

EPILOGUE

JOB 42:7-17

Introduction to the Epilogue (42:7-17)

This appears to be the conclusion of the folk tale that the author has used in order to pursue his argument. In this Epilogue Job is restored by God – which fits the traditional ‘wisdom’ that Job has been challenging. Job is innocent and (in the folk tale) has patiently accepted his suffering from the hands of God, and so God blesses him. Having chosen to base his inquiry on the ancient folk tale, and having begun with it, the author chooses to end with it. He does so, not because it appears to partly support the view argued by Job’s friends (and Elihu), in that a just man is blessed by God in this world (something that is not always apparent), but because he is content for his audience to know that good is stronger than evil, that suffering is not intended by God as man’s final destiny, and to encourage trust in God’s beneficent love.

Job is God’s agent for reconciliation (42:7-9)

The last time we heard from Job’s three companions was in chapter 27. The absence of Elihu here is a further indication that he was added in by a later author. We are to imagine the three companions listening in to Job and then to God’s response. Lest they think that they have been justified, the author leaves us in no doubt that they have seriously misunderstood God. Four times God speaks of ‘my servant Job.’

⁷After YHWH had finished speaking to Job, he spoke to Eliphaz from Teman: “I am upset about you and your two companions; for you have not spoken rightly about me, as my servant Job has. ⁸Therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job will pray for you. I will listen to my servant Job and will not to deal with you as your impudence deserves, for not having spoken rightly about me, as my servant Job has done.”

⁹So Eliphaz from Teman and Bildad from Shuah and Zophar from Naamah went and did what YHWH had commanded them, and YHWH accepted Job’s prayer.

YHWH asserts that Job’s companions (representing the best of the wisdom of the east) ‘have not spoken rightly’ about God. They have consistently argued that there is a necessary link between suffering and sin. This is wrong.

YHWH asserts that Job has spoken rightly about God. In resolutely insisting on his innocence he has correctly shown up the inadequacy of the traditional ‘wisdom’ that claimed a necessary link between suffering and sin. Furthermore, YHWH chooses Job to intercede for the friends, which he does, and ‘YHWH accepted Job’s prayer’(verse 9).

Job is restored

Life does not always have such a 'happy ending'. This is how the tale ends, and our author has explored his question, and successfully challenged the rigidity of the theology he received from the tradition. He has not found a resolution of the question of why a just God allows the innocent to suffer, but he has offered a way to live with the mystery: the way of honest exploration of one's actual experience, and of maintaining trust in God, who cannot be confined within our theological categories, who remains free and mysterious, but who is not unaffected by our situation.

¹⁰When Job had interceded for his two companions, YHWH restored the fortunes of Job and gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹His brothers and sisters and all who had known him before came to visit him, and they shared a meal with him in his house, and comforted him for all the evil that YHWH had brought upon him; and each of them gave him some money and a gold ring.

¹²YHWH blessed the latter days of Job more than before: he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³He had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first Jemimah ('Dove'), the second Keziah ('Acacia'), and the third Keren-happuch ('eye shadow'). ¹⁵In all the land there were no women as beautiful as Job's daughters. Their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.

¹⁶After all this, Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his grandchildren, and great grandchildren. ¹⁷And Job died, an old man and full of days.

