

# The Problem of Evil

The Book of Job.

Job 1–14, 19, 22–31, 32:1–10, 36–42; Hebrews 12:1–11.

## The Book of Job

- **The problem of dating**
  - The character and his setting are early (patriarchal)
  - The text is late (probably the Persian era)
  - Job 19:26 quoted by 2 Nephi 9:4 (c. 559–545 B.C.)?
    - The final text could be a reworking of earlier material
- **Job's historicity**
  - Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11; D&C 121:10
- **Genre**
  - A didactic (teaching) poem in a prose framework
- **Themes**
  - Understanding suffering, particularly as it afflicts the righteous
  - The possibility of "disinterested righteousness"
  - Being able to trust God, even when not able to understand
- **Job and other wisdom literature**
  - Proverbs vs. Job: "and intercanonical dialogue on retribution theology"
  - Development: Dtr > Proverbs > Ecclesiastes > Job
- **Tensions**
  - Prose and poetry
  - Patient and yet defiant hero
  - YHWH in prose; El, Eloah, and El Shaddai in poetry

## Overview of Job

- **Narrative Prologue: Disasters of Job** (1:1–2:13)
  - Job and his Family Circumstances (1:1–5)
  - Job's Calamities (1:6–2:10)
  - Job's Comforters (2:11–13)
- **Poetic Core: Dialogues with Job** (3:1–42:6)
  - Job's Lament: he curses the day he was born (3:1–26)
  - First Cycle: Job alternates with Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar (3:1–14:22)
  - Second Cycle: Job alternates with Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar (15:1–21:34)
  - Third Cycle: Job alternates with Eliphaz and Bildad (22:1–26:14; Zophar's third speech missing)
  - Job maintains his integrity (27:1–31:40)
  - Elihu's Speeches (32:1–37:24; a later insertion?)
- **Poetic Theophany: God's Speeches** (38:1–42:6)
- **Narrative Epilogue: Deliverance of Job** (42:7–17)

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3

## Characters and Their Positions

See Bandstra, 433–35

- **Eliphaz**
  - No one is completely sinless, the guilty are punished (see 4:7–9)
  - Job is "relatively" innocent, so he should be patient because his suffering will end soon
- **Bildad**
  - Job's children must have been vile sinners, for they were killed (see 8:3–4)
  - Job is still alive, so he must not be as bad a sinner
- **Zophar**
  - Job is suffering for his sins, although he will not admit it (see 11:4–6)
  - Job must face his sins and ask God for mercy
- **Elihu**
  - Job justified himself; his comforters found no answer but condemned him anyway (32:2–3)
  - Suffering is how God reveals our sins to us so we will repent (see 36:10–11)
- **Job**
  - No coherent response to his suffering, but he maintains his innocence
  - Challenges even God! . . . *but then he repents* (40:2–3)
- **YHWH**
  - Does not respond to any of the arguments
  - Neither affirms or denies the theology of retribution
  - *Questions Job's ability to fully understand the reasons anyway!* (see 38:2–4)

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4

# Lessons from Job

Tanner, *SS* 5, 391–406

Searching for the true correlation between suffering and sin . . .

- **Wisdom about retribution**
  - Sometimes suffering is a sign of punishment, but not always
    - There can be “no-fault” tragedy!
  - Be careful of reasoning backwards from external circumstances
    - “If/then” conditions are not reversible
    - Virtue may result in prosperity, but prosperity does not necessarily imply virtue
  - Differentiate between covenants made with whole peoples (corporate covenants) and individuals
    - Even D&C 82:10 refers to “ye” (plural)!
- **Wisdom about relationships**
  - Job’s greatest need is for a relationship with God
    - He suffers his pains and losses in relative silence; what grieves him most is that he does not understand why God is allowing this or what he may have done!
    - His challenge to God contains a measure of pride and even arrogance, which is the only thing he is called to repent of
  - Lesson from the supposed comforters
    - Not enough to have the “right” answers, rather we should speak the truth with love and respond with affection (see Job 6:14, 19:21)

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5

# Need for Revelation

The Whirlwind and the Testimony of the Heart

- **Job’s comforters had no revelation or inspiration about the cause of his sufferings**
  - They, like we, often assumed that they knew the answers
  - Do not be too quick to impose our understanding of theology on circumstances and others
- **The apex of the book is God’s revelation of himself**
  - Answers Job’s desire for communion with God
  - Puts Job and his circumstances in an eternal context
- **Despite Job’s confusion, he holds on to flashes of knowledge and testimony**
  - *His hope in the resurrection, for instance, is revelation that serves as an anchor when all other understanding fails*

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6

## Problems of Beginnings and Endings

- Critics of the Book of Job are frequently dissatisfied with the prose frames of the book
- Problem with the Divine Wager
  - Would God really let *ha-Satan* (“the’ accuser”) torment an individual to prove a point?
- Problem with the Restoration of Prosperity
  - Seems to trivialize Job’s losses—can new children replace the dead ones?
  - Seems to reassert the very retribution theology that so much of the poetic passages has questioned
- Solutions?
  - Job may by a type here, the perspective may be eternal
  - God **does** send his children into a period of testing where they are, more-or-less, in the power of Satan
  - The restoration at the end could represent eternal reunions and blessings

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7

## A Christian Parallel

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>**Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God . . .** <sup>5</sup>And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, **My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: <sup>6</sup>For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.** <sup>7</sup>If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? . . . <sup>9</sup>Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: **shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?** <sup>10</sup>For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. <sup>11</sup>Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (Hebrews 12:1–11)

2/2/2009

8: The Problem of Evil: Job

8