

THE HISTORICITY, INTEGRITY AND INSPIRATION OF THE BOOK OF JOB (1)

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Attacks on the Word of God

The Word of God is under attack. This is nothing new for the child of God. The Word of God was under attack even in the time of its writing. Jeremiah faced the false prophet Hananiah during his ministry (Jer. 28). Paul instructed the elders of Ephesus that after his departure wolves would sneak in to deceive the flock (Acts 20:20-28). John warned that there were already antichrists in the world (I John 4:1-3). Our Lord Himself spoke of false prophets being condemned in the judgment, even though they had prophesied in His name (Matt. 7:20-23). Through the early church down through the Dark Ages, the Word of God continued to be under assault. False prophets arose. False teachers lead many astray. They have continued to do so unto this very day.

This attack has taken many forms. Some attacks have been doctrinal, as in the Arian controversy. Passages were interpreted (and some modified) to support this widespread heresy. The modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses cult continues this practice. Other attacks came in the form of heretical interpretations of passages, as with the Montanists (precursors of the charismatic movement). Furthermore, the traditions of men have in some cases so obscured the true meaning of the Word of God that it is all but lost in the practice of the professing church.

However, with the age of the so-called Enlightenment and the blossoming of humanistic rationalism, the nature of these attacks against the Word of God changed. The text of the Word of God itself came under close scrutiny. In and of itself, such scrutiny was not bad. Men like Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin and Beza sought to ascertain the most accurate form of the text of the Word of God. But it was not long before some scholars or theologians proposed that the differences found in the various texts do not simply indicate possible scribal errors in copying over the years. Instead, they were indicative of a larger issue: different authors, scribes or copyists may have actually had dif-

ferent texts. Not only did various documentary hypotheses arise to explain the differing readings of texts or of text families, but commentators and scholars sought to explain the actual *method(s) of composition* of the various books of the Bible, especially in their study of the Old Testament. With such theories, the traditional understanding of authorship of most of the books of the Bible was discarded. This assault actually devalues the very words themselves. And this is the type of assault upon the Word of God which the evangelical and Reformed believer currently faces.

Today, it is not difficult to find such assaults upon the Word of God. Simply enter almost any Christian bookstore and pull off the shelves a commentary on one or more books of the Bible. Gone are the days when conservative Christian bookstores limited their wares to those works worthy of publication. The Christian bookstore is no longer a ministry but a business which must have the widest variety of wares possible. Thus the modern Christian bookstore carries not only commentaries from solidly Reformed and/or evangelical authors, but also of authors of questionable theological background or scholarship. And one will soon find if one looks carefully that the text of nearly every book of the Bible has been at one time or another under assault. The assaults range from mere questioning of the text to outright denial, manipulation and rearranging of the text itself.

Historically, this assault upon the very words of God has been manifested in repeated attacks against four sections of the Word of God in the Old Testament. First, the law (Genesis-Deuteronomy) has had its share of detractors. The Pentateuch is the foundation for much of what follows in the Word of God. In the book of Genesis alone, we find mention and/or explanation of the creation of the world; the creation of mankind, both male and female; the entrance of sin into the world; the worldwide flood; and the creation and origin of nations, languages and cultures. Moreover, we find the biography of one of the most important men who ever lived: Abraham, who is claimed by three of the religions of the world. In Exodus, we find the first concise statement of the moral law of God. In Leviticus, we have repeated instructions concerning sacrifices and cleansings which were to be made on behalf of the Jewish people. And permeating and underlying this book is the concept of sin—its punishment and the need for redemption from it. Deuteronomy contains the

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restatement of the moral law of God. In light of this foundational instruction, ought we be surprised that this section of the Word of God is under assault?

One of the easiest ways to make a structure fall is to undermine its foundation. This is exactly what the modern textual critics have attempted to do. Numerous theories have been brought forth to discredit this section of the Word of God. One of the most popular theories of the past two hundred years is some form of documentary hypothesis concerning the composition of the Pentateuch. One writer explains,

This hypothesis, sometimes erroneously called the Wellhausen Hypothesis, holds that the writings of the Pentateuch derive from four sources, the Yahwist (J), a southern source that provides the main narrative outline of the Pentateuch, the Elohist (E), a northern source, later than J, that supplements J, D, the core material in the Book of Deuteronomy, and the Priestly Writer, who composed a long legal commentary on JE in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, as well as the whole of Leviticus. P dates to the time of the Exile (597/586-539 BCE). The contribution of Wellhausen was to order these sources chronologically as JEDP.¹

Second, the book of Isaiah has suffered a similar fate to that of the Pentateuch with the speculative Proto/Deutero/Trito-Isaiah theory.

Third, the traditional view of the book of Daniel is also commonly under attack. For over two centuries, it has been commonly held that Daniel was written in the second century, a time when the prophecies are no longer prophecies, but rather sage commentaries on the events of the fourth and third centuries BC. The book of Daniel is problematic for several reasons, not the least of which are its Aramaic sections. Large portions of the book were written, not in the language of the people of God, but in Aramaic, the language of the oppressors and enemies of the people of God. But this is not the main reason for objecting to its authenticity. The arguments against the

¹ Fred Horton, Kenneth G. Hoglund and Mary F. Foskett, *A Basic Vocabulary of Biblical Studies For Beginning Students: A Work in Progress* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University, n.d.) (www.wfu.edu/~horton/r102/ho1.html).

historicity of the book of Daniel can be summed up as follows: there is too much accurate detail found in this book for it to have been a work of prophecy. In chapters 8-12, Daniel prophesies concerning the kingdoms found in chapter seven: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, with detailed prophecies in the latter chapters. These detailed prophecies have caused great consternation among modern-day scholars.

A fourth book almost universally questioned by both conservative and liberal scholars alike is the book of Job. Unlike the books previously mentioned, Job is typically not where the average parishioner (or even the average pastor) spends much of his devotional and/or theological study. Thus it has been easier for assaults on the Word of God related to the book of Job to go largely unnoticed.

To complicate matters, the book of Job is one of the most difficult books found in the whole of the Word of God. With the book of Job, we will concern ourselves in the remainder of this study.

The Book of Job—Inherent Difficulties

Both in antiquity and more recently, numerous scholars have approached the book of Job and tried to unravel the almost ethereal nature of the narrative and the discourse of the book, along with the numerous issues that appear to shroud the work: Is the book history? Is the book a story? Is it based upon a historical character or is the character of Job the invention of a skilful yet unknown author? Was the book written in its present form or was the book damaged? What was the original language: Hebrew? Aramaic? Arabic? Edomite? Who was the author? Was it Moses, as was long held? Was it Jacob or one of the other patriarchs? Or was it the product of a skilled and thoughtful post-exilic Jew, who was seriously contemplating the extreme horrors that had been visited upon his people, with the exile of his people and the destruction not only of Jerusalem but also of the sacred and beloved temple?

Robert Gordis, in his commentary on Job, *The Book of God and Man*, notes,

... every aspect of the book poses problems There is not, nor can there be, universal agreement on such major issues as the structure, the unity, and the basic meaning of the book, or even on such relatively minor questions as its style,

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date and origin. Aside from these general considerations, the complexities of the book's language necessarily intrigue the commentator as he tries to interpret each word and passage in the text.²

From what has been stated above, it appears that almost every aspect of the book of Job is fertile ground for difficulties. Indeed, these are *weighty* issues worthy of the most serious study. Unfortunately, time and study have produced precious little in the way of solid answers either in antiquity or in more recent scholarship. In fact, in the opinion of this author, issues related to the nature and the purpose of the book of Job may now be more muddled than ever before in the history of the study of this book.

In spite of these difficulties, many have noted the excellency of the book of Job. Otto Zöckler, in his commentary on Job, quotes Franz Delitzsch: "His wondrous book soars high above the Old Testament limit; it is the Melchizedek among the Old Testament books."³ In like manner, Victor Reichert in his small commentary on Job wrote,

Unnumbered scholars, poets, philosophers, critics in generation after generation have delighted to bestow upon this product of the Hebrew religious genius the accolade of reverent homage. Professor George Foot Moore of Harvard University summarizes the universal testimony in these comprehensive and superlative words: "The Book of Job is the greatest work of Hebrew literature that has come down to us, and one of the great poetical works of the world's literature."⁴

This last quote may express a bit of hyperbole but it is clear that in Reichert's mind the book of Job possesses an excellent even unique quality which has been often recognised and this in spite of the wide divergence of opinion as to the nature of the book.

² Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. v.

³ Otto Zöckler, *The Book of Job: A Rhythmical Version with Introduction and Annotations*, trans. L. J. Evans (New York: Scribner, 1874), p. 243.

⁴ Victor E. Reichert, *Job: with Hebrew Text and English Translation* (Hinhead, Surrey: Soncino Press, 1946), p. xiii.

Questions Regarding the Nature of the Book

Part of this difficulty about the nature of the book may be traced to the numerous parallels within Ancient Near Eastern literature to the book of Job. It has been hypothesised:

... that there was an ancient Job legend, and perhaps a Job epic, which served as the basis of the biblical narrative, is suggested by the allusion to Job in Ezek. xiv 14, 20 where he is associated with the ancient worthies Noah and Danel.⁵

And again:

Mesopotamian parallels to Job have continued to increase since the early days of the recovery and interpretation of cuneiform documents. The first composition to be recognized as a parallel to the Book of Job was the text entitled "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom" (*ludlul bel nemeqi*) which became widely known as the "Babylonian Job." Though the earliest extant copies of this text come from the library of Ashurbanipal (669-633 B.C.), the date of composition, in the opinion of experts, goes back to Cassite times (ca. 1600-1150 B.C.). That there were still older Akkadian compositions on the subject of seemingly innocent suffering is indicated by J. Nougayrol's discovery in the Louvre of a fragment of such a poem which dates from the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon. Behind these Akkadian compositions dealing with the problem of suffering lay still older Sumerian prototypes which are now just beginning to be recovered. A Sumerian text dealing with the same problem as the biblical Book of Job has been pieced together by S.N. Kramer from fragments that had long lain unrecognized in museums thousands of miles apart ... The Sumerian text dates from about the same time as the Akkadian text, that is, ca. 1700 B.C., but it is likely that it derives from a composition as early as the Third Dynasty

⁵ Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965, 1973), p. xxxiii. The spelling of Daniel ("Danel") is Pope's.

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of Ur, ca. 2000 B.C., if not earlier. Thus the literary parallels to Job go back to the second millennium B.C. and enhance the probability that an ancient legend or epic lies behind the biblical story and even that the Dialogue may be much older than commonly supposed.⁶

With this as a foundation, the scholarship of the last two hundred years has produced numerous views regarding the nature of the book. Thus today one can find a range of interpretations as to the nature of the work spanning the entire theological spectrum: it is "pure invention," merely a work of fiction; it is a fictional story based upon a historical character but the details are fiction; it is a work of fiction based upon the life of a historical character using some (if not all) of the major milestones of his life as details within the story; it is a work of fiction based upon the life of a historical character using the historical story (chaps. 1-2, 42) as historical background and including some of the major dialectical issues that have surrounded the character as dialogue; it is a historical narrative of the events of a historical character. Even among those of the last category there is disagreement about when and by whom the work was written.

Questions Regarding the Historicity of the Book

These numerous stories, allegedly "similar" to Job, have given rise to speculation about the true nature of the character of Job and the story surrounding his life. Not only have these difficulties (listed above) caused much consternation within the scholarly community, but the content of the book itself has presented numerous theological issues, such as, does this book really present for us a picture of heavenly activities? For some, the view of God presented is almost an archaic one. Does this book really represent biblical

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. Samuel Rolles Driver also mentions a work commonly called "Babylonian Job:" "More recently quite a different class of evidence from that already considered has been adduced in order to suggest that the ultimate source of Job is in Babylonian literature. In this case, it is not the scene and the names, but the substance of the story, and in particular the speeches of Job, that are involved. The particular Babylonian poem which has provoked this theory has sometimes been described as the 'Babylonian Job'" (S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977]), p. xxxi.

teaching as regards the person of Satan? Does this book really contain the words spoken (i.e., the *ipsissima verba*) by Job and his three friends? Who is Elihu and why is his dialogue included? Does this book really contain an actual dialogue of God speaking with Job? Was Job really sinless, as some think he himself staunchly maintained?

Such questions have been voiced in numerous commentaries over the years. A statement of such can be found in the famous commentary on the book of Job by Samuel Driver and George Gray who noted some of the then-changing views regarding the historicity of the book of Job:

[That] the book is a report of facts of history, the exact record in prose of the actual fortunes of a particular individual and of the words spoken in verse by him and others, is a view that was long maintained ... though not even in earlier times without occasional suggestions that the book is fiction. It is unnecessary to repeat here the arguments against a view which has become entirely antiquated. But if the book is not history, and the speeches not the *ipsissima verba* of speeches reported verbatim, it need not be pure invention; the story with which it opens and closes may be, and in part most certainly is, based on or derived from popular tradition or literature; and, indeed, this is quite certain, if the book is rightly inferred to have been written after the Exile, for Ezek. 14.14, 20 refers to Job along with Noah and Daniel, as a conspicuously righteous man.⁷

Here Driver and Gray state that the historical view of the book of Job, that it is an actual, historical story, is a view which has become "entirely antiquated." They further begin to lay the groundwork for those views which oppose the traditional or historical view:

Among those ... who admit that the author has utilized tradition or popular story, there is, however, wide difference of judgment as to how much he has derived from thence, some holding that he owes nothing more to tradition (and that in the form of an *oral* tradition) than that there was once a

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xxv-xxvi.

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righteous man named Job, others that the entire prologue and epilogue were excerpted by him from a *book* containing the popular story (a “*Volksbuch*”). Between these two extremes it is possible to hold as a middle view that the fundamental elements of the story—the righteousness of Job, his endurance under trial, etc.—the scene in which it is laid and the names of the persons are some or all of them derived from tradition; if this were so, it might offer some suggestions as to whence the story came.⁸

This shift in understanding, that the book of Job is no longer viewed as a historical book, has led to numerous means by which scholars have attempted to understand the composition of the book. Gregory Parsons describes how the book of Job has been handled by more recent scholarship which has had a preoccupation with a “dehusking” process to eliminate “what does not fit”:

This “dehusking” procedure has been often employed (in varying degrees) on the Book of Job. The outer “folktale” is separated from the inner speeches because it contains “a patient Job” whereas the dialogue displays an “impatient Job.” The speeches of Elihu are discarded as a later insertion because they seem to contribute nothing to the argument and appear to anticipate much in the Yahweh speeches. The hymn of wisdom (chap. 28) is isolated as a foreign insertion into Job’s speeches (chaps. 27-31). The literary scalpel then slices off, at least, the Behemoth and Leviathan pericopes (40:15-41:26) from the Yahweh speeches because they seem unnecessary and are “obviously” inferior to the rest of the speeches. Others have even eliminated the Yahweh speeches altogether as irrelevant.⁹

Parsons concludes his description of the modern attempts at analysis of the book of Job with the following sage assessment:

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

⁹ Gregory W. Parsons, “The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job” in Roy B. Zuck (ed.), *Sitting With Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), p. 18.

It is ironic that with regard to the Book of Job (itself a study in irony), which teaches the mysterious nature of God's ways, man attempts to judge this divine book by subjective human standards. To fall into this trap is to miss one of the main teachings of the book.¹⁰

Parsons is correct. Numerous scholars in deconstructing the book of Job have failed to understand the divine character of the work before them. In fact, they dishonour the writer—and even more the divine Author—through their alleged scholarship.

Questions Regarding Linguistic and Textual Issues

There are in the book of Job certain textual and linguistic issues unique to this book which further complicate one's understanding of the book of Job and its origins. Some have commented that the language of the book is exquisite, subtle Hebrew. Robert Gordis comments on the style of Hebrew found in the prose sections of Job: "The prose tale in the prologue and the epilogue is written in exquisite biblical Hebrew, on a par with the classic narratives in Genesis and Samuel."¹¹

Gordis, however, describes this book as an archaizing masterpiece, stating that the author has struck a literary "*tour de force*." He goes on:

Hence in retelling (the story), the author uses perfect classical Hebrew with practically no trace of a later style. There are other examples of such skillful archaizing by gifted writers who give few telltale signs of their own age. The Book of Ruth, likewise post-Exilic, is written in a style reminiscent of the Book of Judges.¹²

Marvin Pope makes similar remarks:

What we can still comprehend of the poetry of Job is, according to Kaufmann [in his book, *The Religion of Israel*],

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, p. 163.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

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classical Hebrew at its best, but he goes on to observe that the “contacts with Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Arabic are most naturally understood as arising out of the antique literary dialect that the author employed; it is this that makes the reading of the book so difficult.”¹³

Others like A. B. Davidson note rather the *disunity* of style of the book:

The style is terse, nervous and pointed, and hardly anywhere marked by such breadth as to be enfeebled or become prolix. The speeches of Elihu are marked by a deeper colouring of Aramaic; are frequently obscure; and not seldom descend almost to the level of prose. The touches of the author’s hand in the other parts of the Poem, particularly in the divine speeches, are easy, vigorous and graphic; in the speeches of Elihu the figures are laboured and the thought strained ... In Elihu’s speeches there are not only unknown use of words, as well as a manner of joining familiar words together to form phrases which have no parallel—in short, the author speaks a language which in some parts is not quite that of any other Old Testament writer.¹⁴

Some of the difficulties mentioned by Davidson undoubtedly have their origin in the language of the book. Jonas Greenfield notes the following regarding the language of the book:

The book of Job has posed more difficulties for translators and commentators than any other part of the Hebrew Bible ... The difficulties, on the whole, are found in the poetic part of the book.¹⁵

And again:

¹³ Pope, *Job*, p. xxxviii.

¹⁴ A. B. Davidson, *The Book of Job*, adapted by H. C. O. Lanchester (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), pp. lvi-lvii.

¹⁵ Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Language of the Book,” in *The Book of Job: A New Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), p. xiv.

The poetic part of Job (chaps. 3-42.6) has provided the rabbis in the Talmud and Midrash with many passages whose obscurity made them fertile soil for contradictory interpretations. The early translator into Greek no longer understood many passages, and so omitted them; the original version of the Septuagint is about a hundred verses shorter than the later edition ...¹⁶

The reason for all this confusion is not hard to find. Job has more *hapax legomena* [i.e., words occurring only once] and rare words than any other book in the Hebrew Bible. The language is exceptionally rich. There is an unusual number of synonyms and descriptive words ...¹⁷

Greenfield continues commenting on these textual issues:

Some take their cue from the medieval commentator Abraham ibn Ezra, who thought that Job was translated from another language (see his comment on 2.11) and was therefore difficult to understand. Both Aramaic and Arabic have been put forward as the book's original language. It cannot be denied that the Aramaic influence in the text is strong, especially in the Elihu chapters (32-37), for many of the *hapax legomena* and rare words are clearly identifiable as Aramaic, or Aramaic proves the clue to their interpretation ...¹⁸

Note also the words of Pope at this point:

In addition to the textual difficulties already mentioned, the Book of Job also presents formidable linguistic and philological problems. Sometimes it is hard to say whether the difficulty of a given passage is more a philological than a textual one. There are more *hapax legomena* and rare words in Job than in any other biblical book. Many of these unique words, as well as the large number of rare words, may be explained

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xiv-xv.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xiv-xv.

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from the cognates in another of the other Semitic languages ... The problems of Job, however, are not simply lexical, but also morphological and syntactic. The language is ostensibly Hebrew, but with so many peculiarities that some scholars have wondered whether it might not be influenced by some other Semitic dialect.¹⁹

Textually, the book of Job is known for its difficulties. Various versions do not match others. The Septuagint follows one text at one point, another text elsewhere. Whole passages are missing in some texts. Some even go so far as to speculate that some major form of “damage” has affected the text.²⁰ Gordis is illustrative at this point. In discussing the originality of the Elihu section, Gordis (as do many modern scholars) comments upon the variety and the number of Aramaisms within this section of the book: “It is undeniable that the Elihu chapters in [the] MT [i.e., Masoretic Text] contain a relatively large number of difficult, even cryptic, passages.”²¹

He continues with a discussion regarding an incident: “major accidental damage” which supposedly occurred early in the history of the manuscript. This “incident” caused numerous “accidents in transmission” which “probably” continue on into the Elihu speeches:

This single assumption, that the text of chaps. 24-37 was damaged, would explain the presence of difficult passages in the Elihu speeches, that had become illegible and suffered errors in transmission.²²

Marvin Pope notes such difficulties in his introductory comments when he warns the reader of his commentary:

In fairness to the reader, it should be explained that the translation offered in this volume—as with every attempt to translate an ancient text—glosses over a multitude of difficulties and uncertainties. The Book of Job is textually the most

¹⁹ Pope, *Job*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

²⁰ Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), p. 547.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 547.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 547.

vexed in the Old Testament, rivaled only by Hosea which has the advantage of being much shorter.²³

In sum, all of these issues make a proper understanding of the book and its origins difficult at best.

Questions Regarding the Book of Job and Aramaic

Related to the linguistic and textual issues is the issue of the relationship of the book to Aramaic. Marvin Pope notes that the Hebrew of Job is classical Hebrew but that it does appear to draw upon or be related to other Semitic languages:

It is generally conceded that the language of the Book of Job has a strong Aramaic tinge. There are many features of phonology and morphology that are characteristically Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic words are often juxtaposed as synonyms in the poetic parallelism. A certain amount of this sort of mixture is normal for biblical and post-biblical Hebrew. The language of Job, however, contains far more than the normal admixture of Aramaic, more than any other book of the Old Testament.²⁴

But he also notes:

No satisfactory explanation has yet been given for the strong Aramaic colouring of the language of Job. Some of the apparent linguistic difficulties may be occasioned by our lack of knowledge.²⁵

Philip Schaff discusses the literary devices which the authors of the poetical sections of the Old Testament utilise. The first item which he mentions is a use of Aramaic:

The license of the Hebrew poets are found in the following particulars:

²³ Pope, *Job*, p. xliii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xlix.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

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1. Archaic forms and particular words, some of Aramaic or even a prior Shemitic dialect: *Eloah* for Elohim (God), *enosh* for *adam* (man), *orach* for *derach* (path), *havah* for *haiah* (to be), *millah* for *dabar* (word), *paal* for *asah* (to do), *katal* for *razah* (to kill). Sometimes they are accumulated for poetic effect.²⁶

More recently John Hartley, in his commentary on Job, notes a similar influence upon the book:

In another effort to account for the peculiarity of the language of this book, Tur-Sinai posits that the original MT arose from a partial translation into Hebrew of a lost Aramaic original. In his opinion, the translator left many Aramaic words and phrases untranslated because of their closeness to Hebrew. In addition, the author mistranslated various words. Tur-Sinai identifies the language as Babylonian Aramaic of the sixth century B.C.²⁷

I do not agree that the author of the Hebrew book of Job “mistranslated various words.” Nor do I see evidence that there ever existed an Aramaic original for the book of Job. I do, however, agree with the sentiment of Hartley’s quote above, that many words do share a closeness to Hebrew. Hartley’s analysis of the terms is common in modern scholarship: Aramaic equals a late date. However, the opposite could be true. Rather than positing a time in the sixth century B.C. (when words and phrases were not translated because of their closeness to Hebrew) could it not also be possible that such a time may have existed earlier, in fact, much earlier, in the history of Israel, where these “Aramaic” words were *in fact* much closer to Hebrew. It has often been noted that both Hebrew and Aramaic are sister languages both being derived from a common Semitic ancestry. If the book was written much earlier in the history of Israel when Hebrew and Aramaic were more linguistically similar there would have been no need to “translate” such terms into Hebrew for they were part of the

²⁶ Philip Schaff in his introductory remarks in Zöckler, *The Book of Job*, p. xxxii. It is interesting to note, in a section on Hebrew poetry in general, that Schaff lists words which are found in the book of Job.

²⁷ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 6.

living language of the people of God of that day. Assuming a very old date for the composition of this work, would not the linguistic conditions have been similar to those noted by Tur-Sinai?

These, then, are some of the difficulties with which the Reformed scholar is faced when he attempts to make a serious study of the text of the book of Job. These considerations, in turn, lead us into the thorny issue of the date of writing of the book of Job.

Questions Regarding the Date of Writing

The date of the writing of the book of Job may well be one of the great mysteries of Old Testament introductory issues. Externally there is little consistent witness to either the human writer or to his date of writing. This fact has not gone unnoticed. Note the words of Pope:

Rabbinic opinions as to the date of the Book of Job range from the era of the patriarchs (ca. 2100-1550 B.C.) down to the Persian Period. Bar Qappara supposed that Job lived in the time of Abraham, and Abba ben Kahana, that he was a contemporary of Jacob, whose daughter he married (TB, *Baba Bathra* 15b). The oldest rabbinic opinion (TB, *Baba Bathra* 14b) ascribes authorship of the book to Moses. Other traditions connect Job with Jethro and Balaam who were consulted by Pharaoh on the question of the Israelites' genocide ... In the apocryphal appendix to the LXX, Job is identified with Jobab the king of Edom, grandson of Esau (Gen xxxvi 33) and great-grandson of Abraham.

While ordinarily little store may be set by such uncritical traditional opinions, they are not to be brushed aside without due consideration. These early datings were doubtless suggested by the patriarchal background reflected in the folk tale, the Prologue-Epilogue. The patriarchal setting of the Prologue-Epilogue appears as authentic in detail and coloring as that of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. Job's wealth, like Abraham's, consists of cattle and slaves (Job i 3, xlii 12; Gen xii 16, xxxii 5) ... There is no priesthood or central shrine

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and the patriarch himself offers sacrifices (Job i 5, xlii 8). The Sabeans and Chaldeans are represented as nomadic raiders with no hint of their later political and economic importance (Job i 15, 17). The unit of money mentioned in Job xlii 11 is met elsewhere only in Gen xxxiii 19 and Josh xxiv 32. Job's longevity is surpassed only by the antediluvians (Gen v) and approximated by Abraham's (Gen xxv 7).²⁸

Driver is even more dogmatic in his assessment of the situation:

As to the age of Job, opinions have differed perhaps more widely than with regard to any other book of the OT, though in recent times there is an increasing agreement that while the book is certainly older than the 1st, it is scarcely older than the 5th or at all events the 6th cent. B.C.

It is often said that the book was traditionally ascribed to Moses; this is not correct, if by it is meant that such was the consistent ancient opinion. On the other hand, early Jewish was scarcely less divided than modern opinion. In the well-known passage in the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Bathra*, 14b, 15a) on the origin of the books of the OT, it is stated that "Moses wrote his own book, and the passages about Balaam and Job;" but in the discussion that follows various Rabbis ascribe the book (or the lifetime) of Job to the age of Isaac, or Jacob, or Joseph, or the spies, or the Judges, or of the kingdom of Sheba, or of the return from the Captivity, or of Ahasuerus.²⁹

And again:

External evidence clearly defines c. 100 B.C. as the downward limit of date; and by then the book already contained the speech(es) of Elihu, and had been translated into Greek ... We are thus thrown back on internal evidence for such determination of the upward and of such exacter determination of downward limits of date as may be possible.³⁰

²⁸ Pope, *Job*, p. xxxii.

²⁹ Driver and Gray, *Job*, p. lxi.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. lxv-lxvi.

Driver follows this with a brief discussion of the parallel passages/allusions between passages of the book of Job and several other books of the Old Testament,³¹ presumably with the idea that the writer of Job was well versed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and alluded to various passages in his writing. However, we need to note that *the reverse may also be true*, that these other Old Testament writers were familiar with the book of Job and *may have borrowed from it*.³²

Other authors give various reasons for dating the book as post-exilic, exilic or pre-exilic. A. S. Peake notes the following on the date of Job:

It is needless to waste many words on the old-fashioned view that the poem dates from the time of Moses or earlier. The antique colouring is proof, not of the book's antiquity, but of the author's art, in conforming his presentation to the age in which the hero lived and suffered. The absence of explicit reference to Hebrew law or history ought never to have been quoted to prove the author's ignorance of them, since he would have been a poor artist indeed to let his characters exhibit familiarity with the institutions of a people that belonged to a period later than the time in which they were placed. It would be more plausible to think of the reign of Solomon, a period of intellectual activity and intercourse with foreign nations. But the phenomena of the book hardly permit us to place it earlier than the time of Jeremiah. The decisive argument in favour of this view is the stage of religious reflection represented by it.³³

Please note carefully what Peake is saying: the earlier Hebrews were too theologically immature to deal with such lofty issues. That is akin to saying

³¹ Biblical books, according to Driver and Gray, which contain some manner of parallelism/allusions to the book of Job are Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Hosea, Amos, Ecclesiastes and Malachi, as well as the apocryphal Sirach (*ibid.*, p. lxvi).

³² At this point in his discussion, Driver seems to parrot the idea of a "theological evolution" as regards the spiritual development of the spiritual identity of Israel, noting that some of the concepts found therein point to a more "*mature*" understanding of God (*ibid.*, p. lxxviii; italics mine).

³³ A. S. Peake, *Job* (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1905), p. 37.

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that men like Abraham and Moses were not able to comprehend God as well as did the author of Job. At best this is ridiculous!

Assuming that one from the age of Moses *wanted* to write such a work, we must ask the question: *what would it look like?* Would the author, by the very nature of the case, deliberately try to make the work appear *even older*? Or should we expect that he would use yet an even more varied vocabulary? The assumptions which are unstated but assumed true with respect to literary technique by the “modern” or “learned” scholar concerning the human writer of the book of Job astound this writer. Note also the words of Davidson:

As there is nothing in the Book which fixes its date at once with certainty, a great variety of opinion has prevailed upon the question. There is almost no age of the world, from the patriarchal times down to the period after the Captivity, to which the Book has not been assigned.³⁴

Davidson then proceeds to lay out his rationale for the book being written sometime between the latter days of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) and the return of the exiles from Babylon. Davidson continues:

Nevertheless, the features of the author's own time may often be perceived beneath this patriarchal disguise. Job betrays familiarity with the Law, or at least with the social customs and moral ideas of Israel ...³⁵

Davidson proceeds to give various examples of items that have a similarity with one command or another found in the Law of God. But we need to note that this is really no argument at all. Why should it be thought strange that the forerunners of God's people were also familiar with various religious customs? Do we not have examples of this in the tithe (Gen. 14:18-20) and in the Sabbath (Gen. 1; Ex. 16)? What then can be said regarding the date of writing? Pope sums up the matter:

The fact that the dates proposed by authorities, ancient and modern, span more than a millennium is eloquent testimony

³⁴ Davidson, *The Book of Job*, p. lxiii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. lxiv.

that *the evidence is equivocal and inconclusive*. Even the mention of Job by Jesus Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus xlv 9) in the second century B.C. does not prove that the present Book of Job was known to Ben Sira, for the allusion is to Ezekiel's mention of the tradition of a righteous Job. The recovery of portions of a Targum of Job from the Qumran Caves indicate that the book must have been in circulation for some time before the first century B.C. While the completed book may be as late as the third century B.C., it may also be several centuries earlier. Parts of the book may have very early antecedents. We have noted the probability of the existence of an ancient Job legend among the western Semites. The treatment of the problem of theodicy and innocent suffering in poetic discourse and dialogue by the eastern Semites, and by the Sumerians, as early as the second millennium B.C. gives reason to suppose that the western Semites could have produced similar works at about the same time. *The date of the Book of Job, then, is still an open question and will remain so until more convincing arguments can be given for assigning it to any given century*. The seventh century B.C. seems the best guess for the date of the Dialogue. We may hope that discoveries and researches in the not too distant future will make possible more confident and precise estimates.³⁶

From an external standpoint this may be true. However, as I hope to show in the conclusion, the internal evidence favours a very early date.

Before we proceed, a brief word needs to be said concerning all that has preceded. From one perspective, much of what I have discussed to this point is not overtly profitable to the child of God. Some might even wonder why I have spent so much time examining the words of what blatantly appears to be unbelieving scholarship. I did this for this reason: to illustrate both the difficulties inherent in studying the book of Job and the nature of the scholarly attacks on this part of the Word of God, attacks which have gone largely unnoticed by Reformed churches. For these reasons, these attacks may be

³⁶ Pope, *Job*, p. xl; italics mine.

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able to make further inroads into the Reformed community, especially in the seminary setting. This justifies an extended discussion of these issues.

I realise that in the preceding discussion I have quoted extensively from various scholarly commentaries written on the book of Job. May the reader understand: I *disagree* with the vast majority of what has been quoted thus far. I have quoted it that the reader may have a deeper understanding of the present scholarly opinion regarding the historicity and the difficulties related to the book of Job, as well as the assault which is presently being waged in these same circles against this book. God willing, in our next article many of these arguments will be addressed and a brief discussion concerning the book of Job and its relation to inspiration will be considered.

to be continued (DV)

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