

George J. Brooke and Pierre Van Hecke (eds), *Goochem in Mokum: Wisdom in Amsterdam*. Papers on Biblical and Related Wisdom Read at the Fifteenth Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Amsterdam, July 2012.

Oudtestamentische Studiën, vol. 68

Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016

Pages 108-120

[p. 108] The Disturbing Experience of Eliphaz in Job 4: Divine or Demonic Manifestation?

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### 1. Introduction

At the beginning of his first speech, Eliphaz responds to the bitter situation of Job with several observations and theological statements (4:1-11). In the second half of chapter 4, he strengthens his argument by appealing to a nightly apparition (4:12-21). In his speech to Job, Eliphaz believes he had a strong argument by citing a revelation he received.

In many commentaries, these words are construed as a divine message, similar to how Eliphaz considers them. Therefore, in these explanations, the vision of Eliphaz is associated with prophetic experiences and with the theophany traditions of the Sinai.<sup>1</sup> Recently, some publications express doubts about these associations.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g. J.E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT), Grand Rapids 1988 and D.J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC), Dallas 1989. For a literary analysis of the passage, see J.P. Fokkerman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis*, vol. II: 85 Psalms and Job 4-14 (SSN, 41), Assen 2000.

Half a century ago, in 1961, the South-African scholar J.H. Kroeze, in his Dutch-language commentary on the book of Job, asked the question what God's purpose could be with such a revelation. He points to 42:7, which embodies a real revelation of God to Eliphaz: 'You have not spoken what is right, as my servant Job has', thereby correcting earlier statements by Eliphaz. Using the prologue of the book of Job for his argument, Kroeze says that Satan used storms, lightning, robbers – and friends. Therefore, he thinks it is possible that Satan (the Accuser)<sup>2</sup> influenced Eliphaz to hurt Job.<sup>3</sup> Repetition of the content of the vision several times in the book, gives more reason to doubt the genuineness of it as a divine message.<sup>4</sup> [p. 109]

In his commentary published in 1985, J. Gerald Janzen also points to the tension between the content of God's words about Job as spoken in the first chapters and this vision. 'What Eliphaz, of course, does not know is that in imputing to humankind the qualities of inevitable untrustworthiness and inevitable error, he (or his "revelation") is speaking on one side of the issue already joined in the heavenly meeting between Yahweh and the Satan.'<sup>5</sup> He argues that from the perspective of the prologue, we may appreciate that the 'inspiration' of Eliphaz derives, not from God, but from the Satan. In an analogous illustration, Janzen points to the prophetic messages of Zedekiah and Micaiah, in 1 Kgs 22:5-28.<sup>6</sup>

A third publication pointing in this new direction is by James E. Harding in his 'A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15?' He deals with the problem of the identity of the spirit, a matter that Eliphaz apparently took for granted.

The reader of the whole book of Job, being aware of the role of YHWH in the narrative,

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<sup>2</sup>J.H. Kroeze, *Het boek Job* (COT), Kampen 1961, 51.

<sup>3</sup>Kroeze, *Job*, 82-83.

<sup>4</sup>Kroeze, *Job*, 86. Joseph Hontheim gives a short remark in his commentary: 'Es handelt sich um eine teuflische Erscheinung'. The reader of the prologue can understand 'den höllischen Ursprung' of the vision. See *Das Buch Job: als strophisches Kunstwerk nachgewiesen*, Freiburg i. B. 1904, 94 (with a reference to a work of G. Gietmann from 1887). Kroeze mentions the work of Hontheim in his bibliography, but gives no reference to it in the cited pages. Georg Fohrer declares that any relation between the vision and the Satan is excluded. He refers to the work of Hontheim, but gives no counter-arguments, see G. Fohrer *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT), Gütersloh 1963, 142, n. 19.

<sup>5</sup>J.G. Janzen, *Job* (Interpretation), Louisville 1985, 43.

<sup>6</sup>Janzen, *Job*, 73-4.

might ask: *whose* spirit is this? Is this the spirit of YHWH that came upon the judges, Saul, and some of the prophets? Or, could it be an evil spirit from YHWH such as that which afflicted Saul? Given that Job 4:12-21 is concerned with a revelation, could this be a spirit of deception such as that which deceived Zedekiah ben Chenaanah in 1 Kgs 22:19-23?

Harding proposes another possibility construing the ghost as 'a spirit of uncleanness'. He refers to a parallel in Zech. 13:2 where a comparable spirit is associated with prophets who are condemned for speaking 'deception' (13:3) in the name of YHWH.<sup>7</sup> Harding, however, gives no clear answer to these questions and points to the ambiguity of the language and the indeterminacy for the reader.<sup>8</sup> [p. 110]

In this paper, I continue the exploration set out by Kroeze, Janzen and Harding and treat the question whether the disturbing experience of Eliphaz in Job 4 constitutes either a divine or a demonic manifestation. After a short remark about Satan, I will deal with several characteristics of the vision, the scope of the vision, and place the apparition of it in the perspective of demonic activity in general. I will focus on the character of the spirit or 'appearance' to Eliphaz and will point to the necessity of discernments of spirits.

## 2. *Satan*

In Job 1-2 the Satan (שָׂטָן) is portrayed as one of the sons of God. He is among them the only figure identified by name and thus is somewhat distinctive from the others. In the Old Testament the word 'satan' is not always used *in malam partem* (e.g. Num. 22:22), and sometimes this creature seems to be portrayed only as an accuser (Zech. 3:1). Without reading back the later conceptualization of Satan as found in the documents from the intertestamental period into the story of Job 1-2, it seems save to interpret Satan in the Book of Job as not only an accuser or prosecutor in a legal context. He behaves as adversary of God as well as of Job, and tries to derive his goal through enacting calamities and the death of Job's children. However, only with the consent of God himself, the Satan

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<sup>7</sup>J.E. Harding, 'A Spirit of Deception in Job 4:15? Interpretive Indeterminacy and Eliphaz's Vision', *Biblical Interpretation* 13 (2005), 137-66, esp. 150. Also R.S. Fyall states that Eliphaz's vision 'is not in fact God but the enemy masquerading as him'. See *Now my eyes have seen You: images of creation and evil in the book of Job* (NSBT, 17) Downers Grove - Leicester 2002, 37, cf. 146-47.

<sup>8</sup>Harding, 'Spirit', describes 4:12-21 as 'the mediation of a problematic revelation' (161, cf. 165).

can do this.<sup>9</sup> The role of Job as intercessor (1:5) is in marked contrast with Satan in the capacity of accuser and destroyer. Because in Old Testament times, the characterization of spirits was not as clear as in later times, I will in this article use the term 'satanic' and 'demonic' interchangeably as manifestations of spirit.<sup>10</sup> [p. 111]

### 3. *Who Received the Vision?*

It is impossible to deal here with the varied linguistic details of the vision, but some insights into several characteristics are required for a proper discussion. One of these is the question who received the vision. Most commentators accept the usual view that Eliphaz is the recipient. However, N.H. Tur-Sinai suggests another view.<sup>11</sup> He is followed by H.L. Ginsberg<sup>12</sup> and especially by Gary V. Smith.<sup>13</sup> The last author points to the fact that the vision is quoted again in Eliphaz's second speech in 15:14-16 and in a later speech attributed to Bildad in 25:4-6, and notes that interpreters always have had difficulty integrating this vision into the flow of the arguments between Job and his comforters.

Smith asks: '[I]f this is a divine revelation to Eliphaz which solves the riddle of Job's suffering, why is Eliphaz condemned by God at the end of the dialogue in 42:7?'<sup>14</sup> This author does not want to consider the possibility that this was a false vision inspired by 'the Satan' of the prologue, while no scholar takes such a position. I think the question of Smith is a good one, but a different answer is possible, as indicated in the publications by Kroeze

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<sup>9</sup> In the encounter between the Satan, as one of the sons of God, and YHWH, the problem arises about the true relation between piety and prosperity. The agreement of God with the proposal is difficult to understand, and seems a paradox, but for the narrator the Satan has the right to ask critical questions and YHWH is in the right to have the problem probed (cf. Abraham in Gen. 22). See Clines, *Job 1-20*, 19-25 and C.L. Seow, *Job 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Grand Rapids 2013, 255-7, 263.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G.J. Riley, 'Demon', in: K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, Leiden 1999, 235-40. Originally, the Greek word δαίμων referred to a 'distributor (of fate)' or just a 'divine being', in the Ancient Near East it is applied to describe negative ghosts or spirits. For the Greek translation of the relevant Hebrew words in Job, see J.G. Gammie, 'The Angelology and Demonology in the Septuagint of the Book of Job', *HUCA* 56 (1985), 1-19.

<sup>11</sup> N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary*, Jerusalem 1957.

<sup>12</sup> H.L. Ginsberg, 'Job the Patient and Job the Impatient', *SVT* 17 (1968), 88-111, esp. 105-7. He sees Job 4:12-21 as a continuation of 3:3-26.

<sup>13</sup> G.V. Smith, 'Job IV 12-21: Is it Eliphaz's Vision?' *VT* 40 (1990), 453-63.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, 'Eliphaz's Vision?', 453.

and Janzen.

Smith shows several examples of unmarked quotations and tries to establish that Eliphaz quotes a vision received by Job. He sees a tension between the message of the vision with on one hand, its emphasis on the total depravity of the universe, and on the other, the rules of righteousness mentioned by Eliphaz. Eliphaz did not think that Job was suffering so severely because he was human; he believed Job was suffering because he had committed serious and grave sins, sins that he needed to confess to God (22:5-11, 15). The sudden destruction of a person, like a moth, and the death of individuals without wisdom (4:20-21) also contradict, according to Smith, the logical connection between sin and punishment, which was a part of Eliphaz's tradition.

The friends claimed that God treats righteous and unrighteous people differently but Job saw that destruction and pain came to them both (9:22-24). Smith concludes that in its essential teaching, the vision corresponds more with the thinking of Job than that of Eliphaz.

In my evaluation of this position, I argue for the traditional view that Eliphaz received the vision, and was not quoting Job. [p. 112]

1. Eliphaz continued his speech in chapter 5. It is not clear in these verses that he reacted to a quotation expressing a wrong view. Although it is possible that quotations were not marked, in this case it is very likely to see the content as a continuation and elaboration of the words and vision portrayed in chapter 4.
2. It is not necessary to see a tension between the words about the depravity of mankind and the view on a different treatment of just and unjust persons. Both arguments can be used against Job's view that he is a righteous person, and that the calamities are not caused by his sinful behaviour.
3. The message of the vision is repeated several times, especially in 15:14-16, in the second speech by Eliphaz. There again, the words are fitting in the argument and no correction of these is discernible. It is even possible that Eliphaz's question 'Have you listened in the council of God?' (15:8) alluded to the message he received in a special way. The content of the revelation in 4:17-18 becomes the bedrock of Eliphaz's position in 15:14-16, which re-emphasizes the impossibility of human

purity or righteousness in view of the sinfulness of all beings beneath God himself.

4. The message of the vision reoccurs in 26:4-6, at the end of a short speech attributed to Bildad. The place at the end indicates that Bildad did not want to correct the content but used it as an argument.
5. Job did not accept the reasoning by Eliphaz. Although in 9:2 Job asked the question how it is possible for a man to be righteous before God, he altered the message of the vision, because in the same chapter Job mentioned several times his own position (vv. 15, 20, 21) and disagreed with the situation on earth.
6. Elihu, another friend, became angry because Job held himself to be righteous in his own eyes (32:1). In his argument against Job, Elihu referred to God's speaking in a dream, in a vision of the night (33:14-15). This can be considered as a support for Eliphaz's appeal to a vision.

Based on these arguments, it seems most likely that the vision had been received by Eliphaz and not by Job.

#### 4. *Wind or Spirit?*

Another question we have to consider is the translation of the word רִיחַ with 'wind' or 'spirit'. It is possible to translate verse 15 'Then a wind swept past my face, a whirlwind made my body quiver.' The word רִיחַ is usually feminine; [p. 113] when masculine, it generally refers to a wind or breath (1:19; 41:8; etc.).<sup>15</sup> However, sometimes the masculine form is used for a spirit. This is the case in Isa. 57:16; 63:10-11; Ps. 51:12-13; Job 20:3. Also in 1 Kgs 22:21 a masculine רִיחַ is mentioned.

Therefore, we need to look here beyond grammatical gender for the proper understanding of this noun. If רִיחַ refers to 'wind', it cannot really be the subject of the verb עָמַד in 4:16, which would entail that the subject of the verb is missing. As suggested by David Clines, maybe the word תְּמוּנָה can be the subject.<sup>16</sup> However, it seems easier to carry the meaning 'spirit' through 4:15-16. In this case, רִיחַ is the subject of עָמַד. For that

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<sup>15</sup>Clines, *Job 1-20*, 107, 111.

<sup>16</sup>Clines, *Job 1-20*, 111.

construction, several parallels can be adduced. In Dan. 8:15, Daniel sees Gabriel, who 'stands before me'. In Zech. 3, several figures 'stand' in the heavenly scene. In 1 Kgs 22:19-23, the prophet Micaiah sees the host of heaven standing before YHWH. One of the spirits went forth and stood before YHWH (v. 21).<sup>17</sup> The word רָמַחַּנָּה can refer to the vague visibility of the spirit. While Eliphaz was seeing this, he heard a voice (v. 16b).

Based on these considerations, I prefer the translation of 'spirit' as found in verse 15, although we have to leave open the possibility that both senses of רָחַח may be intended. Despite this ambiguity in the text, someone in the vision speaks and gives his meaning.

### 5. *The Extent of the Vision*

It is clear that the verses 12-21 form the account of the revelation. In the verses 12-16 the circumstances are given. At the end of verse 16 a voice is introduced. The content of the message is found at least in verse 17, but may be seen extending to verse 21. Most scholars and translations regard verse 17-21 as the 'divine' speech as heard by Eliphaz, but some regard only verse 17 as the word of revelation. And the verses 18-21 serve as wisdom's extensions of it, in their formulation by Eliphaz.<sup>18</sup> I prefer the view of the majority, being that the spirit uttered the verses 18-21, because the content of the verses 18-21 is not easily deduced out of verse 17. [p. 114]

### 6. *Demonic Activity in General*

The main question in this paper is the character of the spirit or 'appearance' as that came to Eliphaz. As already stated, most scholars see the message in the verses 17-21 as a divine word. However, I want to explore another possibility. In the last decennia, more attention is being given to views on demonic activity and allusions to it in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Harding, 'Spirit', 146-50.

<sup>18</sup>Clines, *Job 1-20*, 133-34; Harding, 'Spirit', 140.

<sup>19</sup>Recent publications on magic, demons and spirits are for instance, the above mentioned *DDD* and the Brill series *Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination*. A new publication, available on the internet, is J. Egger and Ch. Uehlinger (eds), *Iconography of Deities and Demons in the Ancient Near East*: [http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/prepublication\\_4.php](http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/prepublication_4.php).

Cf. P.K. McCarter, 'Evil spirit of God', in: *DDD*, 319-20: 'Another *rūah* that should be mentioned in

In the book of Job, we sometimes find remarkable allusions to demonic activities. Scott B. Noegel wrote an article on Job 3:5, and suggested the translation 'day-demons' instead of the usual 'blackness of the day'.<sup>20</sup> In Job 3:8 the mythological monster Leviathan can be aroused by magic. In Job 5:7 several scholars see a reference to Resheph. Clines writes in his commentary:

Since in Joban language the deity Death (Mot) has a 'firstborn' (18:13) and is entitled 'the king of the terrors' (18:14),<sup>21</sup> who are underworld demons, it is entirely likely that the 'sons of Resheph' had the same function. On this view, Eliphaz is saying that when humans beget trouble for themselves they let loose (metaphorically speaking) the underworld demons of pestilence to fly high to earth in order to attack mortals.<sup>22</sup>

More possible references to demonic forces can be seen in the mention of Rahab (9:13; 26:12) and the gliding serpent (26:13). Eliphaz's speech in 15:17-24 [p. 115] mentions no vague spirits or mere metaphors of death, but horrifying presences that torment the living.<sup>23</sup>

It is not possible to evaluate these suggestions here, but I do note a new tendency to detect references to demonic activities and follow up on this development.

### 7. *Arguments for Demonic Activity in Job 4*

If in Job 3 and 5 references are being made to spirits, it is possible to think about such a possibility in Job 4 as well? Did Eliphaz receive a vision of a demon or negative spirit,

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this regard is the "wind" that brushes the face of Eliphaz in his sleep, ... This spirit, which seems to operate quite independently of God, has a discernible form ..., comparable to the appearance of the ghost or spirit of Samuel to Saul (1 Sam. 28).'

<sup>20</sup>S.B. Noegel, 'Job iii 5 in the Light of Mesopotamian Demons of Time', *VT* 57 (2007), 556-62. He mentions the explanation of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. They understood the expression as 'like demons that rule by day'. Cited in support is Deut. 32:24.

<sup>21</sup>Calamity and Disaster in 18:12 can be seen as demons who are waiting for the wicked man to stumble. Disease and 'the Firstborn of Death' are as two underlings of Death that go out in the world looking for victims. In the view of Clines, they are demons like Calamity and Disaster in v. 12. (*Job 1-20*, 416-18).

<sup>22</sup>Clines, *Job 1-20*, 142.

<sup>23</sup>The 'terrors' are not simply the plural of the abstract noun 'terror', but the personified spirits of vengeance, denizens of the underworld, ruled over by 'the king of terrors' (18:14). See *Ibid.*, 357.



although he himself was convinced of its divine origin?

1. The vision was frightening. This phenomenon corresponds with the evil spirit that afflicted Saul and with the spirit he met in Endor (1 Sam. 28). It is true that divine manifestations and apparitions of angels of God evoke strong emotions, but in such cases usually the words “Do not fear” are spoken (Gen. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; Judg. 6:23; Dan. 10:12).
2. Shalom M. Paul adduces several examples to illustrate the second half of verse 15, and describes it as a hair-raising encounter.<sup>24</sup> His illustrations are taken from the Mesopotamian world and refer to ghosts and evil demons. These horrifying encounters with supernatural beings points to the same interpretation in Job 4.
3. As already stated, in 42:7 Eliphaz was rebuked, because he did not speak what was right. It seems likely therefore that the content of the vision and the implications were not right. It raises the issue what the origin of the wrong message was.
4. The main question treated in the vision is: Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker? (v. 17). The unspoken answer on these questions is: No. This dogma is placed in interrogative form for emphasis. While this revealed truth seems so obvious that its being stated is trite, it is central to Eliphaz’s thinking. Thus he will repeat it in each of his speeches (15:15-16; 22:2). His approach allows him to reject Job’s defence of his innocence from the start without directly [p. 116] disputing whether Job is a sinner.<sup>25</sup> However, in the context of the whole book, he is in opposition to the declarations of God in the chapters 1-2. Of course, this raises questions about the redaction of the book, whether or not the framework was later added to the dialogues. But in the final form, the reader senses the tension between the expressions. YHWH declared Job’s being ‘a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil’ (1:8; 2:3). Eliphaz undermines the righteousness of Job and does not believe in his innocence.
5. In general, the Old Testament allows for people to be righteous before God, e.g.

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<sup>24</sup>S.M. Paul, ‘Job 4:15 – A Hair Raising Encounter’, *ZAW*95 (1983), 119-21.

<sup>25</sup>Hartley, *Job*, 113.

Abraham in Gen. 15:6. Even Eliphaz admits the distinction between the upright people and the sinners or fools (4:6-7; 5:2-3; 15:2; 22:2-4). Bildad in 25:5 refers to the vision and makes the very general statement: 'even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his sight', having the conclusion 'how much less a mortal' (v. 6).

6. While the usual basis for the thought of human unworthiness in the Old Testament is humanity's sinful disposition, the vision seems to ground the doctrine of human insignificance on humanity's inferiority before God.<sup>26</sup>
7. The vision states that God puts no trust in his servants, and that He charges his angels with error (v. 18). Regarding the servants on earth, the chapters 1-2 show that God puts a great trust in Job. To such an extent that Satan is allowed to test the loyalty of this servant. Therefore the content of verse 18 is in contradiction with the first chapters.
8. Does God charge his angels with error? The idea of 'fallen angels' is later developed in the intertestamental literature (e.g. 1 Enoch 6-9), but the story of the union of the 'sons of God' with the 'daughters of men' in Gen. 6:1-4 is a possible background for this assessment of angels' reliability.<sup>27</sup> More texts can be adduced for God's judgment of 'heavenly beings' ('sons of God'; Job 1:6)<sup>28</sup>, e.g. Ps. 82 and Isa. 24:21. However, in these cases several reasons are adduced for the punishment. The claim in the vision goes further, for God puts no trust in his servants and charges his angels with error. This statement is so general that it is more than likely a complaint by one of the criticized messengers than a word spoken by a dedicated and obedient angel. [p. 117]
9. The next words in the vision use the argumentation form of *a maiore ad minorem*: humans are portrayed as dwellers in houses of clay. The last sentences point to the possibility of a sudden and unpredictable death. Humans can be crushed like a moth; many people die devoid of wisdom (vv. 19-21). The words can be read as

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<sup>26</sup>Kroeze, *Job*, 86 and Hartley, *Job*, 113.

<sup>27</sup>Maybe Isa. 14:12-15; see N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL), Philadelphia 1985, 129. Cf. J. Doedens, *The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4*, Ph.D. dissertation Kampen 2013, 191.

<sup>28</sup>For 'sons of God', see 1:6; 2:1; 38:7.

general statement or as a possibility.<sup>29</sup> In the last case, they are an indirect appeal to prepare for death and to become wise. However, in the vision these words serve as a strong warning to understand the fragile situation of mankind and for Job the message is not to think he is above this situation. As such, for him there is no hope and no escape. This fits better in the context of accusations by a demon than in the context of heavenly messengers, who usually point out to recipients a way how to behave.<sup>30</sup>

10. In the vision, the notions of sin, guilt, and the confession of guilt are absent. The only message is distrust. Whereas there is no appeal to confession of guilt, yet Eliphaz advises Job to go to God (5:8). The first chapter portrays how Job sanctified his children and offered burnt offerings for them, so to restore the relationship with God (1:5). In 7:20-21, Job speaks about the possibility that transgression may be pardoned. To this the words of Elihu can be adduced. He speaks about God's action in a dream or vision, with the goal that He may turn the people from pride, to spare their souls from the Pit (33:14-18). In the vision these elements are not mentioned.
11. No prophet in the Old Testament refers to a spirit as source of his message.<sup>31</sup>
12. In the totality of the book of Job, the first two chapters give us a view of a heavenly council. Satan received consent to attack Job and his family. After the first attack the writer concluded 'In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing' (1:22). After the second attack on Job's health, the conclusion is 'In all this Job did not sin with his lips' (2:10). In the remaining 40 chapters of the story, Satan is no longer mentioned. Could it be likely that he stopped with his activities? Can Satan only use extreme circumstances, or does he use more subtle means also? The last possibility is often mentioned in later literature.<sup>32</sup> With regard to the [p. 118] book of Job I refer to the words of Kroeze, already mentioned, that Satan used storms,

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<sup>29</sup>Clines, *Job 1-20*, 135.

<sup>30</sup>It is true that Eliphaz pointed out such a direction, but it is not in the vision.

<sup>31</sup>Habel, *Job*, 127-128.

<sup>32</sup>E.g., 1 Chron. 21:1.

lightning, robbers – and friends.<sup>33</sup>

13. In the entire book of Job, God is silent during the sufferings of Job, until chapter 38, while He allows his servant Job to be tested. It is not likely that He attacks his own servant in the meantime.
14. In 7:13-14, Job complained that he was scared with dreams and terrified with visions. It is very likely that he too had hair-raising encounters, with very spooky apparitions. The consequence is that he prefers to die (v. 15). Of course, Job thinks that these visions are given by God, as is clear from the next verses (esp. vv. 20-21). Here again we cannot adduce similar experiences by the prophets. In the case of Jeremiah, he wants to die because of the reactions of man, not because of the visions he received (Jer. 20:14-18). It seems that Job had comparable negative experiences, caused by a demon.

I conclude that it is possible to evaluate the vision of Eliphaz in a more negative way than he himself was aware of. A demonic manifestation in the vision is a serious possibility.

#### 8. *Strategy of the Book*

In case Eliphaz is misguided, it is possible to ask why neither Satan nor a demonic activity are explicitly mentioned in chapter 4. Why is it so difficult to grasp the negative meaning of this vision, easily understood as a theophany?

The first reason lies in the relation between the vision and the prologue. For the dialogues in this chapter are usually explained without a strong connection to the prologue. Yet, looking at the strategy of the book as a whole, the reader is given a double focus. First, he is shown the heavenly discussions and the satanic background of the calamities in the first two chapters. Second, the following chapters concentrate on the situation on earth and the reader comes to see that Job and his friends are not aware of the

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<sup>33</sup>In the history of interpretation, Behemoth and Leviathan in Job 40-41 have often figured as personifications of evil (cf. 3:8). Maybe it is possible to connect them with the Satan in the first chapters. See Fyall, *Now my eyes*, for a strong defense of this view. Clines is more reserved, *Job 38-42*, Nashville 2011, 1186. For a discussion of the usual identifications with a hippopotamus and crocodile, and the relevance for the relation with Satan, see my article 'Behemoth and leviathan in the book of Job', *Journal of Creation* 24 (2010), 94-100.

heavenly background for the problems on earth. Provided with this double focus, the reader views whether [p. 119] or not Job and his friends can grasp the background. The reader not only reads the dialogues, but tries to combine both points of view. This is the strategy of the book. Without this understanding, it is possible for readers to mistake Satan's subtle attacks on Job.

The second reason for the absence of the mention of Satan or demonic activities is that Elifaz is convinced of the positive origin of the received revelation. Only his view is presented, and Job does not have the knowledge of the happenings in the first two chapters to contradict Elifaz. The reader has to interpret several allusions to demonic activities and to wait until 42:7 to hear God's verdict against the friends: 'You have not spoken of me what is right'.

#### *9. Examples in the Old Testament*

Does the above-mentioned interpretation present a unique case, or can more experiences in the Old Testament be found to substantiate this suggestion? A dream or vision can be used for God's communication with mankind. However, sometimes people are misguided.

A first example can be deduced from Deut. 13. If prophets or those who divine by dreams stimulate Israel to serve foreign gods, the people of Israel are not allowed to listen. In that case, YHWH is testing his people, to know whether they indeed love YHWH their God (13:1-5). What is important to note in the formulation of this law, is the prospect that the spokesman will have received a message in a dream. It is clear from the admonition that knowing the content is the most important way to discern the reliability of the message.

An interesting narrative is told in 1 Kgs 22 (// 2 Chron. 18). King Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Israel (Ahab, see vv. 20, 39-40) made plans to attack Ramoth-gilead. They received a positive advice to do so by 400 prophets and by Zedekiah son of Chenaanah (vv. 1-12). At a later moment Micaiah, the son of Imlah spoke of his vision whereby Israel would be scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd. In his explanation of it, he spoke of YHWH sitting on his throne with all the hosts of heaven standing beside Him. In that council, a spirit promised to entice Ahab, saying: 'I will go out

and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets'. Of course Zedekiah disagreed with this message, but for us the point is, that sometimes prophets can be deceived. One of the tests to see who is speaking the truth is the outcome of the prophecies (vv. 17-28).

Zedekiah asked: 'Which way did the spirit of YHWH pass from me to speak to you?' (v. 24). Apparently, Zedekiah believed he had received an authentic [p. 120] revelation! However, in the description of the book of Kings he is revealed as deceived in his meaning and advice.

This story from 1 Kgs 22 is especially relevant for the interpretation of the story in Job, because it contains a comparable pictorial of a heavenly council. The difference is of course that Micaiah spoke about a messenger of God, and in the book of Job it is an action by Satan.

The third reference is to Zech. 13. YHWH will cut off the names of the idols from the land and will remove the prophets and the unclean spirit (v. 2). This combination of 'prophets' and 'unclean spirit' is remarkable. The unclean spirit is a spirit inspiring the false prophets who engage in prophesying lies in the name of YHWH.<sup>34</sup> In Zechariah the consequence is that fathers and mothers accuse their sons of speaking lies. In the next verse their activity is related to visions (v. 4).

In the Old Testament we find several references to negative spirits. According to Judg. 9:23, God sent an 'evil spirit' between Abimelech and the Shechemites. Its task was to cause the Shechemites to become traitorous toward Abimelech and turn on him. An 'evil spirit' also came upon Saul once the spirit of YHWH had left him (1 Sam. 16:14). Though not involving prophecy in these cases, the notion of harmful, evil spirits is very much at home in the Old Testament.

### *10. Conclusion*

On the base of the arguments I have put forward, it seems likely that a negative or demonic spirit (related to Satan) tried to follow up the negative works of the first chapter. This was done in a subtle way: that is, through words of friends, who were influenced by their own thoughts and by a dream, which is perceived by them as a divine message. The

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<sup>34</sup>E.H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary*, Chicago 1994, 329-30.

statements in Job 4:17-21 are formulated as revelation, but in the context of the book of Job a discernment of spirits is necessary. By drawing up a perspective on the role of demonic influence in Job 4, it is possible to have a new interpretation of an old text,<sup>35</sup> with consequences for the interpretation of the whole book. The framework and the dialogues are more connected than usually thought.

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. M.J. Paul et al. (eds), *Bijbelcommentaar Ezra – Job* (Studiebijbel OT, 6), Veenendaal 2009, 437-43, 884-86.