

VISION FOR THE WORD OF GOD

JOB

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Introduction to Wisdom Literature

This book is part of the Bible called wisdom literature or poetry. It is grouped with Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. In the Hebrew Bible, it is part of the section called "Writings."

"The wise men or sages of Israel were a special class characterized by their rationalistic and calculating approach to ethics, religion and the problems of human life."¹ We would be mistaken to assume that only Israel had these sages or philosophers or religious teachers. Such persons were part of the Near Eastern culture and were present among a number of the ancient tribes, ethnic groups and races.

"Among the fundamental tenets of [wisdom literature] is the belief that the world makes sense, that underlying all the apparent confusion and injustice and disorder of daily existence is a basic pattern, an ordering by which all such phenomena can ultimately be understood...biblical wisdom texts themselves present [the] answer [that] evidence of this pattern and order does indeed present itself, if only one is sufficiently discerning and takes the "long view."²

Wisdom literature, like so much other biblical fact or truth, does not present scientific or historic truth but moral, philosophical or theological truth in the form of parable, metaphor, allegory, poetry, reflection or story. Actual places, dates, events, and persons are not important to the wisdom literature. The point is not whom did what and when they did it or did such a person actually exist or did such a thing actually occur, but what do certain actions or events or behavior reveal to us about the meaning of life, the meaning of God, human behavior, ourselves or the principles we should live by.

Wisdom literature looks for the story and meaning behind the story we read.

THE BOOK OF JOB

The best way to approach Job is that of a parable, like the parables that Nathan confronted David with regarding the poor man's one lamb and the rich man's mistreatment of him or our Lord's parable of the Prodigal Son, or the rich farmer, or the rich man and the poor man who ate the crumbs from his table, etc.

Job then is not a real historic character anymore than the sower in our Lord's parable was a real sower, or the prodigal son or his loving father or the jealous elder brothers were real, living historic persons. They may have been or they may not have been. Whether they actually lived or not does not take away any of the truth their stories tell us.

¹ Interpreters One Volume Commentary, p. 238

² Harpers Bible Commentary, pp. 398-399

Authorship

We do not know who wrote Job or whether more than one hand was involved. There are some scholars who believe that a later editor might have been involved to soften and give balance to some of the harsh angry language and cold perspectives found in the book of Job.

There is some evidence that Job was not even of Israelite origin. For example, there is no place in Israel known as Uz, where Job lived. Job and some of the other names are not of Israelite origin. A number of scholars believe that the book of Job come from Edom or one of the ancient Near Eastern tribes.

Date

Many scholars believe that Job was written sometime between the sixth and third centuries and was an extremely important work for the people of Israel when they were attempting to come to grips with the trauma and loss they occurred during the Babylonian exile.

Structure

Chapters 1: 1-2: 13, Prologue: Conversation in the heavenly court and Job's suffering
 3-31, Job's Dispute with Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz
 32-37, Elihu's disputes with Job and friends
 38-42: 6, God lectures Job on the limits of his understanding and his complaining
 42: 7-17, Epilogue

Some Issues Raised in Job

What is the meaning of suffering in life, for the wicked and for the righteous?

Should one serve God unconditionally and *without question*?

What is the nature of the relationship between God and human beings?

What is the character of God and how does one have knowledge of that character?

What if one does not live "happily ever after," in the same way the book of Job ends with double restoration for loss and long life? Note Hebrews 11: 36-40

When one looks at how Job reacted to his suffering, is the expression "patience of Job" really accurate? What would be another way of characterizing Job and his response to his suffering?