz intends his reactions here as a counterpoint to Job's description of his trauma in the previous

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103) Cf. Harding, "Spirit of Indeterminacy," p. 151; Fidler, *Dreams Speak Falsely*, p. 328; Cotter, *Job 4-5*, pp. 185-86.

104) In contrast to a text like Ezek. 1, where as has been noted, Ezekiel undercuts the clarity of his vision with a variety of qualifying terms like כעין, and דמות, but this has the effect of enhancing the visual aspect rather than detracting from it. Cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*; Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 58-60.

105) See the discussion in Clines, *Job 1-20*, pp. 132-137. For a somewhat different reading of Eliphaz's words compare Newsom, *Book of Job*, pp. 139-143.

106) HALOT s.v. שמץ, translates as either a "whisper" or a "tiny fragment." The same term occurs with regard to the limited perception of the divine presence in Job. 26:14; see also Sir. 10:10, 18:32.

chapter.[107] But instead of creating the impression that his is the truer experience, Eliphaz's focus on himself and his own reactions betrays his limited perspective on the divine. It is not the Other who is fully experienced, but rather the emotions of Eliphaz when confronted with otherness.[108]

The mention of the mysterious רוח here reinforces the association with 1 Kgs. 22 mentioned above, in a way which further enfeebles Eliphaz's vision. In that text a sharp contrast is drawn between the prophet of the word and the prophet of the spirit.[109] The former is seen as truthful and authoritative, and is identified with the prophet Micaiah, while the latter is a source of deception, and is aligned with the רוח as a deceptive spirit.[110] In 1 Kgs. 22 this bifurcation between "spirit" and "word" is coupled with a visual/verbal distinction, for it is only Micaiah, the visionary prophet, who has the true word of YHWH. He alone is privy to the vision of the heavenly council, and therefore is able to discern the presence of the deceptive spirit. The other prophets who only hear are not so privileged, and thus are susceptible to divine deception. While Eliphaz himself is no prophet, the associations with 1 Kgs. 22 are too strong to be ignored, and cast a pall of deception over his vision.[111] The deliberate blurring of the visual, coupled with the use of רוח as a revelatory agent, weakens the force of this questionable theophany. Eliphaz's relationship to the divine here is on the cusp of revelation: it appeals to the senses, but with limited visibility. Some aspect of the divine is perceived but only partially, and that through a fog. He has perceived something he calls a דבר, but,

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107) W.A.M. Beuken, "Job's Imprecation as the Cradle of a New Religious Discourse," in Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), pp. 41-78; Cotter, *Job 4-5*, pp. 176-186.

108) See Newsom's discussion of the theme of otherness in this section (*Book of Job*, pp. 139-40).

109) See the discussion of the nature of this *ruah* in Harding, "Spirit of Indeterminacy," pp. 146-150; Dhorme, *Book of Job*, pp. 50-51.

110) Cf. A. Rofe, *The Prophetical Stories* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), pp. 124-126; S. Mowinckel, "The 'Spirit' and the 'Word" in the Pre-Exilic Reforming Prophets," *JBL* 53 (1934), pp. 199-227.

111) Harding, "Spirit of Indeterminacy," pp. 161-62; E. Hamori, "The Spirit of Falsehood," (forthcoming) develops the connection between the deceptive *ruah* in 1 Kgs. 22 and the misleading message which Eliphaz receives in 4:12-21.

whatever sort of word it may be, it can hardly be understood as an identifiable divine oracle. Eliphaz here reinforces the sense that neither he nor his companions can see God; their references to the visual describe only what cannot be seen by humans. Their wisdom depends entirely upon hearing, primarily in the sense of passing on traditions from the elders. The fact that Eliphaz makes no further reference to this revelation in order to bolster his claims has puzzled some commentators, but it seems that this lack of reference is continuous with the narrator's deliberate undercutting of the visual in Eliphaz's remarks, and of this vision in particular.[112]

E. Job's Perception of the Divine

Job's attitude toward the possibility of contact with the divine is very different from that of the friends. In his speeches he frequently addresses God directly in the second person, whereas the friends never do so. This address is not done in the form of prayer as recommended by Bildad (8:5), but in the language of confrontation, and often with the expectation of a answer. As opposed to Eliphaz, who cannot conceive of a direct divine response to Job,[113] Job frequently uses language in which he demands acknowledgment, now with forensic metaphors, now with the language of lament. He is well aware of the scorn of those who think the very idea of God actually answering Job impossible, "I am the one who gives his neighbors cause to smile: 'He calls to God and He answers him!'—a laughingstock—righteous, innocent" (12:4).[114]

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112) There is general agreement that Eliphaz refers to the content of this revelation in 15:14-16, i.e. Dhorme, *Book of Job*, p. 213. But with Harding ("Spirit of Indeterminacy," p. 156) we would ask, if Eliphaz is so certain as to the content of this revelation regarding the fallibility of humans, how can he be so confident as to the correctness of his own opinion? In this sense he seems to lack the very self-critical apparatus which he finds wanting in Job. The result weakens his own claim to authority and with it the reliability of what he sees in 4:12-21.

113) E.g. 5:1—"Call now! Will anyone answer you? To whom among the holy beings will you turn?"

114) Scheindlin, *Book of Job*, p. 79. Job is here quoting the mocking words of those around him. Following Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 213, who cites Gordis's theory of

Yet in the blend of images with which Job replies to Bildad in chapter 9 he moves back and forth between the inapproachability of God and the hoped-for possibility of direct confrontation. On the one hand, vv. 5-11 speak of a God whose overwhelming power precludes the very possibility of contact: "Yet when he comes my way, I do not notice; He passes on, and I am unaware." Yet in the very next breath Job changes his tune: "And if I summoned Him, and if he answered me, I doubt he would listen to my voice" (9:16). Whether one sees here the expectation of actual dialogue[115] or simply a legal summons to court,[116] Job envisions at the very least the possibility of direct confrontation, however ineffectual it may turn out to be. This ambivalence is brought out again in vv. 32-35 where Job first asks for a mediator who could arbitrate between him and God, and at the same time expresses his abject fear in the face of the divine presence. Newsom points to the irony present in Job's wish here, for elsewhere in the Bible it is God himself who is described as such an arbiter.[117] Yet despite the fact that there is no referee other than God, Clines detects a surprising sense of confidence on Job's part in this chapter, a confidence which will continue to grow in subsequent chapters.[118] The possibility of mutual dialogue is again affirmed in 13:22: "Then you can call and I will answer, or I will speak and you will answer me." The immediate context invokes a forensic image with the expected debate between plaintiff and defense, but, as in 14:15, this language also points to the desire for more intimate mutual conversation.[119] Job concludes his final speech in chapters 29-31 with just such a plea for a divine answer: "Here is my desire:[120] that Shaddai answer me" (31:35). Likewise when he speaks of his expectations about this confrontation in 13:15-16, he uses the language of "face," or divine presence: "I will argue my case before him (אל פניו) […] for no impious person can come before him

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quotations in Job (Gordis, *Book of Job*, p. 523).

115) Dhorme, *Book of Job*, p. 136.

116) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 192; Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 234.

117) For example Is. 2:4; cf. Newsom, "Job," p. 413.

118) Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 244.

119) Cf. Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 231; Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 317; Newsom "Job," p. 439

120) Cf. Gordis, *Book of Job*, p. 355 understands תוי as a form of תאוה, desire, following the Vulgate and the Targum.

(לפניו). In contrast with the friends, who rarely speak of coming before God's face or presence,[121] Job pleads that God will listen, asking for the sort of attentiveness which bespeaks the actual presence of the divine. And when Job accuses God of hiding his face from him in 13:24, it carries with it both the connotation of divine disfavor[122] as well as a refusal to respond to Job directly.

When it comes to the possibility of seeing God, Job is also of two minds. On the one hand, in 23:3-4 he says, "If only I knew how to find Him […] I would present my suit to his face (לפניו)," yet in 23:15 he admits that "I panic in his presence (מפניו)." God is somehow present for Job, but not in a way that allows him to pin God down. This ambivalence is brought out well in the intertextual play between Job 23:8-9 and Psalm 139.

> Forward I go, but he is gone,
> backward, and I cannot perceive him.
> He makes for the left—I cannot make him out;
> twists to the right, and I cannot see.

The poet here converses with Pss. 139:7-10, where the psalmist attempts to elude God by making strenuous movements to the extremities of the world:

> O where can I go from your spirit,
> or where can I flee from your face?
> If I climb the heavens you are there.
> If I descend to Sheol here you are.
> If I take the wings of the dawn
> and dwell at the sea's furthest end,
> even there your hand would lead me,
> Your right hand would hold me fast.

Job, however, portrays himself as the pursuer, and God as the one who evades detection. The psalmist's use of hyperbole to describe his evasive movements (climb the heavens, descend to Sheol, wings of the dawn,

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121) Among the friends only Elihu uses this language in 33:26 and 35:14.
122) E.g. Isa. 54:8; Ps. 30:8.

sea's end) emphasizes the enormous effort he expends trying to flee from God, as well as the impossibility of escape. Job, by contrast, describes God as exerting only minimal effort to in order to escape him: "He makes for the left, twists to the right." These simple maneuvers suffice to frustrate Job's search and emphasize the tremendous difference in power between the human and the divine. A person will exert himself strenuously in his failed attempts to escape from God, while God avoids humans with a simple turn to the side.

Moreover, God's hand holds the psalmist fast (אחז), while Job is unable to grasp/see God (אחז).[123] Job's use of the pair "forward/backward" recalls the psalmist's use of this pair in the couplet "forward and behind you besiege me, laying your hand upon me" (139:5). Like the psalmist, Job frequently uses the trope of being hemmed in on all sides, as he does in 7:12-23, complaining that God acts like a jailer toward him.[124] But in 23:8-9 the image is reversed, where the God who at one moment entraps him eludes him in the very next.[125] Despite this, Job does not go so far as to say that finding God or seeing God is impossible, only that he has not yet succeeded in doing so.[126] Job continues to seek out God with the expectation of a hearing, and he does not despair of finding Him and facing Him in confrontation. The intertextual connection with Psalm 139 is not simply in its reversal of pursuer and pursued, but also in Job's demand to confront God. The psalmist declares the impossibility of escape from God; Job continues to contend that God is graspable, perceivable, even visible.[127]

The most explicit statement of Job's wish to see God is found in 19:25-27. In this famously debated passage, Job expresses his unqualified desire for seeing God, using the language of חזה and ראו עיני. We follow Clines's suggestion that the text should be broken down into

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123) As Rashi indicates, the Masoretic accent on the first syllable of the verb indicates that they understood the verb as "to see," but cf. Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 277.

124) Cf. also 10:14-27; 13:21-28; 14:16-17; 19:8.

125) Note also the intertextual connections between Ps. 139:13-18 and Job 10:1-17, as well as the discussion in L. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 140-144.

126) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 349.

127) Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 278.

two parts: 25-26a speaks to the question of the Job's redeemer,[128] and 26b-27, which is set in counterpoint to it, addresses what Job wishes to see now, in the flesh.[129] The temporal contrast between the sections is clear: vv. 25-26a focus on Job's future expectations of vindication, while vv. 26b-27 speak of his immediate desire, and situate this expected experience intensely within his own body.[130] Exactly how literally Job expects to see God is not clear from the text, but there is no mistaking the force of his yearning. The proliferation of terms for the self—בשרי,[131] לי,[132] אני,עיני, כליתי , קי—in the brief context of one and a half verses emphasize how intensely Job wants this seeing to take place. The mention of the kidneys in 27c should be taken as metonymy for Job's whole being, and strengthen the intensity of his feelings about wanting to see God.[133] The phrase אני ולא זר adds to this intensity, highlighting Job's anxiety by focusing on his deteriorating state.[134] On the one hand, the phrase is obvious—who else if not Job will see God? But the contrast between Job's self and the hypothetical stranger heightens the immediacy of the expected encounter, for it is clear that everyone around Job has become a stranger to him. But while the encounter with the divine often points to the great distance between

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128) The issue will not be taken up here as it is of secondary importance to the theme of seeing God. See the discussion of critical positions in Clines, *Job 1-20*, pp. 457-61, and W.L. Michel, "Confidence and Despair: Job 19:25-27 in Light of Northwest Semitic Studies," in Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job*, pp.157-181; Habel, *Book of Job*, pp. 303-308.

129) Understanding מבשרי as "while still in my flesh," in other words, while physically still alive—see Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 461.

130) Cf. Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 308, on the contrast between the two sections: "Job is convinced of his future vindication, but he would also like the pleasure of experiencing that glorious event in person, face to face with his accuser."

131) Cf. the similar phrase of the psalmist in Ps. 63:2 in expectation of seeing God—"My soul thirsts for you, my body yearns for you […] I shall behold you in the sanctuary." Cf. also Ps. 84:3 "I long, I yearn for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out to the living God." On this connection between bodily yearning and seeing God see C.L. Seow, "Job's *go'el*, Again," in J. Barton, et al. (eds.), *Gott und Mensch im Dialog* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 689-709. On the meaning of the preposition *mem* here see cf. Habel, *Book of Job*. p. 293.

132) Gordis, *Book of Job*, p. 206.

133) Scheindlin, *Book of Job*, p. 97: "My whole being melts at the thought!"

134) Cf. Dhorme, *Book of Job*, p. 286.

the human and the divine, here the focus on Job's own body calls forth an unexpected familiarity and an anticipated intimacy with God.

Clines is of the opinion that this desire for seeing is essentially a reflection of the forensic metaphor, but there seems to be more here. The piling up of terms for the self, emphasizing Job's own body again and again, seems to indicate more than simply anticipating his day in court. Intensity of emotion about seeing God is coupled with the mention of the body in highly charged emotional contexts like Ps. 42:3 and Ps. 63:2-3, where the expectation of religious experience seems to stand behind such fervent language.[135] While Job's desperation here is not identical to the religious emotion expressed in the psalms, it is not out of the question to see here an anticipation of the climactic experience of Job's seeing in 42:5. Whatever ambivalence Job voices elsewhere about the possibility of seeing God, his remarks in 19:26-27 trump that uncertainty, and point us unmistakably towards his final experience of theophany at the end of the book.

When Job makes his final statement about seeing and hearing in 42:5, there is no longer any ambivalence—Job claims to have seen God in no uncertain terms. Whether we understand this as an actual theophany reflected in the whirlwind tradition or simply as a deeper form of understanding, the context of Job 42:1-5 places this seeing in a new perspective. It has long been noticed that in 42:3-4 Job repeats or quotes YHWH's words from the whirlwind speech. These quotations have the effect of serving a self-rebuke to Job, as he effectively repeats YHWH's claim about Job's lack of knowledge and applies them to himself. Though there are many other quotations by Job and the friends in the book, this is the only case in which God is quoted. Other quotations are often used for ironic or rhetorical effect, for scoring points within the context of the dialogue with the friends. But, as Ellen van Wolde has remarked astutely in her semantic analysis of this section, what is truly unique is the shift in person from the quote in 42:3 to 42:4. Whereas in the first case the referent of the quote is Job himself ("Who restricts a plan without knowledge?"), in the second it is

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135) Cf. Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple," pp. 43-46. Seow's ironic reading of Job's words here ("Job's *go'el*," p. 707) places too much emphasis on Job's inability to see God thus far.

YHWH himself ("Listen and I will speak; I ask you and you make me know"). We see here a progression in which Job's quotations indicate a complete submerging of his own perspective in order to adopt God's point of view.[136] It can fairly be said that Job in 42:1-4 sees with the eyes of God, and this is the deeper meaning of his statement about seeing God in 42:5. Not necessarily seeing God manifested in time and space, as a physical body (though this remains a possibility), but seeing as God sees. This is, to be sure, a different understanding of seeing God than we find elsewhere in the Bible. It has been argued that Job here quotes these words ironically, skeptically invoking God's words to him from the *beginning* of the whirlwind speech. But while these quotes in 42:3-4 might be taken as having a questioning tone, I do not think that Job's statement about seeing God can be read in this way. To allow Job to have the last word against God, to reject God's passionate description of the chaotic in nature as well as the rebuke of Job's one-sided moral stance, would be too great an affront to the Bible and to the God it elevates. Although a subversive reading of the *book* of Job by the reader remains a possibility, I do not think that the *character* of Job remains at odds with God at the end of the book.

The differences between Job and his friends exist on many levels—their understanding of reward and punishment, their assessment of the sources of wisdom, and their perspectives on suffering. But in addition to these issues, the theological gulf between them can also be described by the difference between seeing and hearing. Not only do the friends hold out no hope of seeing God, but the very notion of visual theophany, in which one can recognize the presence of the deity, is in their eyes not a possibility worth considering seriously, for it flies in the face of their notion of divine-human relations. Job may share their sense of the difficulty of perceiving the deity's presence, but he nonetheless holds out hope, as he expresses it in 19:27. What he actually sees in the course of the whirlwind speeches is not something we can ascertain, for the narrator does not present to the reader the perspective offered in other theophany narratives.[137] But his use of the *language* of

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136) E. van Wolde, "Job 42:1-6 The Reversal of Job," in Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job*, p. 232.

137) See Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, pp. 90-147.

seeing in 42:5 goes beyond 19:27 in making explicit what has been present as an undercurrent throughout the dialogue—that seeing indicates a perception of the divine which is superior to hearing, whether direct or indirect.

Norman Habel[138] draws an interesting parallel between the contrast of seeing and hearing in 42:5 and that which is found in 28:22ff. In this famous meditation on the nature of *hokhmah*, the text details a search for wisdom throughout the cosmos.[139] Humans are clearly unable to locate wisdom, for it is "hidden from the eyes of all living" (28:21). Death and Abbadon, representing those elements of the world which have "seen it all," can claim only to have *heard* of wisdom: "With our ears we have only a report of it." By contrast, God has actually seen and understood the nature of wisdom. Here it seems that divine seeing consists of more than simple perception. In 28:27 there is a chain of four verbs, beginning with sight but concluding with a full sense of understanding.[140] "He saw and gauged it; he measured it and probed it."[141] This perception of the divine contrasts sharply with the limited perception of Death and Abbadon, who have ostensibly witnessed everything there is to see in the world, but somehow not wisdom.[142] The implication is that, though humans strive mightily to find it, wisdom is accessible only to God. Seeing here is equivalent to the fullest sense of understanding, as is reflected in the chiastic pattern of the four verbs in 28:27.[143] The distinction which is drawn between futile human

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138) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 582

139) The place of chapter 28 within the book of Job is a famously difficult issue. For a survey of opinions and some interesting suggestions about its function in the book see Newsom, *Book of Job*, pp. 169-82; Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, pp. 87-107; E. Greenstein, "The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 and its Conceptual and Literary Contexts," in E. van Wolde (ed.), *Job 28*: *Cognition in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 253-280.

140) J. Elwolde, "Non-Contiguous Parallelism as a Key to Literary Structure and Lexical Meaning in Job 28," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, pp. 113-115.

141) The translation of the second verb, ספר, is much debated. See the discussion in Gordis, *Book of Job*, p. 311.

142) Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, p. 96, underlines the negative sense of hearing here, which by analogy reflects upon the human inability to find wisdom as described in vv. 12-22.

143) Habel, *Book of Job*, p. 400.

efforts to obtain wisdom, and the divine ability to see wisdom, to identify it and to make use of it, can be seen as analogous to the difference between seeing (knowing) wisdom and simply knowing *about* it. This divine seeing is to be measured by its alterity, by the idea that "God sees differently."[144] This type of seeing is not about a subject perceiving an object, but about a way of perceiving the world, and through that, a way of perceiving the divine. This is the point of the pious conclusion of 28:28, in which "the fear of the Lord is wisdom."[145] This is what Job comes to understand after the whirlwind speeches, as reflected in his final remarks in 42:1-6.[146]

I would suggest an analogy between the wisdom poem in Job 28 and Job's relationship with his friends. The friends cannot see God/wisdom, but can only relate what they have heard about it, as their perspective reflects the limitations of their abilities.

God sees wisdom		Job sees God
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Death and Abbadon hear about wisdom		Friends hear about God

Job does not see God as did Moses. Rather, he obtains a new perspective on wisdom by seeing God in a different way, by understanding things from the perspective of the divine, a perspective which the friends are unable to attain. By the end of the book, Job has moved from the human plane to the divine perspective, from the identification with those who have only a secondary relationship to wisdom to

144) Newsom, *Book of Job*, p. 180.

145) On the place of 28:28 within the wisdom poem see the discussion in Newsom, *Book of Job*, p. 170; Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, p. 99; B. Zuckerman, *Job the Silent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 143.

146) See van Wolde, "Job 42:1-6," p. 250. Newsom, Greenstein and Geller (see above n. 136) all share the same idea—that wisdom is not so much found as made manifest in the details of creation. It is this realization that Job sees in 42:5, in his own limited way. For another perspective on Job's seeing cf. the comments of J.G. Williams, "Job's Vision: The Dialectic of Person and Presence," *Hebrew Annual Review* 8 (1984), pp. 259-272.

the perspective of One who has seen wisdom, who knows her.[147] The analogy is, of course, only partial, for God seeing wisdom is not simply about perception, but about the ability to create. Wisdom as perceived by God in Job 28 includes the implementation of wisdom within the very structure of the cosmos. Job is simply a bystander in this process of creation, much in the same way as he can only perceive the design in creation as described by God in the whirlwind speeches. But just as seeing God elsewhere in the Bible does not grant power, only perception, so Job's hearing/seeing God in the whirlwind speeches give him only the ability to appreciate the divine, not to participate in its actions. This is perhaps all the wisdom that humans can achieve. In this sense Job 28 stands close to the final chapters of the book in its claims about the divine monopoly on wisdom and about the nature of human limitations in perceiving wisdom.[148]

In light of this, seeing God in Job comes to have a very different sense from that found in other texts. In Exodus 24, seeing God meant coming face to face with the covenant partner, and getting a glimpse of the divine. In Numbers 22 seeing God in the form of the *mal'akh YHWH* meant understanding the divine message and the unchangeability of the divine decree. But in Job 42:5 seeing God means *seeing the world through the eyes of God*. It does not necessarily refer to a beatific experience, or to the opening of the heavens, or to a vision of the divine throne. It means seeing the complexity of the cosmos in a way that Job had never conceived. When he spoke of seeing God in 19:26-27 it was in the context of facing his tormentor/accuser, and the forensic metaphor was dominant. But in Job's response in 42:1-6 the judicial metaphor of much of the book is largely abandoned, and the moral imagination which is articulated therein is of a different nature. Seeing God here means perceiving otherness in its moral complexity, a complexity which does not see the human world as the central focus of divine concern.

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147) Cf. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, p. 105: "The poet [of Job 28] aims to assert the duality of mankind's position. It dominates nature, standing closer in wisdom to God than any other creation, but it still offers no challenge to God so far as obtaining the ultimate knowledge of natural order is concerned."

148) Geller, *Sacred Enigmas*, p. 105.

To the best of my knowledge, there are only two texts in the Hebrew Bible in which a person begs to see God and has his wish granted. In both cases the fulfillment of the wish is not precisely what was requested, and the "appearance" of God in theophanic fashion shows a different side of the deity. The first case concerns Moses in Exod. 33:19. When he says to YHWH "Show me your Presence," he is asking for a glimpse of the divine essence in a clear physical sense. YHWH's response, agreeing to reveal his back but not his front, emphasizes this physical aspect, even if the words "face" and "back" are read as metaphors for direct and indirect views of the divine. Likewise, YHWH's emphasis on covering Moses with his "palm" when he passes by gives the clear impression that a physical revelation is expected. But when the revelation actually comes in Exodus 34, what is emphasized is YHWH's character as reflected in the aspects of divine behavior described in 34:6-7—merciful, full of compassion, holding out the threat of punishment for a few generations, and the possibility of forgiveness for a thousand. Not a word is said about the physical presence of the deity (as opposed to texts like Exod. 24 and Ezek. 1, for example). We cannot know if Moses is disappointed by this view of YHWH, but it is certainly not what he requested to see. Seeking a glimpse of the divine body, he receives a description of a dependable deity who declares that he behaves in predictable fashion, according to clear moral and covenantal categories.

Job is both similar and different. He too asks to see God, not so much to know the shape and size of divinity, but to vindicate himself in his claim of innocence. He wants God to appear in court, as it were, to answer Job to his face and to vindicate him once and for all, as he has been contending all along. However, what Job sees in the end is a deity who functions outside the normative rules of morality which the world of wisdom literature has come to accept. YHWH as revealed in the whirlwind speeches turns out to have a much broader conception of the organization of the cosmos, a deity who is not defined simply by the usual conventions of divine manifestation or by those human notions of morality and covenant which make the world a comprehensible place. This deity is wilder, much less constrained by conventional notions of morality, a god whose canons of behavior in creation are far from anything Job could previously imagine. Seeking a morally defin-

able God, Job receives a picture of the divine essence, not so much a body as a force for creation and sustenance which extends far beyond the human sphere, to embrace wild creatures and unexpected behaviors. As with Moses, it is impossible to say whether Job is disappointed by this answer, but we do know that he now sees the world differently. Seeing God in Job 42:5 means not that God is the object of Job's gaze, but that the divine provides a subjective lens through which to see the world. For Job, seeing God means seeing the world through the eyes of God.[149]

149) I would like to thank Prof. Ed Greenstein for his incisive comments on an earlier draft of this article.