

## Messianic Implications in Elihu's "Mediator Speech" (Job 33:23-28)

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ETS Annual Meeting  
November 19, 2003

### Introduction

The following paper is still a work in progress. For the ETS presentation I have focused on the interpretation of Job 33:23-24 within its own context and in the OT. There is much more that remains to be examined. For example, more research needs to be pursued in the realm of extrabiblical literature, especially the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and rabbinic sources. Of course, the NT evidence should also be taken into account, but I have left that for another time due to time and space constraints.

In 1935 G. Campbell Morgan published a brief (136-page) study entitled *The Answers of Jesus to Job*<sup>1</sup> in which he connected a number of Christological concepts and teachings to references in Job. Morgan made the usual identifications with Job 9:33; 16:19; and 19:25. However, he did not include 33:23-28. Did he miss an opportunity to expand his study? A substantial portion of the vocabulary in 33:23-28 are theological weighted in the NT: angel, mediator, grace, ransom, and redeem. Who was the "mediator" about whom Elihu spoke? Was he man, angel, God, or Messiah?

In 1887, nearly 50 years prior to Morgan's little publication, Franz Delitzsch had delivered a series of lectures on Messianic prophecies. Addressing the matter of Job 33:23-24, he concluded:

Here we see in the Book of Job, which is elsewhere remarkable for its angelology, that the redemption of man can only be mediated by means of a superhuman being. The *angelus internuntius* is a preformation of the Redeemer going forth from the range of the Godhead. The angelic form is the oldest, which the hope of a mediator of salvation gives (Gen. xlviii. 16). It is taken up again ... in Mal. iii. 1 (cf. also the remarkable translation of the Septuagint of Isa. ix. 5). The מלאך הברית of prophecy is the reality of the מלאך מליץ postulated by the Chokma.<sup>2</sup>

Two major areas of discussion that I will pursue in this paper are the reliability of Elihu's teachings and the interpretation of verses 23-24. The following is the English Standard Version translation of the passage:

"If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand,  
to declare to man what is right for him,

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<sup>1</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Answers of Jesus to Job* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973 reprint of 1935 Fleming H. Revell ed.).

<sup>2</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. by Samuel Ives Curtiss (reprinted; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 105.

and he is merciful to him, and says,  
'Deliver him from going down into the pit;  
I have found a ransom; ...'"<sup>3</sup>

### How Reliable Is Elihu?

In order to accept what Elihu says as viable and normative, we must demonstrate his reliability as a witness to truth. At one extreme we find Freedman identifying Elihu as an incarnation of Satan "to press his case for the last time."<sup>4</sup> A less radical, but still negative, assessment of Elihu is as the parade example of a brash young man with a quick temper who rushes in where even fools fear to tread. Habel identifies Elihu as an example of the אָרִיל (*brash fool*).<sup>5</sup> However, lest we discount Elihu's speeches on the basis of his foolishness, Habel insists that it "does not render his speeches irrelevant."<sup>6</sup> Is his evaluation of Elihu correct? Or, could it be that Elihu was a truly wise man with a true passion for God?

The author of the Book of Job enables us to call other witnesses to the stand—witnesses capable of confirming Elihu's testimony. Those witnesses include God, Job himself, and Job's wife. A review of their testimonies indicates that they confirm Elihu's assessment of Job's problem. Elihu accuses Job of wrong words that reveal a wrong attitude. He announces that Job "adds rebellion to his sin; he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God" (34:37). A few verses later, he levels the same charge: "Job opens his mouth in empty talk; he multiplies words without knowledge" (35:16). Accordingly, Habel wonders if Job's words might be characterized as "verbal sin."<sup>7</sup>

The chief witness to concur with Elihu is God Himself when He speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. He echoes Elihu's charge by means of a rhetorical question:<sup>8</sup> "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2). Both God and Job know the answer to the question. The question serves as an emphatic assertion of Job's guilt. Job had ceased to speak as carefully as he had in the early stages of his suffering. He had responded to his wife by pointing to the nature of her words ("You speak as one of the

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2001). Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> David Noel Freedman, "The Book of Job," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, ed. by William Henry Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David Noel Freedman, Biblical and Judaic Studies from The University of California, San Diego 1 (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Norman C. Habel, "The Role of Elihu in the Design of the Book of Job," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. by W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer, JSOTSS 31 (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1984), 89.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 81.

<sup>8</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, JSOTSS 26 (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1984), 340: "The most striking aspect about 'Job' with regard to rhetorical questions is their *frequency*. Chapter after chapter uses this device to a degree unparalleled by other books. It is highly likely that this is a component of *wisdom* tradition.

"Job is also notable for the sets of rhetorical questions *in series* ... Outstanding, though, is Job 38 which is almost entirely made up of this device."

foolish women would speak," 2:10a).<sup>9</sup> Then, with controlled wisdom, he said, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (v. 10b). The narrator specifically declares that Job's words, up to that point in his suffering, were blameless: "In all this Job did not sin with his lips" (v. 10c).<sup>10</sup>

In the end, Job confirms Elihu's testimony by confessing his failure to control his tongue. He agrees with God (and, thereby, Elihu): "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). As Alden put it, "He deeply regretted the presumption of his foolish words."<sup>11</sup> How does Job's confession relate to God's statement to Eliphaz: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (v. 7)?<sup>12</sup> In the light of God's final declaration, Habel contrasts God's "celestial verdict declaring Job in the right" with "the earthly verdict of Elihu finding Job in the wrong."<sup>13</sup> If Elihu was right, how is it that God could give such a different verdict? Since Elihu is not alone in his assessment of Job's words, perhaps a different understanding is necessary for 42:7.<sup>14</sup> Could God's declaration be based upon Job's return to right speech by means

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<sup>9</sup> William Henry Green (*The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* [Minneapolis, Minn.: James & Klock, 1977 reprint of 1874 ed.], 93-99) observed that Job's wife has suffered at the hands of commentators and preachers. Job did not say specifically that his wife really was a foolish woman. Note that he only indicated that, in this one instance, she spoke "like" one of them (cf. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies*, Moreshet Series 2 [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978], 21). By saying "should we receive," Job purposefully included her in the situation rather than shutting her out. He knew her well enough to know that the words she spoke were shaped by her loss of her children and of her financial security (see David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary 17 [Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1989], 51, for a detailed description of the socio-economic status of Job's wife) was not in this pickle by himself. Job's wife only desired to see her husband's suffering ended. Her words to him had been in loving concern for his welfare even if it meant life as a widow with no means of support. Perhaps it is significant that God addressed Job's friends' foolish words (42:7-9), but made no mention of Job's wife in this regard.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Ibn Ezra understood that this phrase hinted that Job would sin with his lips sometime in the future (see, Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 22, who observes that such an implication is not intended). Cf. "The writer hints that, later on, Job committed himself by some unwise thoughts of the government of God" (F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, 2 vols., trans. by Francis Bolton [reprint; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970], 1:66). Clines comments that "it foreshadows the very different turn the narrative will take when Job opens his mouth again" (Clines, *Job 1-20*, 55).

<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary 11 (N.p.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 409.

<sup>12</sup> "God had just rebuked Job for many wrong words during his dispute with the counselors, in what sense, then, was he here commended for saying what was right?"—Elmer B. Smick, "Job," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library – Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 4:1057. See, also, Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, 3rd ed., Anchor Bible 15 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1973), 350.

<sup>13</sup> Habel, "The Role of Elihu," 88.

<sup>14</sup> Contra Robert V. McCabe, "Elihu's Contribution to the Thought of the Book of Job," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 67 ("Elihu's presentation of Job is diametrically opposed to God's own assessment of Job as a man with impeccable spiritual integrity (1:8, 2:3). Elihu's assessments of Job at key junctures are not only inaccurate, but they are also couched in his anger"). However, McCabe later appears to present Elihu's assessment of Job as accurate: "Has Elihu given an accurate verdict on Job's speech? In comparing Elihu's assessments of Job's words with God's, God's evaluation indicates that Job has sometimes made assertions in ignorance but he has generally been correct in his understanding of God's administration of justice.

of his confession? In such a case, perhaps the divine verdict about Job's three friends involved their failure to confess their presumptive ignorance in the way Job had.

Although virtually unnoted, *words* are a theme of the Book of Job. The narrator, all five men, and God focus on words and speech.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the book of Job is a battle of words. The lesson thus exemplified is that it is difficult even for a righteous man like Job to always maintain control over his mouth (cf. James 3). The emphasis on speech (both wise and unwise) is a theme in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Prov 10:19-21, 31-32; 12:16-22; 15:1-2, 4, 7, 23, 28).<sup>16</sup>

Elihu also accuses Job of being over-zealous in protecting his reputation and rightness: "Do you think this to be just? Do you say, 'It is my right before God,'<sup>17</sup> that you ask, 'What advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned?'" (35:2-3). Before providing the reader with Elihu's accusation against Job, the narrator sums up the situation between Job and his three friends and between Job and Elihu: "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God" (32:1-2).

A harbinger of this ultimate conflict appeared in the prologue. There the narrator reports that, up to that time in Job's early stages of suffering, "Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22). The meaning of "wrong" (תִּפְלוּת) needs clarification. If it is best translated "contempt," does it refer to "curse"? Does Job cross this line in his later speeches?<sup>18</sup> Is the report that Job "cursed the day of his birth" (3:1) the beginning of a

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"... Yahweh's evaluation of Job is that Job has spoken some words that have condemned God in order to justify himself. Though Job's words are sinful, these are not words of a blasphemous rebel" (ibid., 68).

<sup>15</sup> The following table shows the relative frequency of key Hebrew terms for speech in Job as compared to a few other OT corpora:

Corpus	עֲנָה	אָמַר	דָּבַר	דִּבֶּר	מָלָה	Total Occurrences	Ratio (occurrences/total verses in corpus)
Job	62	86	39	20	34	241	241/1070 = <b>0.225</b>
Proverbs	8	25	10	36	1	80	80/915 = <b>0.087</b>
Deuteronomy	19	142	71	95	0	327	327/955 = <b>0.342</b>
Isaiah	26	171	47	49	0	293	293/1291 = <b>0.227</b>
1&2 Samuel	50	307	79	146	1	583	583/1506 = <b>0.387</b>

Most characters (the exceptions are Satan, Job's servants, and Job's wife) make reference to words or speech as follows: *Narrator* (1:16, 17, 18; 2:10; 3:1; 31:40; 32:1, 3, 4, 5; 42:7), *Eliphaz* (4:2, 3, 4, 12, 16; 5:1, 15, 16, 21; 15:2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 13, 17, 23, 30; 22:13, 17, 22, 29), *Job* (2:10; 6:3, 10, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 7:4, 11, 13; 9:3, 7, 12, 14, 15, 16, 20, 22, 27, 32, 35; 10:1, 2; 12:4, 7, 8, 11, 20; 13:3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 15, 17, 22; 14:15; 16:3, 4, 5, 6, 21; 17:12, 14; 19:2, 7, 16, 18, 23, 28; 21:2, 3, 14, 19, 22, 28, 31, 34; 23:4, 5, 7, 12; 24:18, 25; 26:3, 4, 14; 27:4, 5, 11; 28:14, 22, 26, 27, 28; 29:9, 10, 22, 23; 30:20; 31:14, 30, 31, 35; 40:4, 5), *Bildad* (8:2, 10, 18, 21; 18:2), *Zophar* (11:2, 4, 5; 20:7, 12, 13, 29), *Elihu* (32:6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20; 33:1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 27, 31, 32, 33; 34:2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 16, 18, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37; 35:2, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16; 36:2, 4, 9, 10, 22, 23, 32; 37:2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 15, 19, 20), and *God* (38:2, 11, 12, 18, 34, 35; 39:27; 40:2, 9; 41:3; 42:4, 7, 8).

<sup>16</sup> Such a theme was not touched upon by Gary V. Smith, "Is There a Place for Job's Wisdom in Old Testament Theology?" *Trinity Journal* 13/1 (Spring 1992): 3-20.

<sup>17</sup> "I am more righteous than God" is a better translation of אָמַרְתִּי מֵאֵל (cf. John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988], 463).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 94.

reversal of the state Job enjoyed in 1:22? תַּפְּלָה is related to תָּפַל ("tasteless") in 6:6-7.<sup>19</sup> Hartley's summary is as good as any: "It has the sense of something unsavory or unseemly, an impropriety. Used in regard to Yahweh it means accusing him of an action that is contrary to his holy nature."<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after that, Job's wife addresses the issue when she asks Job, "Do you still hold fast your integrity?" (עֲדָךְ מַחֲזִיק בְּתַמְתְּךָ, 2:9). She understood her husband better than anyone other than God. She knew his weaknesses. Would her husband stubbornly maintain his own righteousness even if it meant accusing God of wrongdoing? Job's wife perceived that her husband was capable of ignoring circumstances in the defense of his own integrity.<sup>21</sup> Clines notes, "Though he does not follow his wife's advice to the letter, he is from this point onward entirely infused by its spirit."<sup>22</sup> And, that is indeed what we find near the conclusion of his dialogue with his three friends. Job still insists on his integrity: "Far be it from me to say that you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me" (לֹא-אָסִיר תַּמְתִּי מִמֶּנִּי, 27:5). He is echoing his wife's question. There are only two other occasions in Job where this term for "integrity" (תַּמָּה) is employed. The first is in 2:3 where Yahweh says to Satan, "He still holds fast his integrity [וְעֲדָנוּ מַחֲזִיק בְּתַמְתּוֹ], although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Job uses the term in his final reference to his integrity: "Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity [תַּמְתִּי]!" (31:6).

Elihu censured Job for saying, "I am in the right, and God has taken away my right" (34:5; see 9:15, 20; 27:2). As Payne explains, the first part of Job's statement is correct, but the second part is not.<sup>23</sup> Elihu goes on to make his point: "far be it from God, that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should do wrong" (v. 10). Elihu's assessment is correct, for Job was indeed "wrong, temporarily, in his antagonistic attitude against his heavenly sovereign (32:2; 33:13; 35:2)."<sup>24</sup>

The ultimate witness to confirm Elihu's accusation is God Himself. In 40:8 God exposes Job to a stinging interrogation: "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?" Apparently, Job had turned a corner somewhere along the way. He is no longer maintaining the high moral and spiritual ground that he had occupied at the beginning of his suffering. Job's words are proof of his wrong thinking. His attitude had degenerated through his interminable suffering. Job did not suffer because he had sinned, he ended up sinning because of his suffering.<sup>25</sup> In essence, Job "charged God with acting unjustly. For a mortal to presume himself guiltless and to *impugn* God's just governance of the world approaches the sin of presumptuous

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<sup>19</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 78 n. 23.

<sup>21</sup> She "feared that it inspired a fanaticism in him that refused to face the reality of circumstances" (ibid., 83).

<sup>22</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> J. Barton Payne, "Inspiration in the Words of Job," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. by John H. Skilton (n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), 323.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Pope, *Job*, 318: "Job had indeed denied divine justice in his own case and even in the world at large; cf., e.g., ix 22. His outbursts were considered blasphemous by the rabbis, but excusable under the circumstances ... (TB, Baba Bathra 16b)."

pride."<sup>26</sup> According to Payne, when Job said, "I retract' (42:6). By this he meant, fundamentally, the faulty evaluations he had made of God (vs. 5). . . . Job had gotten carried away by his own rhetoric."<sup>27</sup> In 8:3 Bildad asks Job, "Does God pervert [יַעֲרֹת] justice? Or does the Almighty pervert [יַעֲרֹת] the right?" Job utilizes the same verb in 19:6 to accuse God of injustice: "know then that God has put me in the wrong [עָוֹתָנִי] and closed his net about me." Elihu chooses the same verb in 34:12 to declare, "Of a truth, God will not do wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert [לֹא-יַעֲרֹת] justice." The use of the same Hebrew verb in these three texts is a subtle, but powerful, confirmation of Job's charge against God.<sup>28</sup>

Although this powerful confluence of opinion regarding Job's situation should be sufficient in and of itself to validate Elihu's reliability, additional arguments can be advanced to support that validation. Elihu respected his elders (32:4), but did not allow their error to infect him (32:14). He claimed impartiality (32:21-22), desired Job's justification (33:32), and offered what he described as true wisdom (33:33). The young man declared that his ultimate aim was to justify God and that should also be Job's desire (34:12; 35:10-11; 36:2-3, 22-26). Prior to Elihu's speeches the dialogue had been more anthropocentric than theocentric.<sup>29</sup> God allows him the nearly prophetic privilege of announcing the approaching theophany (37:1-5, 22). It may also be significant (although it is an argument from silence<sup>30</sup>) that Elihu was excluded both from God's condemnation of Job's friends (42:7-9) and Job's prayer of intercession (42:8-10). Like a herald or a forerunner,<sup>31</sup> Elihu prepares Job for the transition. Job had longed for an audience with his Maker and now he was going to get it. Especially for those of us who are married, one has to wonder what passed through the patriarch's mind when God addressed the matter of concerning Job's obsession with his integrity (40:8)—Job's wife had focused on that very issue at the beginning of his suffering (2:9).

In conclusion, there is no reason to question the reliability of Elihu's words concerning Job's mediator in 33:23-24. Beeby makes a valid observation: "It is only because we have looked at Elihu the man with a jaundiced eye that his words have been misunderstood."<sup>32</sup> However, the narrator, Job's wife, Job himself, and God all confirm Elihu's assessment of Job's situation. It would seem logical to also accept what he has to say about the remedy for Job's situation.

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<sup>26</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 519.

<sup>27</sup> Payne, "Inspiration in the Words of Job," 325-26. Thus, Job withdrew "his avowal of innocence" (Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 537).

<sup>28</sup> Payne, "Inspiration in the Words of Job," 326.

<sup>29</sup> Larry J. Waters, "Elihu's Theology and His View of Suffering," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156/622 (Apr-June 1999): 144.

<sup>30</sup> Yet, "the implication is that if Elihu had been in full agreement with the three, then he would have been equally condemned"—Larry J. Waters, "The Authenticity of the Elihu Speeches in Job 32-37," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156/621 (Jan-March 1999): 39.

<sup>31</sup> Smick rejects this depiction of Elihu on the grounds that Elihu "saw no need for a confrontation between Job and God (34:23-24)" ("Job," 4:998). However, the passage to which Smick refers seems to speak of the fact that God is not under any constraint to confront any man before He should choose to initiate judgment. He is free to deal with an individual without granting a hearing first. That does not rule out the possibility of God choosing to confront someone.

<sup>32</sup> H. D. Beeby, "Elihu—Job's Mediator?" *The S.E. Asia Journal of Theology* 7/2 (Oct 1965): 46.

## Job 33:23-24

### The Immediate Context

Alden interprets Elihu's speech as presenting two separate and unrelated actions to free the sufferer from his suffering.<sup>33</sup> His suggested scenario is as follows:

1. Elihu calls upon Job to listen to his argumentation and to reply to it (33:1, 5) and restates Job's own argument concerning his blamelessness (33:8-11).
2. Then he responds to Job's claim (33:12-30).
  - 2.1 As he responds, Elihu states that God has ways of dealing with people in order to bring them into conformity with His will (33:12-22). The divine methods vary from case to case.
    - 2.11 Sometimes God speaks to people in dreams (33:15-18),
    - 2.12 but He might also employ suffering (33:19-22).<sup>34</sup>
  - 2.2 Since suffering would seem to be the most likely scenario—and, indeed, it was Job's experience—there are two possible ways to obtain deliverance: (1) the work of an intercessor (33:23-25) and (2) the sufferer's repentance (33:26-28). Job had desired just such an intercessor, but one had not appeared. Since such an intercessor "is only a remote possibility ('one out of a thousand'), a more viable option is the one Elihu, less directly than the other three, urged Job to take."<sup>35</sup>

Alden's scenario cannot be accepted as an adequate representation of the text, however. Repentance is not a second option, it is the consequence of the mediator's work. According to Ross, the mediator intercedes and the consequence is the confession.<sup>36</sup> Habel concurs: "Reconciliation is won by the intercession of the mediator not by human contrition."<sup>37</sup> However, for Habel it is all nothing more than a shrewd ploy on the part of Elihu to employ Job's own vision of a mediator to set up a hypothetical case for gaining Job's agreement.<sup>38</sup> That seems a little too simplistic. As Habel himself admits, "The stinger in the tail of the analogy is that the 'upright' person finally confesses (v. 27)."<sup>39</sup>

A strophic analysis of Job 33 presented by Webster gives at least some support to a logical flow from instruction (vv. 14-22), to mediation (vv. 23-25), to repentance (vv. 26-28), and finally deliverance from the Pit (vv. 29-30).<sup>40</sup> The majority of commentators

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Alden, *Job*, 322-31.

<sup>34</sup> Steinmann enumerates three ways God might select for delivering a person from the Pit: dreams (v. 18), sickness (v. 22), and the angelic mediator (v. 24). "All three are summarized by the numerical saying in vv. 29-30"—Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Graded Numerical Saying in Job," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by Astrid B. Beck et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 294.

<sup>35</sup> Alden, *Job*, 330.

<sup>36</sup> James F. Ross, "Job 33:14-30: The Phenomenology of Lament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 42.

<sup>37</sup> Habel, *The Book of Job*, 462.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Edwin C. Webster, "Strophic Patterns in Job 29-42," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (1984): 102. Webster notes the inclusio of graded numerical statements in vv. 14 and 29 with the pattern  $x + (x + 1)$  that frame this context.

would agree with the use of "then" (as in ESV) to connect verse 26 with verses 23-25. Once the afflicted individual has been restored by divine grace, he can approach God with confidence to make his confession and to experience again the joy of divine fellowship.<sup>41</sup>

### Who Is the "Mediator"?

Perhaps the mediator is the most significant contribution made by the Book of Job to Old Testament thought.<sup>42</sup> Habel is convinced that Elihu saw himself as Job's mediator or arbiter. He points to 32:12 declaring that "The terms מוֹכִיחַ 'arbiter', and עוֹנֵה 'answerer', are technical juridical terms. ... The arbiter (מוֹכִיחַ) is an official of the city gate who presides over civil cases and recommends a resolution for disputes."<sup>43</sup> Chapter 33, therefore, would begin (v. 1) and end (vv. 31-33) with summonses issued to Job by Elihu. Job is called upon to defend himself before a verdict is reached in his case.<sup>44</sup> In the prose frame of the book Job is presented as a pious patriarch, but in the poetic frame of the book he is gradually revealed as a "despairing sufferer at odds with his God and his friends."<sup>45</sup> Job's very being cries out for a proper legal hearing in which he would have an advocate or mediator defending him (cf. 9:32-35; 16:18-22; 19:23-27).<sup>46</sup>

Job's desire for such an advocate becomes the focal point of Elihu's description of the divine procedure for the afflicted man's restoration. In 33:23-24 a threefold identification of the advocate is center stage:

23 "If there be for him **an angel,**  
**a mediator,**  
**one of the thousand,**  
to declare to man what is right for him,  
24 and he is merciful to him, and says,  
'Deliver him from going down into the pit;  
I have found a ransom; ...'"<sup>47</sup>

**The Messenger (מַלְאָךְ).** Hartley lists six different potential identifications for the "angel" or "messenger" (מַלְאָךְ).<sup>48</sup> The most popular of these views is that he is an angel,

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<sup>41</sup> E.g., E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. by Harold Knight (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 504; Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 378; Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 447; and McCabe, "Elihu's Contribution to the Thought of the Book of Job," 54.

<sup>42</sup> Donald L. Williams, "The Speeches of Job," *Review and Expositor* 68 (Fall 1971): 476.

<sup>43</sup> Habel, "The Role of Elihu," 82.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> This translation is ESV restructured by the author of this paper. Compare it with Guillaume's translation:

If there be with him an angel,  
An interpreter, one among a thousand,  
To show unto man what is right for him;  
Then he is gracious unto him and says  
"Spare him from going down unto the pit,  
I have found a ransom."

A. Guillaume, *Studies in the Book of Job with a New Translation*, ed. by John MacDonald, Supplement II to the Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1968), 61.



a spirit being.<sup>49</sup> Hartley takes this approach: "Elihu teaches that there is a heavenly intercessor who takes up the sufferer's case. This helper is an angel who functions as a mediator (*mēlîš*), one who will help whomever God is afflicting for disciplinary reasons."<sup>50</sup> In opposition to this viewpoint Pope relates the reference to Eliphaz's taunting question in 5:1 to show Job that it was hopeless to expect some lesser supernatural being to be his intercessor with God.<sup>51</sup>

Other interpreters identify the "messenger" with a human being.<sup>52</sup> Alden is convinced that the מַלְאָכִים is "best pictured not as a feminine figure with gossamer wings but as a close friend or relative who agrees to do the duty of kinsman redeemer and stand by the plaintiff's side."<sup>53</sup> Delitzsch emphatically denies that a mere human could fulfill the role envisioned in the text:

This deliverance, as Elihu says, requires a mediator. This course of thought does not admit of our understanding the מַלְאָכִים of a human messenger of God, such as Job has before him in Elihu (Schult., Schnurr., Boullier, Eichh., Rosenm., Welte), an 'interpreter of the divine will, such as one finds one man among a thousand to be, a God-commissioned speaker, in one word: a prophet' (von Hofmann in *Schriftbew.* i.336f.). The מַלְאָכִים appears not merely as a declarer of the conditions of the deliverance, but as a mediator of this deliverance itself.<sup>54</sup>

Although it seems better to invest this messenger with a heavenly rather than a human identity, the remaining descriptors discourage making the individual an angel. If this messenger is an angel, it would be the only biblical reference to such angelic authority and duties.

**The Mediator (מַלְאָכִים).** Driver and Gray defend the angelic interpretation of the מַלְאָכִים. The מַלְאָכִים is an angelic intermediary between God and man. The "function of this special class of angels was to interpret to men, as it were, the foreign and unintelligible language (Gn. 42<sup>23</sup>) of God's dealings with them."<sup>55</sup> Dhorme compares this "angel" with

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<sup>48</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 446. The 6 views are: (1) a human being, (2) the sufferer's own conscience, (3) an angel, (4) the heavenly witness mentioned in 16:19, (5) the special angel or messenger of Yahweh, and (6) Christ (though hidden in the figure).

<sup>49</sup> McCabe, "Elihu's Contribution to the Thought of the Book of Job," 54 n. 35.

<sup>50</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 446.

<sup>51</sup> Pope, *Job*, 41, 251.

<sup>52</sup> See, Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 347-48; H. D. Beeby, "Elihu—Job's Mediator?" *The S.E. Asia Journal of Theology* 7/2 (Oct 1965): 45; David Wolfers, "Elihu: The Provenance and Content of His Speeches," *Dor-le-Dor* 16 (1987/88): 92; and Hendrik Viviers, "Elihu (Job 32-37), Garrulous but Poor Rhetor? Why Is He Ignored?" in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, JSNTSS 146 (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 143. All four identify Elihu as this messenger. In fact, Beeby also identifies the "redeemer" in 19:25 as Elihu ("Elihu—Job's Mediator?" 45).

<sup>53</sup> Alden, *Job*, 329.

<sup>54</sup> Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, 2:228-29.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of Job*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1971 reprint of 1921 ed.), 1:290. The angelic view is also taken by Tim Powell, "מַלְאָכִים," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 2:798, 799, and

Michael in Daniel 12:1 and with all the prophets (cf. Isa 43:27).<sup>56</sup> There are a variety of translations for מְלִיץ. It is a term found not only in Scripture, but in the Qumran scrolls as well, where it is normally translated as "interpreter."<sup>57</sup> Ancient translations like the Septuagint appear to have struggled with the translation of the Hebrew text (or, to have had a totally different text than what has been preserved in the MT).<sup>58</sup> As John Gammie observes,

What is especially interesting about this passage is not so much that the singular מְלִיץ is rendered in Greek as a plural, for this can be fairly easily explained, but rather, that the function of the ἄγγελοι appears to be death-bearing (θανατηφόροι) to man and not that of spokesmen in behalf of man's righteousness, as the Masoretic text most naturally means. It is difficult to determine, on the basis of the Masoretic text, what Hebrew the translator had before him. The phrase "but if he should take it to heart to turn to the Lord" seems to have no basis in the MT. The translator thus here seems to be paraphrastic. And if paraphrastic, thus expressing something of his own interpretive views.<sup>59</sup>

The MT's depiction is the activity of intercession. The Septuagint, however, focuses on the necessity of repentance in order to prevent divine judgment administered by angels dealing death.<sup>60</sup> Such a view may have received impetus from 33:22 ("those who bring death," מְלִיץִים).<sup>61</sup> Gammie notes that, in the light of the deaths of Job's children, the

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Philip E. Satterthwaite, "מְלִיץ," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 2:955.

<sup>56</sup> Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 501.

<sup>57</sup> 1QpHab 8:4 (MT); 1QH 2:13, 14, 31; 4:7, 9; 6:13; 18:11. Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 8 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), 41.

<sup>58</sup> The Syriac Peshitta also took a paraphrastic approach similar to that of the Septuagint and the Targums. According to Heidi M. Szpek, *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Job: A Model for Evaluating a Text with Documentation from the Peshitta to Job*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 137 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 161: "In P[eshitta]-Job nineteen examples of paraphrase were discovered . . . What prompts a translator to paraphrase? In some cases the desire to clarify an ambiguous or uncommon term is obvious. So, for example, with Heb. מְלִיץ (Hiphil participle מְלִיץ 'to scorn'), a term which occurs only here (33:23) and twice elsewhere (Isa 43:27; 2 Chr 32:31) with the meaning 'interpreter'. P simply rendered it מִלְּשָׁנָה 'one who listens to him'; by contrast in Gen 42:23 the specific מְלִיץ 'interpreter' is used." "P does not preserve a reading for מְלִיץ in 2 Chr 32:31" (ibid., 161 n. 75).

<sup>59</sup> John G. Gammie, "The Angelology and Demonology in the Septuagint of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 56 (1985): 5. The LXX reads as follows: ἐὰν ὧσιν χίλιοι ἄγγελοι θανατηφόροι, εἰς αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ τρώσῃ αὐτόν· ἐὰν νοήσῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ ἐπιστραφῆναι ἐπὶ κύριον, ἀναγγεῖλῃ δὲ ἀνθρώπῳ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μέμψιν, τὴν δὲ ἄνοιαν αὐτοῦ δείξῃ, ἀνθέξεται τοῦ μὴ πεσεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς θάνατον, ἀνανεώσει δὲ αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα ὡς περ ἀλοιφῆν ἐπὶ τοίχου, τὰ δὲ ὀστά αὐτοῦ ἐμπλήσει μυελοῦ· ("If there were a thousand death-bearing angels not one of them would wound him if he should take it to heart to turn to the Lord. On the contrary, He proclaims to man his fault and shows him his senselessness. He will withstand his falling into death. He will renew his body as ointment on a courtly wall. His bones He will fill with marrow"), Job 33:23-24.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Smick, "Job," 4:1008.

Septuagint's translator may have had Satan in mind as the angel of death.<sup>62</sup> The difficulties of the Septuagint translation are compounded by the fact that the translator has omitted "up to 35% of the text in chapters 32–37 (Elihu's speeches)."<sup>63</sup> It is apparent that no one can base much on the Septuagint translation of the passage before us. Its primary contribution is to an understanding of the hermeneutics and theology held by Alexandrian Jews within two centuries of Christ.

The Septuagint may reflect interpretive methodologies identical to those exhibited in the Targums. An angel of death is identified by additions in the Targums of Job 18:13; 19:29; 28:27; and 33:23.<sup>64</sup> Commentary on Job 2:4-7 in the Babylonian Talmud equates the angel of death and Satan.<sup>65</sup> The Aramaic Targum translated מְלִיץ with פִּרְקָלִיטָא from the Greek παράκλητος,<sup>66</sup> a significant term in Jesus' "Upper Room Discourse" (cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). Did Jesus choose παράκλητος because of its use in the Targum of Job? Research for this paper was unable to demonstrate any direct connection. Gordis commends the Targum for its rendering, claiming that the Greek term means "defense attorney."<sup>67</sup> Later Hebrew drew upon Job 33:23 for expressing the concept of "defender" by means of מְלִיץ יִשְׂרָאֵל.<sup>68</sup> Although the "apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, and early rabbinic works are full of references to angelic mediators"<sup>69</sup> using the same word (מְלִיץ), "their function is quite different."<sup>70</sup> The difference is in the provision of a ransom and deliverance rather than just intercession. That would seem to exclude angels as candidates for the messenger in Job 33:23.

It is tempting to associate the mediator in Job 33:23-24 with the role of the παράκλητος in the Gospel of John (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). After all, it is God Himself who shows grace and redeems in Elihu's speeches. But, as Ross concludes, "these are probably merely superficial similarities; the angelic spokesman of Job 33:23 and the Paraclete share only the role of mediation and otherwise operate in realms of their own."<sup>71</sup> In other words, the Holy Spirit's realm of activity is primarily revelation whereas Christ's realm of activity is primarily redemption. We must keep in mind that the παράκλητος described in John's Gospel is the Holy Spirit, not Christ. Christ Himself is a παράκλητος (note 14:16, ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν = "He will give you another [of the

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<sup>62</sup> Gammie, "The Angelology and Demonology in the Septuagint of the Book of Job," 12.

<sup>63</sup> Natalio Fernández Marcos, "The Septuagint Reading of the Book of Job," in *The Book of Job*, ed. by W. A. M. Beuken, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium 114 (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1994), 262.

<sup>64</sup> Céline Mangan, "The Interpretation of Job in the Targums," in *The Book of Job*, ed. by W. A. M. Beuken, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium 114 (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1994), 269.

<sup>65</sup> *Baba Bathra* 16a. Ibid., 269 n. 14.

<sup>66</sup> "The 1st hemistich is paraphrased in Targ. 'if there is virtue in him, an angel prepares to intervene, an advocate (פִּרְקָלִיטָא, παράκλητος) among a thousand accusers (קַטְיִגּוֹרִיאַ, κατηγορος)'" (Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 501). פִּרְקָלִיטָא in Aramaic has the meaning of "advocate" or "intercessor" according to Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: P. Shalom Pub. Inc., 1967), 2:1241.

<sup>67</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 377.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ross, "Job 33:14-30: The Phenomenology of Lament," 45.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 46.

same kind] advocate"). Although the Holy Spirit is never described as presenting a ransom, Christ is.

**One of a Thousand (אֶחָד מִנִּי-אַלֶּף).** Note the differences in translation at this point. ESV appears to agree with Driver and Gray who take the expression as a reference to a large number of angels even though they are but a few among the myriads.<sup>72</sup> Andersen likewise interprets the phraseology in a way that "implies rather that God has a large team available for such a task."<sup>73</sup> The terminology is found also in Job 9:3; Ecclesiastes 7:28; and Sirach 6:5—only in wisdom literature.<sup>74</sup>

A more adequate interpretation of Elihu's phraseology, however, is in the sense of "unique." It is a hyperbole referring to something (or someone) rare or difficult to find.<sup>75</sup> As Hartley explains, "This angel is one in a thousand, i.e., 'one of a kind,' meaning that there is only one such angel. Elihu recognizes that no earthly person can fulfill that role. It must be a heavenly messenger."<sup>76</sup>

**The Act of Grace (וַיִּתְּנֵנִי).** According to Hawthorne, this is the only direct reference to grace (the root is תָּנַן) in the entire book of Job.<sup>77</sup> Since human beings are sinners, no individual is able to save himself or herself without divine intervention. This is a truth that Elihu recognized.<sup>78</sup> Driver and Gray indicate that there are two possible subjects implicit in the verb וַיִּתְּנֵנִי: "God (Hi. De. Di. Dav.), or the angel (Du. Peake)."<sup>79</sup> However, they also note that there is an exceedingly strong argument for deity being involved here:

Others take God as the subj., on the ground (Di.) that the right of showing favour and receiving ransom does not belong to the angel; and certainly, if it is not to the 'slayer,' it must be to God that the ransom is ultimately paid (cp. the illuminating parallel in Ps. 49<sup>8-10 (7-9)</sup>); yet the angel may speak as God's agent.<sup>80</sup>

Redemptive theology as expressed in Psalm 49:7-9, 15 (Heb. 8-10, 16) would appear to eliminate any man from being Job's "mediator." This particular line of reasoning is especially fitting when considering the "ransom." As Gordis explains, the "subject of the

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<sup>72</sup> Driver and Gray, *The Book of Job*, 1:290. This is also the view taken by Stanley Gevirtz, "Phoenician *wšbrt mlšm* and Job 33:23," *Maarav* 5-6 (Spring 1990): 148. Since I worked as an editor on Job in the ESV project, I should have noted this translation and should have recommended "one of a thousand," but regrettably I failed to do so.

<sup>73</sup> Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 250.

<sup>74</sup> Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, "Das Verhältnis Ijobs und Ben Siras," in *The Book of Job*, ed. by W. A. M. Beuken, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 114 (Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1994), 415.

<sup>75</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 377.

<sup>76</sup> John E. Hartley, "Job: Theology of," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 4:787. See, also, Alden, *Job*, 330.

<sup>77</sup> Ralph Rogers Hawthorne, "Jobine Theology: Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101/402 (Apr-June 1944): 184. (art. 173-86)

<sup>78</sup> Waters, "Elihu's Theology and His View of Suffering," 148.

<sup>79</sup> Driver and Gray, *The Book of Job*, 2:248.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:291.

verb is not the angelic advocate who does not possess the authority to redeem man, but God."<sup>81</sup>

**The Pit (שְׁחַת).** שְׁחַת ("pit") occurs 23 times in the Hebrew Bible. The densest concentration of occurrences takes place right here in Job 33.<sup>82</sup> It "indicates a physical pit only infrequently, some eight times. And two of these [Pss 9:15; 94:13] contain underworld allusion since the pit is dug for the deserving wicked. More often *šahat* refers to the underworld: fifteen times in eleven passages."<sup>83</sup> Parallels with Psalm 49 demonstrate that the topic is death.<sup>84</sup> The Pit is the perceived location of either the dead body or of the departed spirit. Since all men die, the association of the Pit with those who are wicked would seem to indicate that there is something more than just the grave that is in view.

**The Ransom (כִּפְר).** For some commentators, the ransom is figurative. It is thus taken as "the sufferer's own improved spiritual state as an adequate ground or reason for his release from further endurance."<sup>85</sup> Tate believes it "is best to understand it as a general term for that which is acceptable to God."<sup>86</sup> According to the Peshitta,

The 'he' of the MT refers to a mediator or angel 'who could declare to man what is right' (33:23). It is this mediator who declares that he has found a ransom for Job. In P, the mediator is still the author of this declaration, but with a slight twist. It is not he, the mediator, who will procure the ransom, but Job himself who will find it. Thus the mediator brings hopeful tidings of help, but that is all. It is Job who must find the 'ransom' himself.<sup>87</sup>

Who will obtain this "ransom" for Job? Interpreters who hold to the angelic view identify the one with the ransom as an "interpreting angel," who addresses a death-bearing angel (v. 22). This reference is thus understood to foreshadow "the later highly developed doctrine of opposed types of angels interested in the death of men"<sup>88</sup> Alden's interpretation is that the "'gracious' intercessor pleads, presumably before the bar of divine justice on behalf of his friend. His last-minute discovery of a 'ransom' saves the condemned from descent into the 'grave/pit' (cf. vv. 18,22,24,28,30)."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 377.

<sup>82</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "שְׁחַת," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 4:94.

<sup>83</sup> Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 84. In n. 77 the eleven passages are listed: Job 17:14; 33:18, 22, 24, 28, 30; Pss 16:10; 30:10; 49:10; 55:24; 103:4; Isa 38:17; 51:14; Ezek 28:8; Jon 2:7.

<sup>84</sup> Alden, *Job*, 330: "The last elements in this list of the good effects of prayer and reconciliation with God are 'salvation/redemption' from the 'grave' and ongoing 'life' in 'the light,' that is, above ground on earth, as opposed to underground in some 'pit.' Neither Elihu nor Job were thinking much beyond physical death but, like their contemporaries, they unknowingly heralded important doctrines that would unfold as God progressively revealed his plan of the ages."

<sup>85</sup> Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 348.

<sup>86</sup> Marvin E. Tate, "The Speeches of Elihu," *Review and Expositor* 68 (Fall 1971): 492.

<sup>87</sup> Szpek, *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Job*, 87. "And he will have compassion on him and say, 'Deliver him that he will not go down to corruption, and he will find salvation for himself.'"

<sup>88</sup> Driver and Gray, *The Book of Job*, 1:291.

<sup>89</sup> Alden, *Job*, 329.

Psalm 49:7-9 (Hebrew, 8-10) is the key passage in understanding the nature of this "ransom" as well as the individual who applies it to Job's situation. God alone is capable of providing the ransom.<sup>90</sup> Certainly no man can provide it, and nothing in Scripture (either OT or NT) provides any indication that an angel has such a capability.

### **Messianic Implications?**

Job 33:23-24 makes a significant contribution to the Old Testament description of God's dealings with mankind, whether or not the messenger is the Messiah.<sup>91</sup> Payne complimented the quality of Elihu's teaching "on the substitutionary nature of divine atonement (33:23-24)."<sup>92</sup> He considered the reference in verse 24 to be, in some way, a type of "the ransom yet to be paid by Jesus Christ."<sup>93</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon delivered a sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1869 entitled "Footsteps of Mercy" based upon Job 33:23-24. He declared that "the full meaning of these words will never be found in ministers of mortal race. We must rather refer it to the Great Messenger of the Covenant, the Great Interpreter between God and man."<sup>94</sup>

In a thought-provoking essay, Block reminds us all that in the study of the Messiah in the OT "we have sometimes played loose and free with the evidence and imposed on texts meanings and/or significance that go beyond authorial intent."<sup>95</sup> Most expositors would agree with Greg Parsons in warning that the New Testament teachings concerning the redemptive work of Jesus Christ should not be allowed "to shape the understanding of Job's 'redeemer.'"<sup>96</sup> Such a conclusion, however, would not deny that Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of Job's longing for a mediator.<sup>97</sup> Some commentators would see Christ as the ultimate mediator even if they would take Job 33:23-24 as a reference to a contemporary of Job. Alden says, "In the fullness of time Jesus, the son of God, came to stand up and represent his believing followers, and he is 'much superior to the angels' (Heb 1:4)."<sup>98</sup> He goes on to write,

Many of the words in these two verses become theologically freighted in the New Testament: angel, mediator, grace, ransom. For the Christian, Christ is the gracious mediator who ransoms the believer's soul from everlasting death.<sup>99</sup>

The revelation contained in both OT and NT restricts our understanding of the individual who properly fits the description in Job 33:23-24. The Hebrew Bible itself proclaims emphatically that no human being can fulfill the assignment. Although there is

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<sup>90</sup> Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 446. "This was something no man could give for himself; cf. Ps xlix 7-9; Matt xvi 26, xx 28; I Tim ii 6; Rev v 9" (Pope, *Job*, 252).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. McCabe, "Elihu's Contribution to the Thought of the Book of Job," 54.

<sup>92</sup> Payne, "Inspiration in the Words of Job," 320.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Footsteps of Mercy," Sermon No. 905 in volume 15, electronic edition, [www.spurgeongems.org/chs905.pdf](http://www.spurgeongems.org/chs905.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Daniel I. Block, "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah," in *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. by Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 22.

<sup>96</sup> Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151/604 (Oct 1994): 406.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 406 n. 78, 410 n. 101.

<sup>98</sup> Alden, *Job*, 329.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

no equivalent elimination of angelic beings from consideration, no passage of either testament attributes to an angel any such capabilities. In all of divine revelation there is only one who can fulfill the offices and actions Elihu describes: the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Elihu may not have understood that at all, but he did accurately define what is involved in the identification of Job's true mediator. The OT title for the pre-incarnate Son of God is **מְלֶאךָּ יְהוָה** (Gen 16:7-11; 22:11, 15; Zech 1:11-13; 3:1-6).<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

Job 33:3-24 is, at minimum, a very early<sup>101</sup> signal that the redemption of a human being from an ultimate residence in the realm of the unrighteous dead is a superhuman task. It is not something that one human being can accomplish on behalf of another (Ps 49: 7-9, 15, Heb. 8-10, 16). Therefore, Elihu cannot be Job's mediator-redeemer—by the OT's own standards. However, the OT provides no evidence whatsoever to indicate that an angelic personage can accomplish such a work either. In fact, according to Psalm 49 only God can provide such a deliverance. That brings us to the matter of specific identification. Did the author of Job intend to identify a specific person of the Godhead? Could he have done so? These are still unanswered questions. Even if the author of Job was consciously describing the work of God in 33:23-24, that does not, in and of itself, prove that he identified Him as the Messiah—or even the second person of the Godhead.

Is the mediator of this passage the Messiah, the Son of God? I believe that He is, but not on the basis of the Elihu speeches alone or the OT alone. This study, in its limited scope, can only bring us to the point of identifying the mediator as divine. To flesh out the identity in greater detail, one must consider all of the redeemer/mediator references in the Book of Job and any other appropriate OT texts. Then, having established the OT teaching, one must consider the NT's evidence. Ultimately, Psalm 49's eloquent testimony is echoed in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, but that is another paper for another time.

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<sup>100</sup> Hartley's conclusion is that the mediator in Job 33:23 is the special angel, the **מְלֶאךָּ יְהוָה** (*The Book of Job*, 446-47).

<sup>101</sup> It is my conviction that the Book of Job should be dated at least as early as the time of Jacob if not earlier. See William D. Barrick, *The Man Who Wouldn't Say "Uncle"—A Study in Job* (Denver, Colo.: B/P Publications, 1976), 5-10; and, Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, updated and revised ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 505-8.