

The Fruits of Monotheism

Week 3; November 19, 2018

The Book of Job

For scholars, Job is the most difficult book in the Bible. Its hero is not an Israelite and lives in Edom in the southern transjordan, not in Caanan. The book contains a very large number of Hebrew words which appear nowhere else in the Bible and thus have highly ambiguous meanings. Finally, there are numerous cases in which the text has clearly been corrupted, leaving us to guess what the “original” text might have said.

Nonetheless, for the thesis of this study group, Job is central. It asks directly the hard question that cosmic monism presents: if YHWH is the sole cosmic force (and thus the ultimate source of everything), how can we account for the bad things which happen to good people?

The beginning and end of Job are written in prose (the “prose envelope”) while the larger central portion is poetry. The two parts were clearly written by different authors each of whom suggested a different answer to the hard question.

Reading:

The Book of Job 1:1 through 3:1 and 42:7-14 (the “prose envelope”). [[pdf](#)]

The prologue is sometimes said to describe a “bet” between YHWH and Ha-satan; and sometimes said to involve a “test.” What is the precise assertion which is disputed?

Note the difference between “the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away” and “should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?” Is this significant?

State in a sentence the answer which the prose envelope gives to the hard question.

The Book of Job ch 3 (Job’s lament); ch 9 (Job decides not to sue God for treating him unjustly); ch 10 (more lament and accusation); ch 21 (Job describes the prosperity of the wicked); ch 22 (this speech is typical of the other friends’ speeches but more concrete); ch 29-31 (Job’s soliloquy asserting his innocence); (selections from the “poetic core”). [[pdf](#)]

Most of the poetic core consists of speeches by Job’s friends to which he then replies. The gist of the friends’ message depends on the traditional understanding that YHWH rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked; from this it follows that when one is made to suffer it must be because of some sinful conduct.

Note the reference in 9:24 to “handed over to the wicked one” and “If it is not He, then who?”

The Book of Job ch 38-42:6 (YHWH's response from the whirlwind) [[pdf](#)]

Does Job acknowledge anything that YHWH has said?

State in a sentence the answer which the poetic core gives to the hard question.

Bart Ehrman, *The Bible*, p. 195-202 (the section on Job) [[pdf](#)]

Read this only *after* reading the biblical text!

Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p. 87-103 [[pdf](#)]

A summary of the development of many of our themes.

(optional) *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. [[pdf](#)]

Ecclesiastes is (like Job) a book which challenges the traditional understandings. I include it here because you will very much enjoy reading it. Notice particularly the absence of references to God; those at the end seem to suggest an editorial addition.