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To See a Sound: A Deuteronomic Re-Reading of Exodus 20:15

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Abstract

In his chapter on inner-biblical exegesis in *The Garments of Torah*, Michael Fishbane says that his purpose is "to suggest some of the ways by which the foundation document of Judaism, the Hebrew Bible, not only sponsored a monumental culture of textual exegesis, but *was itself its own first product*." I believe that this assertion, surprising as it sounds, is indeed correct. In what follows, I intend to sharpen it in two ways: first, by pointing out the locus of the Bible's invention of itself, Deuteronomy 4; second, by pointing to the act of exegesis--a Deuteronomic midrash on the phrase from Exodus 20 that describes the Israelites as "seeing" the thunder--that provided the creative spark that transformed theological energy into textual matter and (ultimately) gave us the Bible.

Disciplines

Biblical Studies | Jewish Studies

NOTES AND READINGS

To See a Sound: A Deuteronomic Rereading of Exodus 20:15

In his chapter on inner-biblical exegesis in *The Garments of Torah*, Michael Fishbane says that his purpose is “to suggest some of the ways by which the foundation document of Judaism, the Hebrew Bible, not only sponsored a monumental culture of textual exegesis, but *was itself its own first product*.”¹ I believe that this assertion, surprising as it sounds, is indeed correct. In what follows, I intend to sharpen it in two ways: first, by pointing out the locus of the Bible’s invention of itself, Deuteronomy 4; second, by pointing to the act of exegesis—a Deuteronomic midrash on the phrase from Exodus 20 that describes the Israelites as “seeing” the thunder—that provided the creative spark that transformed theological energy into textual matter and (ultimately) gave us the Bible.

To approach the former point first, it has long been understood that the idea of an authoritative written Torah, once the product of revelation and now its source, came into its full flower in the Second Temple period. Modern biblical scholarship places the creation of the Pentateuch in more or less the form we know it today in the exilic and immediate postexilic periods—constructed, to be sure, primarily from a variety of preexilic materials. The observation of Resh Lakish in B. Sukkot 20a that “when Torah was forgotten from Israel, Ezra came up from Babylon and established it” attests to a certain awareness of this among the Rabbis as well.

Avi Hurvitz has noted a concomitant linguistic change that is quite telling. The verb דרש, “seek, inquire,” is regularly used with a divinity as object, meaning “to seek a revelation from [the god].” Thus in Gen. 25:22, Rebecca’s difficult pregnancy leads her to seek an oracle: “She went to inquire [לדרש] of the Lord.” Similarly, Ahaziah, severely injured in a fall, sends messengers to inquire (לכו ודרשו) of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, whether he will recover. But in postexilic texts, a different usage of דרש begins to appear. In these occurrences, as regularly in rabbinic literature, the object of דרש is a text: “For Ezra directed his heart to investigate [לדרש] the Lord’s Torah, and to do it” (Ezra 7:10). Similar expressions are found in Ps. 119:45, 94, 145; Isa. 34:16, and 1 Chron. 28:8, all postexilic texts. As Hurvitz puts it, this change in usage parallels the difference between “search” and

“research” in English. In the postexilic era, one looked for revelation not to a voice—whether God’s or an intermediary’s—but to a verse.²

But the notion of written revelation that gained supremacy during the Second Temple period and that has been dominant within Judaism for two thousand years had already begun to find expression before the exile. In Exod. 24:3–8, an apparently idiosyncratic source that describes a covenant between God and the Israelites sealed by a blood ritual, Moses interrupts this ritual, splashing half the blood from the sacrifices onto the altar and pouring the other half into basins to wait until he has read ספר הברית, “the Book of the Covenant,” to the people (v. 7). Exactly what Moses read aloud—though it would seem crucial—is left unspecified, and indeed, the passage itself is embedded in a complex and somewhat confused chapter containing a number of what might be called “off-brand” traditions about just what happened at Sinai. Nonetheless, it is clear that the reading of a written text is an intrinsic part of the ceremony, and further, that the text is presented as a record of revelation: “Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the laws . . . and Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord” (Exod. 24:3 f.).

The idea of written revelation begins to cohere a bit more in Deuteronomy, as we can see in the following passage, which has entered the liturgy as the first paragraph of the Shema’:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Let these things that I command you today be on your mind. Teach them over and over to your children; speak of them when you stay at home and when you travel, when you go to bed and when you get up. Tie them on your hand as a reminder [אֶתָּ], and let them be a frontlet between your eyes. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.³ (Deut. 6:5–9)

Here, the demand for constant attention to God’s word is described by a series of merisms, opposing pairs of words meant to be all-encompassing: “when you stay at home and when you travel . . . when you go to bed and when you get up” (Deut. 6:7). Even the pairing of “hand” and “eyes” in v. 8 may be calculated to suggest a comprehensive unity of thought and action, a major theme of Deuteronomy. God’s words, too, as in Exodus 24, are both written and spoken. That text, however, describes a onetime event. The written text used there, like a stage prop, disappears at the end of the ritual. Deuteronomy 6, by contrast, describes not an event but a way of life. The Israelite’s every moment is to be spent in an encounter with God’s word, in two different media: spoken (וְדַבַּרְתָּ, v. 7) and written (וְכָתַבְתָּם, v. 9).

Speaking and writing, while not paired in the tight formal manner of the obvious merisms in the passage, are indeed a pair; they represent two different ways of encountering the world. We hear speech through the ear, but see writing with the eye. Together with the heart, these two organs provide the comprehensive biblical description of cognition:

Go tell this people, “Hear, indeed, but do not understand; do see, but do not know.” Clog this people’s mind, harden its ears and smear its eyes, lest it see

with its eyes, hear with its ears, and understand with its mind, repent and be healed. (Isa. 6:9–10)

Yet the two modes of perception coexist in some tension. In Deuteronomy 6, for example, the spoken words of v. 7, though not written down until v. 9, are in v. 8 somehow already enough of a physical object to be tied onto the body.⁴ The awkwardness of this transformation is reflective of the fact that, for Deuteronomy, the eye and the ear represent two different realms.

The arena of history is for Deuteronomy overwhelmingly the realm of the eye. We know that this is so from Moses' continual reminders to the Israelites of the events that "your own eyes saw" or that God performed "before your eyes":

[The Lord your God] will fight for you, just like all he did with you in Egypt before your eyes [לעיניכם]. (1:30)

The great experiences that your eyes saw [אשר ראו עיניך]. (7:19)⁵

For Deuteronomy, seeing was believing—perception with the eye represented direct, undeniable experience. This use of the eye as the characteristic organ by which one becomes aware of events is matched by a characteristic verb that describes the maintaining of that awareness—זכר.

The commandments, on the other hand, were not historical events but the verbal contents of the core curriculum in Israel's passage from slavery to freedom. Hence, in Deuteronomy, one is never instructed to remember the commandments, only to "keep" (שמר) them. But שמע, "hear," is also regularly associated with them by the Deuteronomic writers. The combination is nicely illustrated by Deut. 5:1, an introductory verse whose Deuteronomic vocabulary shows its centrality to the ideology of the book:

Hear [שמע], O Israel, the laws and statutes that I speak in your ears this day: Learn them and make sure [ושמרתם] to do them.

With respect to the hearing and keeping of the tradition, Deuteronomy follows the lead of the wisdom tradition as reflected in the Book of Proverbs. There, too, the verbal contents of the wisdom teaching are never the direct object of זכר. Instead, the wisdom teachings—the functional equivalents of Deuteronomy's laws and commandments—are to be "heard" (using the verb שמע) and "kept" (using שמר). Wisdom, too, understands the eyes as the medium of direct experience through which one gains knowledge of the world and deduces its underlying patterns. But (as I have shown elsewhere)⁶ the biblical Book of Proverbs evinces no interest in the functioning of the mind, understanding it primarily as a sort of container for the verbal content of the wisdom tradition, which the student absorbs through listening. Thus, the eye plays a minor role in the epistemology of Proverbs, the ear a major one. In Deuteronomy, however, the eye plays not merely an equal but a complementary role, since remembering the historical events that the eyes saw is supposed to provide the motivation for performing the commandments, which (like traditional wisdom) were heard and taught. Thus, the wisdom tradition was not so much the origin of the Deuteronomic ideology as its jumping-off point.

There is one more element of Deut. 6:6–9 that remains to be discussed: the expression ושננתם לבניך, "teach them over and over to your children." This, too,

represents an aspect of the wisdom milieu that was transformed into an integral part of a comprehensive Deuteronomic ideology. Like the written text of Exodus 24, the transmission of wisdom from parent to child, which is a trope of Proverbs, is a onetime event, albeit in this case often repeated. In Deuteronomy, however, the Israelites are taught to teach their children the commandments, including the commandment to teach one's children, making the teaching self-perpetuating. Deut. 31:9–13 returns to this theme, in a national rather than a familial context. It is at this point, according to 31:9, that Moses actually writes down "this teaching" (הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת), upon which he gives it to the Levitical priests—presumably for storage with the ark, which they carry—but also to "all the elders of Israel." Then (v. 10) he instructs them to read the Torah out loud to all Israel, every seven years when they have assembled for the holiday of Sukkot,

so that they will hear and will learn to fear the Lord their God, and keep doing all the words of this Torah. And their children who do not know will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. (Deut. 31:12 f.)

It is this statement to which Deut. 4:10 alludes:

The day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, "Assemble me the people, that I may make them hear my words; so they will learn to fear me all the days they live on the land, and they will teach their children."

With Deuteronomy 4, however, we reach a crucial juncture in the history of the Bible as Bible. The teaching that Moses presents is no longer a series of "laws and statutes" but a complete and unified text. Both its completeness and its nature as a text are pointed to by the phrasing of Deut. 4:2, "You shall not add to the word that I am commanding you, nor shall you subtract from it," widely recognized as a formula intended to ensure accurate transmission of a written work. The distinction can be clearly seen in the contrast between Deut. 4:44, a postexilic verse linking Deuteronomy 4 to Moses' "second discourse," and 4:45. Compare them:

And this is the Teaching
that Moses set before the
Israelites. (Deut. 4:44)

These are the testimonies, laws, and statutes
that Moses spoke to the Israelites
when they went forth from Egypt.
(Deut. 4:45)

The preexilic Deuteronomic character of the latter is very clear; the former, it seems to me, despite the intervention of the "cities of refuge" passage in Deut. 4:41–43, must be associated with the bulk of Deuteronomy 4 and Deuteronomy 30, which deliberately frame the intervening chapters as a *text* of revelation.⁷ It is no accident that Deut. 4:44 has entered Jewish ritual as a line that is recited while pointing at a physical Torah scroll.

Weinfeld rightly makes Deuteronomy the critical grain of sand around which the Bible formed:

The primary impetus for the crystallization of the sacred Scripture . . . was the sanctification of the book of Deuteronomy, and it was this impulse that changed the religion of Israel into the faith of the Book.⁸

Yet if the impetus came from the discovery of the scroll in the Temple during the time of Josiah (2 Kings 22–23), the historical moment of crystallization belongs to the postexilic creation of Deuteronomy 4. My contention is that this took place at a “moment” not merely on the historical scale, but literally at an instant—to use Daniel Boyarin’s term, a “midrashic moment”⁹—of intertextual insight that resolved a difficulty in the epistemology of preexilic Deuteronomy.

For Deuteronomy, as we have noted, the roles of eye and ear were both important, albeit distinct. The separation between the two realms, though, created a conceptual problem: How were the commandments, received by ear and transmitted by speech, to be infused with the immediacy and power of the historical events that shaped Israel, perceived by the eye? As Stephen Geller pointed out in this journal several years ago, it is the postexilic chapter Deuteronomy 4 that confronted, and resolved, this problem.¹⁰ The problem facing Deuteronomy 4 was to legitimate the role of hearing—the medium by which the commandments were transmitted—in the face of the assumption of the wisdom school that vision is the superior way to knowledge. For Geller, the tension between the two is resolved, and the evaluations of their worth reversed, by a magnificently Chestertonian paradox. He has Deuteronomy 4 agreeing, for tactical purposes, that seeing is superior, and then proving by means of the Israelites’ visual experience itself that hearing is superior. Geller epitomizes the argument of the chapter as follows: All agree that true knowledge of the divine realm comes through the eye; at Horeb, Israel had a visual experience giving them true knowledge; the true knowledge they acquired was that true knowledge comes through the ear.

But the difficulty facing the author of Deuteronomy 4 was not an imbalance between the eye and the ear; rather, it was their estrangement. The problem was not to make hearing superior to sight, but to make it the *equivalent* of sight, to make the commandments that each generation was to teach the next as immediate a part of the Israelites’ experience as the mighty deeds that God had performed “before your eyes.” Fortunately, this author had earlier traditions on which to draw. It was one of these, Exod. 20:15 (v. 18 in BHS), that provided the key to the solution: “All of the people could see [ראים] the peals [of thunder, קולת] and the flashes [of lightning] and the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking. The people saw,¹¹ trembled and stood at a distance.” That קולת here means “peals of thunder” and not “voices” or “sounds” was observed long ago by Moshe Held¹² and is confirmed by the pairing with לפידים, “flashes” (cf. קולת וברקים of Exod. 19:16). The use of the verb ראה, however, requires some explanation.

The commentators agree that the use of the participle indicates that the people’s “seeing” is described as taking place throughout the theophany. The implication seems to be more than merely that they observed the goings-on, but that they had direct experience of the divine in waking life, yet did not die. The closest example is in Judg. 13:19 and 20, where Manoah and his wife see the angel of God ascend to heaven in the flame from the altar as they watch (ראים). Similarly (albeit with a different verb and tense), the seventy elders of Exodus 24 “beheld

God, and they ate and drank" (v. 11). In our verse, however, ראה is used with the object קולת, which presents something of a difficulty.

The two possible understandings of this text can be illustrated by the approaches to it taken, respectively, by Rashi and Ibn Ezra. Rashi insists that, yes, "they could see what was audible—something impossible to see in any other place." Ibn Ezra takes a more commonsense view, pointing out that all the senses come together in the head, and that "there are plenty of similar cases" in the Bible: e.g., "See, the smell of my son" (Gen. 27:27) and "Sweet is the light" (Eccles. 11:7). The translators of this verse have generally agreed with the latter approach. In English, one cannot "see" thunder; hence, the verb is generally rendered as "perceived" (RSV) or "witnessed" (NJPS, NRSV). REB fudges nicely: "When all the people saw how it thundered and the lightning flashed." Cassuto explains in more detail:

more exactly: they were seeing and hearing, only the verb רָאָה *rā'ā* ['see'] may be used in the general signification of perceiving with the senses; furthermore we have here an example of *zeugma*, that is, the use of one verb that is suited to only some of the objects exactly, but not to all.¹³

The use of two contradictory claims to see which the reader will like best—ראה as appropriate for any kind of perception, or as inappropriate but used in a *zeugma*—suggests the *ad hoc* nature of this argument. Either may well be correct, but neither provides the reader with that mental "click" of inevitability that marks a satisfying explanation. The lack of a convincing reason for the use of ראה may thus have nagged even more at a postexilic thinker of the Deuteronomistic school, for two reasons. First, the exile and return can have only strengthened the Deuteronomistic position that the traditions of the revelation in the desert—not the contemporary innovations of some self-proclaimed prophet—were the surest key to what God wanted from Israel. Second, as we have seen, the Deuteronomistic school had a well-developed epistemology that distinguished carefully between the realms of seeing and hearing—the very distinction that Exod. 20:15 seems deliberately to confound.

For the author of Deuteronomy 4, this could not be a mere accident of language. Rather, it was a theological and psychological problem; moreover, it was one that needed to be solved in an exegetical way. The solution came, I am convinced, not merely in a satisfying mental "click," but in a particular kind of click: Boyarin's "midrashic moment." The text that made sudden sense of "seeing קולת," it seems to me, was the description of the theophany in Deut. 5:1-5, the preexilic Deuteronomistic introduction to the Decalogue:

Moses called to all Israel and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the laws and statutes that I speak in your ears this day. Learn them and make sure to do them. The Lord your God made a covenant with us at Horeb; not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us ourselves, all those of us living right here today. The Lord spoke face-to-face with you on the mountain, from the fire. I was standing between the Lord and you at that time, to tell you all the words of the Lord; for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain."

That key passage has all the Deuteronomic ideas we discussed earlier, but with one crucial difference: Unlike the other historical events of the Exodus, the revelation is presented not as something that happened before the Israelites' very eyes, but (as it were) before their very ears. "The Lord spoke face-to-face with you on the mountain, from the fire." For the author of Deuteronomy 4, it was certainly a given that "face-to-face" could not possibly indicate the kind of ordinary visual experience that the phrase would seem to imply. After all, God had already told Moses, "You cannot see my face; for no human being can see my face and live" (Exod. 33:20). Yet, as we have seen, the description of the theophany in Exodus 19–20 (like that in Exodus 24) strongly implies that it was, indeed, accompanied by a kind of seeing that ought to have caused death but did not do so. "The Lord spoke face-to-face with you" must have meant, to the author of Deuteronomy 4, that the Israelites experienced God's speaking in just the sort of seeing-is-believing direct experience that is ordinarily provided only in a face-to-face encounter, by the sense of sight.

Indeed, the Israelites did not "hear" God in any ordinary sense, for Moses had to convey to them later, on the plains of Moab, the verbal details of what God actually said. Deut. 5:5, which contradictorily seems to put Moses into the middle of the Israelites' face-to-face encounter with God, is often considered a later interpolation; it may well have been the author of Deuteronomy 4 who inserted it, for it provides a crucial link between the experience of theophany and the giving of the law on the plains of Moab: "I was standing between the Lord and you *at that time*, to tell you all the words of the Lord." In the context of Deut. 5:1, I suggest, "at that time" implicitly suggests that only now are the Israelites being told "all the words of the Lord": "Hear, O Israel, the laws and statutes that I speak in your ears *this day*." In this verse, moreover—uniquely in Deuteronomy—Moses tells the Israelites that they are experiencing something (the laws and statutes) "with your ears" in just the same fashion that God so frequently had acted in history "before your eyes." Why, after all, was it necessary for Moses to recite the entire contents of the revelation years after it had occurred? Suddenly, *וכל העם ראים את הקולות*? was no longer an impenetrable difficulty, but an answer, in plain sight, to the philosophical difficulty at issue.

To *see* a sound! Surely it would have been absurd or trivial, in a description of the unique experience of theophany, to waste words saying that the Israelites had seen a thunderstorm. But to say that Israel had "seen" God's voice would be a matter of the deepest philosophical import. The direct experience of God's actions in history, understood by the Deuteronomic school as visual, could only, imperfectly, be "remembered." The genius of the revelation at Horeb, as understood by the author of Deuteronomy 4, is that Israel could *see* the revelation—not merely the accompanying phenomena, but the actual revelation. This made the commandments an unprecedented phenomenon—a direct, personal experience, yet (when at last, on the plains of Moab, Moses transmuted the visible voice into an audible one) in such a form that it could be transmitted exactly and in all its immediacy from one generation to the next. This is the subtle but significant implication of Deut. 4:12, *תמונה אינכם ראים וולתי קול*, "You could see no image; just a voice."¹⁴

Such a revision in understanding is the product not of careful study—though it certainly demands a thorough knowledge of the texts in question—but of a flash of insight. It is not the reasoned conclusion of a learned process of exegesis, but a truth so obvious that it was there all along—for those who had eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand. More important, this flash of realization was not a random event, but the spark created by the striking together of two texts—the preexilic version of the theophany in Deut. 5:1–5 and the Sinai tradition of Exod. 20:15. The author of Deuteronomy 4, in short, created his text from a moment of inner-biblical, exegetical insight. I think it is no exaggeration to say that it was this understanding of Exod. 20:15, and the transformation of Deuteronomy that it prompted, that was responsible for the phenomenon noted by Weinfeld: the process, begun by the authors of Deuteronomy 4 and 30, in which the expectation of revelation shifted from oracle to text. It was this shift that, over the course of the next half millennium, gave us the Bible. This was undeniably a slow, uncertain process, and one whose end could hardly have been foreseen by those who experienced its beginning. But the gradual nature of the Bible's development should not blind us to the possibility that there was an instant when the seed around which the Bible would ultimately crystallize was created. I believe this instant was that in which the author of Deuteronomy 4 rewrote the tradition that Israel "saw the thunder" to say that they "saw no image, only a Voice."

Samuel Butler remarked that a hen is only an egg's way of making another egg, a quip that has taken on the status of an axiom among the geneticists and biological theorists of the contemporary age. Now the gene, the self-replicating organic compound that lies at the basis of all life, has found its parallel in the meme, the self-replicating idea that lies at the basis of every culture. (The word is a coinage of Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*.) It was the author of Deuteronomy 4 who turned תורה from "teaching" into "Torah," in the process creating one of the most successfully self-replicating ideas in human history. Whether it was the *memra* that created the meme or vice versa, as a theological rather than a literary question, is beyond the scope of this essay. From a purely historical perspective, though, we are justified in saying that the angle of vision provided by Deuteronomy 4 freezes, in a textual frame, the instant of time in which midrash created the Bible.

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NOTES

1. Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, 1989), p. 4 (emphasis added).
2. Avi Hurvitz, "Continuity and Innovation in Biblical Hebrew—The Case of 'Semantic Change' in Post-Exilic Writings," in *Studies in Ancient Hebrew Semantics*, ed. Takamitsu Muraoka, *Abr-Nahrain Supplement 4* (Louvain, 1995), pp. 7–9. See also Yehoshua Amir,

"From the Biblical 'Seeking of God' to the Rabbinic 'Exegesis of Torah'" [Hebrew], *Beit Miqra* 41 (1995–96): 128–34. Again, the rabbinic notion that prophecy ceased with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi reflects the increased reliance on text as a source of revelation in somewhat legendary garb. On this notion, see most recently Benjamin D. Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation," *JBL* 115 (1996): 31–47.

3. I.e., so that you will see them when you come in and when you go out.

4. On the question of whether this verse is to be taken figuratively or literally, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, Anchor Bible (New York, 1991), pp. 341f. The realization that this verse effects the transformation of the word from spoken to written obviates the need to locate it at either end point of that transition.

5. To these examples, add Deut. 3:21 and 27; 4:9 and 34; 6:22; 9:17; 10:21; 11:7; 25:3 and 9; 28:31, 34, and 67; 29:2; 31:7; 32:49; 34:4 and 12.

6. See "Proverbs and the Reality of the Mind," in Michael Carasik, "Theologies of the Mind in Biblical Israel" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1996), pp. 166–213.

7. See S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3d ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, 1902), p. 80.

8. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, p. 84.

9. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, 1990).

10. Stephen A. Geller, "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4," *Prooftexts* 14 (1994): 103–39.

11. The ancient versions read "feared" instead of "saw" here, and Moses' telling the people "Fear not" in v. 17 (20) suggests that it is the more likely reading. In any case, it is ראים at the beginning of the verse that marks the connection with Deut. 4:12, not this verb.

12. "The YQTL-QTL (QTL-YQTL) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic," p. 287 n. 4, in *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman*, ed. Meir Ben-Horin et al. (Leiden, 1962), pp. 281–90.

13. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 252.

14. The subtlety of the phrasing, in which the reader encounters a gap before קל, which ראים fills by implication (rather than ראים governing קל directly), may have been suggested by Deut. 18:16, לא אסף לשמע את קול ה' אלהי ואח האש הגרלה הזאת לא אראה עוד, where the speaker seems to be hearing not only God's voice, but also the fire, until suddenly we are brought up short by the verb ראה, transposed after its object.

Job and the Unanswered Question

The conclusion to the Book of Job can be a disappointing finale for most contemporary readers. Particularly perplexing in the Book of Job is the elaborate set-up of nearly forty chapters that lead the reader to expect a resolution that approaches a grand unified-field theory of morality and suffering. Those who speak in this book do not simply argue a point and then move on, for the same arguments and perspectives circle around and reappear only to be scrutinized from varying vantage points with subtle nuancing. Job and his partners in dialogue do not raise lightly the hard questions that center upon a few central issues: what kind of a world is this, and what kind of a god is in charge, when a human such as Job suffers for no discernible reason? When such questions are carefully raised in a monumental work of extended poetry, readers expect some