

TWO INTERPRETIONS OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The Traditional Interpretation

The Book of Job is considered ONE book: Prologue, Dialogue, and Epilogue

There is ONE Job figure

The Prologue tells of the “Satan’s” request to try to get Job to curse God. God permits this.

The Dialogue begins with a long lament on Job’s part.

Three friends come to confront him about his thinking (3 cycles of speeches) representing the Deuteronomic Worldview: if you keep the Law you will be blessed;
if you disobey the Law you will be punished.

Job insists that he is innocent and therefore the theology is wrong: he should not be suffering.

Job calls upon God to speak to him and explain why there is innocent suffering.

God speaks “out of the whirlwind” and shows Job that there is so much that he can never understand.

Job realizes his ignorance and “repents” (*mem, alef, samek*) in dust and ashes

The Epilogue tells us that this case of innocent suffering was only a test and since Job has been faithful, all is restored to him. The friends are chastised because they did not speak correctly in this matter of a test.

The Critical Interpretation

The Book of Job is in actually TWO books: A Dialogue that was written about the 7th Century BCE and a Prologue/Epilogue that was added about 300 years later.

There are really TWO Job figures: one who is a placid and accepting and
one who is angry and willing to challenge God.

The Dialogue must be read independently. It begins in Chapter 3 with Job’s lament. He is suffering greatly, but no reason is given. The three friends come to confront him about his thinking: he is challenging the Deuteronomic Worldview. They insist that he must have sinned, else he would not be suffering. Job insists that he is innocent and therefore the traditional theology is wrong. Job calls on God to answer his questioning. When God speaks, he does so from the calm of the storm. God shows Job his limited vision and in doing this, Job is given a profound experience (*YaDaH* in Hebrew) of this God. Having experienced this God, he realizes that the fact of suffering is not a question to be answered in the mind, but in the heart. He is able to let go and he “melts” (*mem, samek, samek* – with the Greek and Targum) in dust and ashes. Here the Dialogue ends. Job continues to suffer, but he is now able to cope with suffering in light of this new found experience (“knowledge”) of God.

300 years later, when the Dialogue was about to be added to the canon of the Bible, the Prologue/Epilogue was added. In essence, it preserves the Deuteronomic Worldview: that suffering IS in fact the result of sin, but on occasion, God permits innocent suffering in order to test faith. Those who pass the test will be rewarded a hundredfold.

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