

THE IDENTITY OF JOB'S GOEL IN JOB 19:25

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One of the most famous and disputed passages in the book of Job is Job 19:25-26. This paper will examine two of the questions that arise from a reading of these verses. The first deals with the identity of Job's redeemer in verse 25. The second question deals with Job's second statement in verse 26. When and how does Job expect to see God?

In Job 19:25, Job utters the famous phrase "I know that my redeemer lives." The difficulty in this passage is due to the fact that Job does not say who this redeemer is. So who is this redeemer that Job knows is alive?

We must first define the word usually translated "redeemer" before we try to identify who or what this redeemer is. Because the English word, "redeemer" carries many Christian overtones, a translation of "vindicator" is preferable.¹ The word used in Job is the participle, גֹּאֵל, "my redeeming one", or "my vindicating one". The root g'l has the sense of a family law term. It refers to one with the responsibility to redeem, or restore, what belonged to the family.² It can also communicate the idea of "setting free", "liberating", or "rescuing".³

The term is used of kinsman in Leviticus 25. If a man is so poor that he has to sell part of his property, his nearest relative has the responsibility to buy back the property for the poor relative. The same applies to those who have to sell themselves into slavery. A relative may redeem them back out of slavery.

The *go'el haddam* ("blood avenger") has the responsibility of exacting vengeance for the murder of one in his family. An example of this is in Numbers 35:19ff and 2 Samuel

¹ Murphy, Roland E. *The Book of Job: A Short Reading* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 55.

² Stamm, J.J. "גֹּאֵל g'l to redeem." In *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, Translated by Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1977), 1:291.

³ Ringgren, Helmer. "גֹּאֵל ga'al; גֹּאֵל go'el; גֹּאֵל g'ullah." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, Translated by John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:351.

14:11. In Joshua 20, a manslayer may find sanctuary in a city of refuge if the leaders of that city accept him.

Go'el is also used of God in passages like Psalm 19:14; 78:35; Proverbs 23:11; and Jeremiah 50:34. There are a number of passages which refer to God as *go'el* in Isaiah, such as 41:14; 43:14; and 44:6 to name a few. In Exodus 6:6; 2 Samuel 7:23; and Nehemiah 1:10 all refer to God's acts of redemption for his people.

In Job, the *go'el* carries the sense of "lawyer" or "legal aid".⁴ One thing to keep in mind when coming across this term in the Old Testament is not to read New Testament doctrine back into the Old Testament. With the definition of *go'el* established, I will now examine possibilities for the identity of Job's *go'el* in chapter 19.

In hearing the word *go'el* in an Old Testament context, one of the first things that might come to mind would be the kinsman redeemer. Perhaps Job is clinging to the hope that he has a relative who will redeem him from the hand of God. It could be argued that Job could not have a kinsman redeemer because all of his sons were killed in Job 1:19. In chapter 19, Job says that in addition to his friends and associates, all of his relatives have abandoned him. There could be no kinsman redeemer for Job because his sons were killed and the rest of his relatives are estranged from him. In response, it could be argued that this is why Job does not identify his redeemer by name. Job is thinking that there has just got to be a kinsman redeemer somewhere who will stand up for him.

The biggest difficulty that I see for Job's redeemer being a kinsman is the unusual situation. The Hebrew scriptures legislate the terms for redeeming a relative sold into slavery. They also legislate how a person can redeem something or someone that has been

⁴ Stamm, J.J. "ג'ל g'l to redeem." In *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, Translated by Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1977), 1:292.

consecrated to God as in Numbers 3:46. However, how does one redeem (or vindicate) a kinsman who is being wronged by God? Is it even conceivable? In Job 9, Job himself claims that if he were to actually have the opportunity to contend with God, he would still lose even though he were in the right and God were in the wrong. So how in the world could a human being act as a vindicator in this unique case?

Another possibility for the identity of Job's *go'el* would be another heavenly being. It is usually understood that the "witness" and "advocate" of Job 16:16 and the "redeemer" or "vindicator" of Job 19:25 are the same person. Job says that his "witness" is in Heaven and his "advocate" is on high. If the "redeemer" is the same as the "witness", then Job's *go'el* is in Heaven, another heavenly being other than God. The problem with this interpretation is that the overall outlook of Job and his friends is monotheistic. Not only does Job affirm God's omnipotence, but Job states that he has been faithful to God, not gods (Job 12:13-25; 14:5; 23:11-12). Also against this interpretation is a question Eliphaz asks rhetorically, "Call now, is there anyone who will answer you? And to which of the holy ones will you turn?" (Job 5:1). It could be argued that this is Eliphaz's view, not Job. However, we must keep in mind that Job and his friends were cut from the same theological cloth. In Job 4:1-5, Eliphaz remarks that Job used to comfort others just the way he and his friends were now comforting Job. Job says in 13:1-2 that he knows and understands what his friends know. In Job 16:1-4, Job sarcastically says he could use the same arguments his friends use, which he does in the third cycle of speeches. All of this demonstrates that Job had the same theological background as his friends. The only thing that has changed is Job's misfortunes, which served to explode his rigid, black-and-white theology. So it is highly unlikely that Job is putting his faith in another heavenly being as his *go'el*.

Another possibility for the identity of Job's *go'el* is his cry for justice.⁵ This interesting interpretation comes as a result of re-pointing the Masoretic Text in Job 16:20 to offer the following translation; "It is my cry that is my spokesman; sleepless I wait for God's reply."⁶ So Job's "spokesman" in Job 16:20 and his *go'el* are both his assertion of his integrity. There can be no one to act as Job's *go'el*, except Job himself, because everyone has turned their back on him including God (Job 19). Job does not want the earth to cover his blood (Job 16:18), but wants his cry to be a permanently inscribed record (Job 19:22-23). Therefore Job "personifies" his cry for justice by calling it his *go'el*.

One of the unanswered questions I have for this interpretation comes from Job 16:19, where Job says his witness/advocate is in Heaven. How could they be equated to his cry if Job is physically on the earth? It is more likely that his advocate and witness is God, for besides Job, only God knows that Job is innocent. Even if one argues that this means his cry as his advocate is heard in Heaven, there is still the fact that Job does not expect God to act. To Job, God is a silent "watcher of men" (Job 7:20) who is beyond human perception (Job 9:11). Even if God did answer Job, Job would not believe God was actually listening to him (Job 9:16). Even though this is an interesting interpretation, I believe it is unlikely.

The traditional interpretation for the identity of Job's *go'el* is God himself. Elsewhere in scripture as has already been seen above, this term is used for God as a deliverer. An objection to this interpretation is that Job clearly perceives God to be his adversary. He believes that God will find him guilty regardless of whether he is innocent or not (Job 9:29-

⁵ Clines, David J.A. *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 17 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 459.

⁶ _____. "Belief, Desire and Wish in Job 19:23-27: Clues for the Identity of Job's Redeemer." In *Wunschet Jerusalem Frieden: Collected Communication to the XIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament*, edited by Matthias Augustin (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986), 366.

31). What Job wants is deliverance from God, not deliverance by God. However, it is precisely for this reason that Job turns to God. Man cannot win against God even when righteous, according to Job (Job 9:19-20). What good would any other mediator do? Indeed, Job cries in despair that there is no umpire between him and God (Job 9:33). That leaves only one being to whom Job can appeal to, who is God, himself. Both Job and his friends agree that Job needs to turn to God; there is no one else to turn to. However, they differ on the reason Job should turn to God. For Job, it is to contend with God and receive justice. For Job's friends, it is to ask God for forgiveness.

Understanding God to be the *go'el* respects the Masoretic Text as it stands without emendation. It has been suggested that Job 19:25-26 has a chiastic structure with an A,B,B,A pattern.⁷ This would make the "lives" in verse 25 parallel to "God" in verse 26. The adjective "alive" which is the word *hay* in Hebrew, should be taken as a noun, or title for God, rather than an adjective. One of the compound names used for God is *El-elyon*, "God-most-high" (Genesis 14:18; Psalms 7:10; 57:2; 78:35;). Sometimes this name appears without the *El* "God", so it is merely *Elyon*, "Most-High" (Numbers 24:16; Deuteronomy 32:8; Psalm 9:2). Another compound name for God is *El-shaddai*, "God-Almighty" (Genesis 17:1; Psalm 59:5) This compound name also appears without the *El*, "God", being merely "Almighty" (Ruth 1:20; Job 6:14; 21:15; Psalm 68:14). Likewise, the title "Living-God", *El-hay* appears in scripture as well (Deuteronomy 5:26; Psalms 42:2). If the compound names "God most high" and "God Almighty" can appear without the "God", why couldn't "Living-God" appear without the "God" as well? Taking *hay* as a title, the phrase would be rendered

⁷ Michel, Walter L. "Confidence and Despair: Job 19:25-27 in the Light of Northwest Semitic Studies." In *The Book of Job*, edited by W.A.M. Beuken (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1994), 166

in English as "I know that my Redeemer is the living one."⁸ To say "I know my God is alive" is perfectly normal in a Canaanite context. For example, there is a Canaanite legend that the god Ba'al was put to death by another god and came back to life. Concerning this, an ancient writer wrote: "I know that mighty Baal lives." However, in an Israelite context, it is not even conceivable that God should die and come back to life, which would make the statement, "I know that my Redeemer (God) is alive", absurd.⁹ The better translation is probably, "I know that my redeemer is the living one."

Another objection to this interpretation is that God as both judge and *go'el* does not fit a forensic context. There needs to be both a judge and advocate to insure impartiality. How could one get an impartial hearing of the lawyer is also the judge? In answer to this, we should remember not to press the forensic imagery too far. The context of Job is not an earthly court, but a heavenly one.¹⁰ In God's court, it would not be unusual for him to be both judge and arbitrator.

In regard to this, I would continue to argue that God is portrayed as a redeemer in other Old Testament passages. Even though all of them do not occur in a forensic context, there are definitely parallel in concepts found in Job 19:25 and other Old Testament passages. For instance, Isaiah 52 portrays God as both the one who judges Israel by selling her into captivity, and the one who "redeems" Israel out of slavery, punishing her enemies. In all of Israel's history, God has acted both as judge and redeemer, or vindicator. So it is not at all unusual for God to seat in the seat of judge as well as taking a stand as vindicator.

⁸ Holman, Jan. "Does my Redeemer Live or is my Redeemer the Living God? Some Reflections on the Translation of Job 19,25." In *The Book of Job*, edited by W.A.M. Beuken (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1994), 388.

⁹ Wolfers, David. *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job, Essays and a New English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 488.

¹⁰ Gordis, Robert. *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies*. Moreshet Series, vol. 2 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 526

In addition to God being the *go'el*, (vindicator or redeemer) and the "living one", God is also called the "last one" (Job 19:25b). The phrase usually translated something like "at the last" or "in the end" could be taken as a title, "the last one", similar to the title "The first and the last" (Isaiah 44:6).¹¹ "The last" has also been translated "ultimate one."¹²

So God, the living one, is the vindicator. He is also "the last" or "the ultimate one" who will take his stand on or against the dust, meaning he will contend against Job's friends who turned out to be his enemies.¹³

The final possibility for Job's redeemer is that there is none. In support of this, David Wolfers offers the following translation of Job 19:23-26.

23. Would then that my words were written;
Would that they were inscribed in an archive,
24. With iron pen and lead,
Carved in rock for ever!
25. And me, that I might know my Redeemer alive,
And that in the end He will arise upon the dust,
26. And that after my body, this might be restored,
And in my flesh I should see God,¹⁴

In this translation, Job does not expect a *go'el* but merely wishes for what he does not expect. "I know" is usually followed by a *ki* or a *sh* or equivalent. It is not followed by either in this passage, which indicates we should see an alternate reading.¹⁵ The *waw* in verse 25 is a "hook", joining what comes after it to what came before. So when Job begins to "wish" for a permanent record of his words in verse 23, he continues to "wish" to know his redeemer while alive who will vindicate him. In context, Job does not expect this to happen.

¹¹ Holman, 378.

¹² Michel, 157.

¹³ Holman, 379.

¹⁴ Wolfers, 341.

¹⁵ Wolfers, 486-487.

This interpretation fits nicely with the overall tone of the rest of the book of Job. Job 19:25-26 is not a ray of hope, but a statement of despair. Job does expect to be vindicated, but not while alive.¹⁶ The fact that every single being in existence that could have acted on Job's behalf is gone. His sons are dead, his relatives have abandoned him, his friends have become his enemies, and even God himself has turned against Job. Job complains in chapter 19 that everyone has abandoned him. He wishes that he could have a redeemer. However, Job claims his witness is in Heaven and his advocate is on high (Job 16:19). Job says that he "knows" he will be vindicated (Job 13:18). Clearly this is more than a doubtful wish.

So who is Job's *go'el*? All of Job's relatives are either dead or have forgotten him. So it is unlikely that Job is putting faith in one of his relatives. Job is faithful to a God that demands loyalty to him alone. So it seems highly unlikely that Job would be calling on another heavenly being. In a sense, Job's cry could be seen as his *go'el*, though I do not believe that is what Job is saying in Job 19:25. Repeatedly, Job states his desire to contend with God. Yet there is no "umpire" between him and God, so Job has to act on his own behalf. In this sense, his cry could be his *go'el*. However, only God can be Job's *go'el*. Job is not the one who has the ability to vindicate or redeem himself, only God can do that. So who else is there to appeal to other than God himself? In fact, Job says that he expects God, as his judge, to be the one to deliver him if he could bring his case before him (Job 23:7). Whether Job "knows" his *go'el* is alive or "wishes" to know his *go'el* while still alive is basically expressing the same wish of vindication. But does he expect or wish this? Job has stated both (Job 13:3, 18). Either way, it seems that the most likely candidate for the identity of Job's *go'el* is God.

¹⁶ Zink, James K. "Impatient Job: An interpretation of Job 19:25-27." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 152.

As we have seen above, Wolfers does not believe that Job actually expects to see God, but believes that Job merely desires it and does not expect it to come true. That is certainly possible, but we have already seen from other statements Job has made that he actually expected to be vindicated.

If Job actually expects to see God, when and how will he see God? In Job 19:26, the text says something like, "Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God." An alternate translation of the preposition *min*, "from" would be "away from" or "out of". So the passage could be rendered, "without my flesh I shall see God." However, Job expects to see God with his own "eyes" in Job 19:27. Job does not expect to be in some disembodied state when he sees God. Therefore, we can rule this alternate translation out, and understand Job to be saying that he will see God in his current body.

Before asking when Job will see God, we must keep in mind why Job wants to see God. In addition to reading this passage out of context, it is tempting to read Job's statements from a Christian perspective. In doing so, we might think that Job is talking about seeing God after a resurrection in Heaven. The obvious difficulty with this interpretation is that it is anachronistic. The doctrines of the resurrection and of heaven are both clearly developed in the New Testament. There is no developed doctrine of a resurrection or eternal life in heaven in the Old Testament. To an Israelite, the only sense of living on after death would have been through his descendants.¹⁷

If Job is not talking about an afterlife or resurrection, what is he talking about when he says he wants to see God? Job states several times that he wishes to contend with God

¹⁷ Kaufmann, Yehezkel. *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*. Translated by Moshe Greenburg. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 312.

about the injustice of his suffering (Job 13:3; 23:4). So "seeing God" is not his expectation of seeing God in Heaven, but his expectation of seeing God "in a law suit", so to speak.

There is a difficulty with the phrase "after my skin is destroyed." In the absence of a developed doctrine of a heaven and an afterlife, what could Job be saying? There are several possibilities.

The first possibility is that Job expects to see God after death. This is not to say that he believes in a resurrection body, but that he believes that God can bring him back to life after he dies. A person coming back to life was not inconceivable in the Old Testament. Elisha brought a boy back to life in 2 Kings 34:4. Ezekiel prophesied of a dead army coming back to life by the word of God in Ezekiel 37. Hannah sings that God has the power to both kill and make alive in 1 Samuel 2:6. There are a few other like references, but I have offered these to show that it is not inconceivable in an Old Testament context to think that it is possible for God to bring someone back to life.

From the introduction in the book of Job, we can assume that Job is not an Israelite, but an Arab of some sort who worshipped the LORD. Did Job himself believe that God could raise one from the dead? Some scholars would say no due to Job 14:13-17¹⁸. Job says there is hope for a tree even if it is cut down. The stump could grow again. Not so with a man. Job says that when a man dies, he will not awake (Job 14:12). One thing we must remember is that it would not be unusual for Job to contradict himself. On one hand, Job knows he will be vindicated (Job 13:18). On the other hand, Job believes that God will not acquit him even though he is innocent (Job 9:28). So it is plausible that Job believes he will die and God would then raise him from the dead.

¹⁸ Janzen, Gerald J. *Job*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 141.

Other interpreters would claim that Job does expect to be vindicated, but not while alive. This is based on the alternate translation of verse 26, "but that will be after my flesh has been stripped away like this. But I would see God while still in my flesh."¹⁹ So Job is confident that he will be vindicated, but when it finally happens, it will be too late because Job will already be dead. That he would be vindicated after his death is no comfort to Job. He wants vindication while still alive.

The other possibility as to when Job expects to see God is before his death. If there is a chiastic structure to Job 19:25-26, some interesting parallels appear which may help to translate the difficult words in these verses.²⁰

A - I know that my redeemer lives
 B- And he shall stand at last on the earth
 B - And after my skin is destroyed, this I know
 A - That in my flesh I shall see God.

The word for "destroyed" is *niqq^epu*. This word is difficult because it is used only once in the Old Testament. Many translators assume this word comes from the root *nqp I*, which means "to strike off" or "to destroy". In the chiasm, *niqq^epu* is parallel to *yaqum*, "he shall stand". Therefore, the definition for *niqq^epu* should be sought after within the semantic range of "standing up" instead of "striking off". It is possible that this word actually comes from the root *nq'* whose quiescent aleph has disappeared.²¹ To further support this theory, one could compare Job's second speech in the second cycle to Job's second speech in the first cycle. Doing so yields the following parallels in words and themes²².

10:13 - "I know" that this was with you.
 19:25 - "I know" that my...

¹⁹ Zink, 149.

²⁰ Doukhan, Jaques. "Radioscopy of a Resurrection: The meaning of *niqq^epu zo't* in Job 19:26." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34 (Autumn 1996): 189.

²¹ Doukhan, 188.

²² Doukhan, 190-191.

10:12 - You have granted me "life" (*"hayyim"*)

19:25 - ... redeemer "lives" (*"hay"*)

10:9 - 'apar - "dust, earth"

19:25 - 'apar - "will stand upon the dust/earth"

10:11 - Clothe me with "skin and flesh"

19:26 - After after my "skin ... in my flesh ... "

10:10 - Did you not ... "curdle me (*taqqi'eni*)" like cheese?

19:25 - After my flesh has been "made firm, made to stand (*niqq^epu*)", I will see God"

In the last pair, *niqq^epu* is taken as a *nq'* whose quiescent aleph has disappeared. The root of *niqq^epu* may come from the same *nq'* root as the word *tapqi'eni*. In Job 10:10, *tapqi'eni* carries the idea of being "made firm". So Job is saying is that after his flesh is made firm (or made to stand up) again, he will see God. Job is envisioning a restoration of his health before he sees God. Even though this is an interesting and innovative interpretation, it is difficult to accept with any level of certainty.

The Aramaic Targum of Job renders Job 19:25-26 as, "As for me, I know that my redeemer lives, and after this his redemption will stand upon the dust. And this will be after my skin has swollen, and from my flesh I will see God."²³ Evidently, Jewish Rabbi's did not believe Job was speaking of a resurrection here. Parts of this targum might go all the way back to pre-Christian times.²⁴ However, the fact that an interpretation is old does not necessarily make it correct. It does, in my opinion, give the interpretation a more weight.

There is still another translation of *niqq^epu* that supports the interpretation that Job expects to see God and be vindicated before his death.

25a Although I, I know, my vindicator is the Living One,

25b and the Ultimate One against the Dust will stand up,

²³ Mangan, Celine. *The Targum of Job: Translated, with Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and notes*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 15. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 52.

²⁴ Managan, 6-7.

26a and the Ultimate from my skin will strike off This/Filth
 26b and from my flesh; - I gaze upon Eloah,
 27a and I, I gaze upon Him,
 27b and my eyes see Him, and not an Alien,
 27c my kidneys are spent in my loins.²⁵

"Ultimate" in lines 25b and 26a are from *'aharon* and *'ahar*, which can be interpreted as a pair of divine names, "the last one", or "the ultimate one." The plural, *niqq'pu*, is translated "strike off". *Niqq'pu* is probably a majestic plural referring to God, "He will strike off". "Filth" is from *zo't*, which is chiastically paired with *'apar*, "dust." If *zo't* is a feminine noun related to *so'ah*, "indignity, filth", then Job is saying that God will strike off the filth/indignity from his flesh. This is probably an allusion to what Job says in Job 7:5, "My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt; My skin hardens and runs."

We might think it strange that Job refers to his suffering as "filth" or an "indignity." But that is just how Job and everyone around him views his misfortune. Normally when one is struck with severe misfortune in today's time, friends will come to comfort and encourage. They typically express their sorrow and let the suffering one know that there are friends that support and love him or her. This is not the case for Job. Job's own wife tells him to curse God and die. "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9) I can almost feel the scorn in her voice. She is telling Job that his attempt at maintaining his integrity is futile. His guilt has been exposed by his misfortunes. She seems heartless, but she evidently assumed, like everyone else, that Job was responsible for the calamities that came upon them. Everyone assumed that a just God was punishing Job for sins he had committed. If Job was responsible for his misfortunes, then he was also responsible for the death of his children. In Eliphaz's first speech, he affirms his belief that the wicked man's

²⁵ Michel, 157.

children are far from safety, thus implying that Job was responsible for the death of his children (Job 5:4). Is it any wonder that Job's wife seemed so cold? Her own husband was responsible for the death of her children! So she turned against him, "curse God and get it over with!"

But it was not just his wife who turned against him, everyone did. Job laments that all of his friends and family have turned against him. He says "my breath is offensive to my wife, and I am loathsome to my own brothers, even young children despise me; I rise up and they speak against me. All my associates abhor me, and those I love have turned against me." (Job 19:17-19) This was not just because Job looked horrible, but because the condition of his body and household was a sign of divine scorn. Job is wearing a scarlet "A" all over his body. He bears the mark of God's indignation, or so everyone thought.

Job wistfully remembers his life before his misfortunes. He was highly respected in the city gates. When Job spoke, they listened and did not interrupt. The young men got out of his way when they saw him coming. The old men rose from their seats as a sign of respect when Job approached them. Job sat among the men of the city as a leader. They valued what he had to say and did not question him (Job 29). That all changed after Job's misfortunes. The young men mock him (Job 30:1). Worthless fellows spit in his face (Job 30:10). No one restrains the fools when they taunt him, they simply do not care (Job 30:13).

So the "filth" of Job's flesh is indeed an "indignity" or "insult". Job affirms his faith in his vindicator who will "strike off" the "filth" or "indignity" from his flesh.

Of course, one could object to this interpretation based on the fact that Job expects to die (Job 7:21). In response to this, we should note that there is a movement from despair to hope or anticipation in the speeches of Job. In the first cycle, Job bleakly expresses his

desire to die (Job 6:9), and does not believe God would acquit him even though he is innocent (Job 9:19-20, 28-31). Then a more hopeful Job expresses his conviction that if he could just bring his case before God, he would be vindicated (Job 13:16-18). In the second round, Job is convinced that his witness is in heaven and his advocate is on high (Job 16:18-19). Job expresses his belief that his vindicator will finally stand up for Job (Job 19:25-26). Finally, Job repeatedly expresses his desire to contend with God. He believes that if he could just find God and bring his case before him, God would listen and deliver him (Job 23:3-7). In the end, Job demands that God answer him (Job 31:35). But in between all these statements of hope and anticipation, Job laments in despair that he will probably just die anyway. Job seems to bounce from hopefulness to despair. Each time he bounces back to hope, his hope gets stronger. In light of the nature of this bouncing back and forth from hope to despair, I think it is unwarranted to say that Job does not expect to be vindicated while alive simply because he expresses the opposite elsewhere. Trying to interpret what Job means in Job 19:25-26 is not a matter of accepting or rejecting its interpretation on the basis of agreement or contradiction to what Job says elsewhere. Rather, it is a matter of investigating what Job is saying at a particular moment.

In light of all the evidence, it would be best to understand Job 19:26 in much the same way as the other expressions of hope throughout Job. Job expects to be vindicated by his vindicator, which is probably God, and expects this to take place while still alive. Job never speaks of a conviction or hope that he would come back to life after death. He always speaks of his death with a sense of finality. Besides, how much sense does it make for him to express faith in a vindicator who will only act after he is dead? Some vindicator!

Of course Job sinks back into despair again as he has already done in previous his previous speeches. However, for that moment in Job 19, Job does express a ray of hope that God will come through for him and restore his dignity and health, which God actually does in the end.

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