The Book of Job: General Introduction

NAHUM M. SARNA

THE NAME

Biblical tradition has failed to preserve the name of the incomparable genius who was the author of the Book of Job. Not surprisingly, some rabbinic teachers felt that only one of the stature of Moses himself was worthy to be connected with so sublime and consummate a work (Baba Batra 14b). Even its original title is uncertain. The Book of Job (*Sefer Iyyob, Iyyob* for short) is the sole name that has come down to us, which is only fitting, since its towering hero dominates the work from first to last.

The interpretation of the name itself is not at all certain. One is tempted, of course, to invest it with symbolic meaning, and to connect the Hebrew *Iyyob* with the stem *'YB,* "to be hostile," "to suffer hostility," which is exactly what the rabbis of the Talmud did, albeit playfully (Baba Batra 16a; Niddah 52a). But there is another, more likely, possibility. The name Job, in an early Semitic form *('ay'ab),* has been widely attested in the ancient Near East over a long period of time. It was borne by a Canaanite chief as early as around 2000 B.C.E., as is mentioned in an Egyptian Execration text. It also belonged to a prince of Ashtaroth in the Bashan, according to an Amarna Letter (256.6), and various other personalities of the same name are recorded in cuneiform texts from Mari and Alalakh, in the alphabetic texts from Ugarit, and in South Arabian and Thamudic inscriptions. The manner of writing "Job" in cuneiform suggests that it is to be interpreted as a compound of *'ay* and *'ab,* meaning, "Where is the [divine] Father?"—an appellation not inappropriate for that anguished biblical soul who cries out for divine justice.

ITS PLACE IN THE CANON

In spite of the daring and controversial nature of its contents, the propriety of including the Book of Job in the biblical canon seems never to have been called into question. It has always occupied an honored place in *Kethubim,* the third section of the Hebrew Scriptures. Because of its size, Job joined Psalms and Proverbs to form "the great writings" (Berakhot 57b). The oldest surviving list of *Kethubim* places the book between these two (Baba Batra 14b; Gittin 35a), but offers no explanation for this order. Perhaps a theory of chronological sequence was the determining factor, or perhaps it was to allow books ascribed to Solomon to be clustered together thereafter. At any rate, it appears thus in the

Aleppo Codex (10th century C.E.), the Leningrad Codex B (1008 C.E.), and also, generally, in the Spanish Bible Codices. Ashkenazi manuscripts and the printed editions, however, place Job after Proverbs.

THE TARGUMS TO JOB

Despite its difficult language, the popularity of the book must always have been considerable, for translations into other languages already existed in the time of the Second Temple. A famous report of one such translation comes from the writings of the Tanna R. Yose son of Halafta, who was a student of R. Akiba (d. 135 C.E.). He relates that his father, Halafta, once went to visit Rabban Gamaliel II, in Tiberias, and found him reading a Targum scroll of Job. Thereupon, Halafta recalled a story about Rabban Gamaliel I, who was once sitting on a step on the Temple mount when a translation of Job was brought before him. Displeased, he ordered that it be secreted under a row of stones (Tosefta Shabbat xiii, 2).

Unfortunately, neither the language of the translation, whether Aramaic or Greek, nor the reason for the patriarch's displeasure has been preserved. But the story has acquired added interest in light of the Aramaic Targum to the Book of Job that turned up in Cave XI at Qumran from the library of the sect that occupied the site in the last centuries of the Second Temple. There is no way of knowing, of course, if any connection exists between this version and the one seen by Gamaliel I. The Qumran document is very fragmentary, and the first sixteen chapters are missing. Nevertheless, what has remained indicates that it was made from a Hebrew text remarkably close to our received text. There is no connection between these ancient Targums and the present Aramaic version, printed in the rabbinic Bibles, which derives from the early Middle Ages.

THE NARRATIVE BACKGROUND

The Book of Job is made up of two distinct parts, prose and poetry. The author has chosen the prose style as the vehicle for the narrative Prologue (chs. 1–2) and Epilogue (42.7–17) that encase the main body of the work, which is the poetic disputation (3.1–42.6). The story is simple. Job is a saintly man of considera-

ble means. Because the Accuser (the "Satan") challenges the disinterested nature of his piety before the heavenly assembly, God permits Job to be tested by a series of disasters that deprive him of his children, strip him of his worldly possessions, and leave him the victim of some horrible skin disease. Despite this crushing burden of misfortune, no word of impiety, of questioning God's actions, escapes his lips.

When his wife suggests that he renounce God and thereby put an end to his sufferings, he soundly rebukes her, and reaffirms his simple, unshakable faith: "Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?" he asks. Three of his friends learn of his unutterable misery, and they travel from their respective lands to be with him and to console him. After a week of uninterrupted, somber, and obviously reflective silence, our hero finally unburdens himself, and he curses the day of his birth.

The Epilogue is quite brief. It opens with the implication that Job and his friends have engaged in serious discussion. God takes the side of Job, who now becomes an intercessor on behalf of his friends. He is then doubly recompensed by God for all his losses, becomes the father of more children, and lives to a ripe old age, enjoying the company of his great-grandchildren.

There is clearly some discrepancy between the stoic figure of the Narrative and the fiercely argumentative, accusatory Job of the Poem. The explanation is not hard to find. The author has made use of an earlier story for his own theological-philosophical purposes. Who is this man named Job? All we know is that he lives in the land of Uz. Neither the name of his father nor any chronological information is given.

Where the text fails us, speculation fills the void. The Greek translation bears an addendum identifying Job with Jobab son of Zerah, the second king of Edom (Gen. 36.33), and this fancy must have circulated among the Jews of the Middle Ages, for Abraham ibn Ezra (1092–1167) takes pains to refute it. In talmudic literature, the entire spectrum of chronological possibility is covered, beginning with the time of Abraham and continuing into the age of Jacob (according to some, Job was actually the patriarch's son-in-law) and projecting him as a contemporary of Moses, the Judges, Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar, Ahasuerus, and as one of the returnees from the Babylonian Exile (Baba Batra 16a; P. Sotah 5.6 (8), 20c). Unable to identify the hero unequivocally, one critical Amora, in desperation, actually declared Job to be a fictitious

character, and the book to be an allegory composed for didactic purposes (Baba Batra 15a). Yet the prophet Ezekiel knew of a Job who, together with Noah and Daniel, was a classic exemplar of true righteousness (Ezek. 14.14, 20). This citation takes on added significance in light of the discovery of an Ugaritic text concerning a certain Danel, an honest judge, famous for his solicitous care of the widow and the orphan. It seems certain that Ezekiel was aware of some tale about an ancient worthy named Job who was a paradigm of integrity.

How much of the Narrative of Job is indebted to an ancient legend? Did our author draw upon a well-known tale on which to base his present text? First, it should be stressed that the two parts of the Narrative, or Framework, of the poem demonstrably belong to a single composition. In both, the hero is cited as "My servant Job," and, in both, he plays the role of intercessor, presenting burnt offerings to assuage God's anger. The order in which Job's material belongings are listed is the same in both sections, and the enumeration of his restored and redoubled possessions presupposes a knowledge of the Prologue. The three friends are mentioned in identical order in both parts, and in neither does the name of Elihu appear. The narrative Prologue and Epilogue thus form a unity, and constitute the tale on which the philosopher-poet hangs his discourse.

The social and religious setting of the story is unmistakably patriarchial—Job is a figure whose wealth is measured in terms of cattle and slaves. Sabeans and Chaldeans are not yet organized into kingdoms, but are still wild, nomadic tribes. Religion knows no priesthood or central shrine, only private sacrifice. Job's longevity recalls that of the pre-Mosaic period, and he dies, like Abraham (Gen. 25.8) and Isaac (Gen. 35.29), "old and contented." The patriarchal setting really adds nothing to our understanding of the book's theme, and for this reason alone we can safely assume that it is a vestigial remnant from an original tale, probably the one that Ezekiel had in mind. This case is strengthened by the presence of several other features peculiar to the Narrative.

The series of misfortunes that beset Job are presented in a way that bespeaks a carefully designed, symmetrical, literary arrangement. The structural pattern is reminiscent of that underlying the Ten Plagues. There are three groups of two afflictions each, in which the first blow falls on livestock and the second on human

beings. The cause of each series is alternatively human and divine, and the whole culminates in a climactic divinely-wrought seventh calamity.

And here another singularity appears: the extensive use of the number seven. Job has seven sons; his children celebrate seven-day feasts; he experiences seven disasters; his friends maintain a silent vigil of seven days and seven nights, and, when it is all over, they offer seven bulls and seven rams. It is not coincidental that Job has seven sons and three daughters; this is a characteristically epic and mythological motif. In the Ugaritic texts, King Keret is said to have begotten seven sons, while the god Baal, like Job, sired three daughters as well. Triads of daughters are a common motif, especially in Greek mythology. Moreover, the names of Job's daughters are given, whereas the sons remain anonymous, precisely the case as with Baal's children. In this respect, too, the social milieu reflects the epic tradition. Feminine pulchritude is exalted, the girls participate in the feasts alongside their brothers, and, together with them, receive an inheritance, quite contrary to the practice in Israel (Num. 27.8).

Finally, the Narrative of Job contains some mythological elements comprising two scenes describing the assembly of the heavenly host, in which God and Satan are the principal actors. The image of Satan here is not that of the later literature. He is simply the Adversary, who enjoys no independence of action and who cannot do his evil work without permission from God. And "Satan" is not yet a proper name, for it invariably occurs with the definite article.

All in all, there is a plethora of multifaceted evidence for concluding that behind the narrative Framework lies an ancient tale, from which many details have been incorporated intact into the prose sections of the present Book of Job.

The Language of the Book

JONAS C. GREENFIELD

The Book of Job has posed more difficulties for translators and commentators than any other part of the Hebrew Bible. Its language is often difficult; there are lines whose interpretation depends entirely on the translator's understanding of the context and his ability to make the best of what is preserved in the text.

The difficulties, on the whole, are found in the poetic part of the book. The Framework story (chs. 1–2, 42.7–17) is told in a classical prose style. It has a strong patriarchal coloring, evident not only in the description of Job's way of life but also in the choice of words dealing with his age (Job 42.17, cf. Gen. 35.29) and wealth (Job 1.3, cf. Gen. 26.14), and it reflects epic elements that must go back to an earlier prose tale. By his skillful choice of words and phrases, the author has provided allusions to various biblical narratives; through the use of such literary devices as assonance, alliteration, and parallelism, he has lifted the prose away from the merely descriptive. Yet we are informed by recent research—for example, the careful study of the use of various words (*qabbel,* "to accept," 2.10), turns of phrase (*'îš hāyā . . . ušmō,* "there was a man . . . named," 1.1), and choice of preposition (*yitpallel 'al,* "will pray for," 42.8)—that the present form of the prose Framework was composed in the Persian period.

The poetic part of Job (chs. 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 and was based, in all likelihood, on a text in the old Hebrew script. Comparison with the Latin, Greek, and Syriac versions, as well as with the traditional Targum, shows that the ancients were far from agreement as to the reading and meaning of those same words and passages about which we turn to them for enlightenment today. Indeed, their struggle with the Hebrew text is apparent; they often have recourse to the same sort of paraphrase or contextual translation on which modern translators, equipped with the best philological tools, must rely. A Job Targum was recently discovered at Qumran, near the Dead Sea. At times it offers two translations for the same Hebrew word (39.21); thus *yāśîś* is translated *yrwṭ,* "he will run," and *yḥd',* "he will rejoice."

The reason for all this confusion is not hard to find. Job has more hapax legomena 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; names of animals, minerals, and stars; terms from the fields of mining and hunting. The detailed anatomy of exotic beasts was known to the author, as was the technical language of the law. Alongside words that are easily recognizable are others that are not known; even in juxtaposition, their overall meaning is unfamiliar and not readily comprehensible. And another element characteristic of this book is the frequent use of part of a verse familiar to the reader from elsewhere in the Bible (although it is possible that to the author this was simply a familiar hymnic phrase) together with a verse whose meaning is unclear.

These and other considerations have led scholars to propose a variety of theories as to the origin of the Book of Job. Some have taken 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 provides the clue to their interpretation—for example, *ḥawweh,* "to tell," *śāhēd,* "witness," and *geled,* "skin." Grammatical forms, such as the masculine plural (*-īn,* rather than the usual Hebrew form *-īm,* in *millīn,* "words," and *ḥayyīn,* "life") and *minhem,* "from them," instead of *mehem*, may be identified as Aramaic in origin.

The complex arguments for an Aramaic origin of Job, however, have not supplied the key for unlocking the difficulties of the text. Nor is that key the use—indeed, the abuse—of the vast resources of the Arabic lexicon. There are various words which, when taken in their Arabic meaning, make good sense in context —thus, on the basis of Arabic cognates, the verbs *ʿśh* and *ʿṭp* in Job 23.9 may be interpreted as "to turn"—and there are other examples of the use of Arabic; but many scholars are wary of relying too heavily on this element as an aid to the understanding of the Book of Job.

The use of philological information garnered from Canaanite epigraphic sources—Ugaritic texts and Phoenician inscriptions—has been hailed in some quarters. But these texts have not greatly advanced the understanding of the poetic portion of Job. Random phrases, such as *mibbĕkī nĕhārōt,* "sources of the streams" (28.11), and *nibĕkē yam,* "sources of the sea" (38.16), have been

clarified. Of greater importance, however, is the fact that the Canaanite material has enabled scholars to appreciate more fully the mythological background of such imagery as the battle with the sea (26.12–13), the role of the Rephaim (26.5), and the references to the sea and the dragon (7.12), for material from such sources may have been used or quoted in Job.

No simple comprehensive answer has yet been found to account for the linguistic difficulties in Job. The author(s) not only had a rich vocabulary in Hebrew but was also familiar with literature that was to become part of the biblical corpus (Psalms, Isaiah), with ancient material now lost to us, and with neighboring dialects, having drawn upon all these to enrich the language of the book's protagonists, who are given tribal designations that would indicate non-Israelite origin.

It has been suggested that the Aramaic flavor of a good part of the book is a result of the Kedemite origin attributed to Job and his friends. Kedem is the region of the middle Euphrates, and the tribes that settled there spoke Aramaic during and after the period of the First Temple; the area in which Job lived was contiguous to the desert areas inhabited by Arab tribes. Thus, local dialects may have provided some elements of speech that would have given the book a stamp of authenticity for its contemporary readers but that have added to the difficulty of transmitting a text which, for its later readers and translators, still contains many mysteries.

Reflections on Job's Theology

MOSHE GREENBERG

Job is a book not so much about God's justice as about the transformation of a man whose piety and view of the world were formed in a setting of wealth and happiness, and into whose life burst calamities that put an end to both. How can piety nurtured in prosperity prove truly deep-rooted and disinterested, and not merely a spiritual adjunct of good fortune ("God has been good to me so I am faithful to Him")? Can a man pious in prosperity remain pious when he is cut down by anarchical events that belie his orderly view of the world? The Book of Job tells how one man suddenly awakened to the anarchy rampant in the world, yet his attachment to God outlived the ruin of his tidy system.

Job is a pious believer who is struck by misfortune so great that it cannot be explained in the usual way as a prompting to repentance, a warning, let alone a punishment (the arguments later addressed to him by his friends). His piety is great enough to accept the misfortune without rebelling against God: "Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?" (1.10). But his inability, during seven days of grief in the company of his silent friends, to find a reasonable relation between the misfortune and the moral state of its victims (himself and his children) opens Job's eyes to the fact that in the world at large the same lack of relation prevails (9.22–24; 12.6–9; 21.7–34). Until then, the crying contradiction between the idea of a just order and the reality of individual destinies had, because of his prosperity, hardly been visible to Job. He may not have been as simple as his friends, but neither was he more perceptive than Elihu, who, at the end (chs. 32–37), offers those above-mentioned explanations of misfortune. But Job now knows their absurdity and their inadequacy to save a reasonable divine order according to human standards of morality.

The Prologue of the book, telling of Satan's wager and the subsequent disaster that befell Job, has been a scandal to many readers. But the Prologue is necessary, first of all, to establish Job's righteousness. To depict the effect of dire misfortune that demolishes the faith of a perfectly blameless man in a just divine order is the author's purpose. The book is not merely an exposition of ideas, a theological argument, but the portrayal of a spiritual journey from simple piety to the sudden painful awareness and eventual acceptance of the fact that inexplicable misfortune is the lot of man. Without the Prologue we should lack the essential knowledge that Job's misfortune really made no sense; without

the Prologue the friends' arguments that misfortune indicates sin would be plausible, and Job's resistance to them liable to be construed as moral arrogance. The Prologue convinces us from the outset of Job's integrity, hence we can never side with the friends. For Job is a paradigm ("He never was or existed," says a talmudic rabbi, "except as an example" [Baba Batra 15a]). He personifies every pious man who, when confronted with an absurd disaster, is too honest to lie in order to justify God. The author must convince his readers that Job's self-estimation is correct, and that therefore his view of moral disorder in God's management of the world is warranted. That is one purpose of the Prologue.

Satan's wager and God's assent to it dramatize a terrible quandary of faith: a pious man whose life has always been placid can never know whether his faith in God is more than an interested bargain—a convenience that has worked to his benefit—unless it is tested by events that defy the postulate of a divine moral order. Only when unreasonable misfortune erupts into a man's life can he come to know the basis of his relation to God, thus allaying doubts (personified here by Satan) that both he and others must harbor toward his faith. To conquer these doubts by demonstrating that disinterested devotion to God can indeed exist is necessary for man's spiritual well-being; God's acquiescence in Satan's wager expresses this necessity. The terrible paradox is that no righteous man can measure his love of God unless he suffers a fate befitting the wicked.

The speeches of Job reveal the collapse of his former outlook. For the first time in his life he has become aware of the prevalence of disorder in the government of the world. In his former state of well-being, Job would hardly have countenanced in himself or in others a death wish; in his misfortune, however, he expresses it vehemently (3.11–23). Could Job, in his prosperity, have appreciated the anguish of victims of senseless misfortune, or have regarded God as an enemy of man (7.17–21; 9.13–24; 16.9–14; 12.5)? Job would previously have responded to despair of God as his friends and Elihu responded to him in his misery and despair. For Job's friends were his peers ideologically no less than socially; he belonged to their circle both in deed and in creed. A chasm opened between him and them only because of a disaster that Job alone knew to be undeserved.

Job's pathetic appeals for a bill of indictment (10.2; 13.18ff.; 23.1ff.; 31.35f.) belong to the context of the neat, orderly system

in which he had once believed. One wonders whether such repeated affirmations of his innocence are not aimed as much toward his friends as toward God, in an effort to break down their complacency. But since his friends neither have undergone his suffering nor share his confidence in his own righteousness, they will not question the validity or give up the security of their system.

Though Job never tires of denouncing the inadequacy of his former concept of the divine government (a concept which his friends still adhere to), his complaints are addressed to God. The orderly fabric of his life has been irreparably rent, yet his relation to God persists. We shall soon consider how that could be.

The outcome of the drama is that the collapse of a complacent view of the divine economy can be overcome. For Job this came about through a sudden overwhelming awareness of the complexity of God's manifestation in reasonless phenomena of nature. Job's flood of insight comes in a storm (סערה)—we may suppose, through the experience of its awesomeness. One may compare and contrast the midrashic word play that has Job hearing God's answer out of a "hair" (שערה), from contemplation of a microcosm. The grand vista of nature opens before Job, and it reveals the working of God in a realm other than man's moral order. Job responds to, and thus gets a response from, the numinous presence underlying the whole panorama; he hears God's voice in the storm. The fault in the moral order—the plane on which God and man interact—is subsumed under the totality of God's work, not all of which is reasonable. Senseless calamity loses some of its demoralizing effect when morale does not depend entirely on the comprehensibility of the phenomena but, rather, on the conviction that they are pervaded by the presence of God. As nature shows, this does not necessarily mean that they are sensible and intelligible.

It has been objected that God's speeches (chs. 38–41) are irrelevant to Job's challenge. God—the objection runs—asserts His power in reply to a challenge to His moral government. But this sets up a false dichotomy. To be sure, God's examples from nature are exhibitions of His power, but they are also exhibitions of His wisdom and His providence for His creatures (38.27; 39.1–4; 26). Through nature, God reveals Himself to Job as both purposive and nonpurposive, playful and uncanny, as evidenced by the monsters He created. To study nature is to perceive the complexity, the unity of contraries, in God's attributes, and the

inadequacy of human reason to explain His behavior, not the least in His dealings with man.

For it may be inferred that in God's dealings with man, this complexity is also present—a unity of opposites: reasonability, justice, playfulness, uncanniness (the latter appearing demonic in the short view). When Job recognizes in the God of nature, with His fullness of attributes, the very same God revealed in his own individual destiny, the tumult in his soul is stilled. He has fathomed the truth concerning God's character; he is no longer tortured by a concept that fails to account for the phenomena, as did his former notion of God's orderly working (42.1–6).

If God is a combination of divergent attributes, and is a cause of misfortune, why does Job not reject Him?

What had Job known of God in his former happy state? He had known Him as a conferrer of order and good. Basking in His light, Job's life had been suffused with blessings (29.2–5). No later evidence to the contrary could wipe out Job's knowledge of God's benignity gained from personal experience. Job calls that former knowledge of God a "hearing," while his latter knowledge, earned through suffering, is a "seeing" (42.5); that is, the latter knowledge gained about God is to the former as seeing is to hearing—far more comprehensive and adequate. Formerly, Job had only a limited notion of God's nature—as a benign, constructive factor in his life, "good" in terms of human morality. At that time, any evidence that ran against this conception of God was peripheral: it lay outside Job's focus. He assumed that it too could somehow be contained in his view of the divine moral order, but nothing pressed him to look the uncongenial facts in the face.

But misfortune moved the periphery into the center, and the perplexity that ensued is a testimony to Job's piety, for he was not transformed by senseless misfortune into a scoffer—a denier of God—but, instead, thrown into confusion. His experience of God in good times had left on him an indelible conviction of God's goodness that clashed with the new, equally strong evidence of God's enmity. Though one contradicted the other, Job experienced both as the work of God, and did not forget the first (as did his wife) when the second overtook him.

The author of Job had a dedication to theological honesty and a passion to teach the reality of God's relation to man that are

unique in the Bible.* Job cannot rest after the collapse of his old outlook until he has come to a better one, more congruent with the facts of experience. How highly the author prizes right knowledge of God is revealed by his final estimate of Job's friends. Although they argued in evident good faith, in the Epilogue God is angry at them and declares them in need of forgiveness (42.7–8). Wrong thinking about God is reprehensible. One might say that an aim of the author of Job is to warn men away from such culpable misconceptions. After Job, God is not willing to be conceived of in the friends' terms; after Job, such views are abhorrent to Him.

To the very end, Job remains ignorant of the true cause of his misfortunes, for he never learns of Satan's wager. Job appears to have found consolation in his realization of the complexity of God, but the reader knows more: he knows that Job's suffering was the result of a divine bet on Job's disinterested piety.

Why couldn't Job, like Abraham, have been told at the end that the entire event was a trial, and have heard, as did Abraham, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22.12)?

From the Epilogue, it is clear that God's vindication of Job's honesty, proven in his passionate recriminations against God and against his friends' simplistic theories, is more important for Job than knowing the reason for his suffering. The Epilogue shows Job satisfied by the divine assurance that his friends' arguments were specious, as he had always asserted (13.7–10; 19.22–29; 42.7–9). Beyond that God does not go in revealing to Job the cause of his suffering.

Abraham's case is not identical to Job's, for, in the end, Abraham did not sacrifice Isaac, while Job lost all his children and his possessions. It was dreadful enough for Abraham to learn that his God was capable of subjecting His followers to trials that brought them to the verge of disaster, even though He rescued them at the last moment. For Job to have learned that his family and his possessions had been annihilated because of a mere wager with Satan—that he had been a pawn in a celestial game—would have been far harder to accept than was the mystery of a God part known, part hidden, whose overall work is nevertheless good. For it is easier to bear a mixture of benignity and

***Kohelet shares with Job the clear-eyed vision of a flawed moral governance of the world, yet he has none of Job's anguished perplexity. That is because Kohelet, to all appearances, never had Job's experience of the goodness of God, with which the anarchy in the world might clash. Job might well have turned cynical had he never "heard" God in his earlier days.*

enmity, with their ultimate meaning clouded in mystery, than to accept a cold-blooded toying with the fortunes and lives of men.

Nonetheless, the Framework story says that one reason for senseless suffering is to test the motives of a pious man. This is stated only as the particular circumstance of this case and not as a general principle: one pious man, famous for his integrity, was visited with calamity for no reason other than to prove his character. That the same reason may apply to other pious men on whom senseless calamity falls is not said. But it is a possibility, one which lends a potentially heroic dimension to every such case; that is the exemplary value of the book.

Job ends up a wiser man, for he sees better the nature of God's work in the world and recognizes the limitations of his former viewpoint. The manifestation of his peace with God, of his renewed spiritual vigor, is that he reconstitutes his life. He is a vessel into which blessings can be poured; he who wished to have died at birth now fathers new sons and daughters. That, in addition to answering the demands of simple justice, is the significance of the Epilogue (which many critics have belittled as crass).

This concept of God contradicts not only that of the Wisdom of the Proverbs (in which the principle of just individual retribution is iterated in its simplest form) but that of the Torah and the Prophets as well. These writings bear the imprint of God's saving acts, the Exodus and the Conquest; they represent God as the maintainer of the moral order, and interpret events in terms of reward and punishment. But the Torah and the Prophets refer to the nation more than to the individual, and in their time no situation arose in which that concept failed. On the national level, Israel could always be regarded as falling short of righteousness and integrity; there were always elements within it that could rightly be reproached as deserving of punishment and, under the principle of collective responsibility established by the public covenant, of tainting the people at large with their guilt.

The later inability to find an explanation for national destiny in the Torah and the Prophets is reflected, not in Job, but in the apocalyptic literature that arose in the Hellenistic period. There was no explanation in the tradition for the persecution by Antiochus IV, which singled out those loyal to God while leaving the apostates in peace. The faithful were reconciled to their suffering only because they saw it as the preordained prelude to an eventual spiritual domination of the world by the Saints of the Most

High (Dan. 7.27). Taking his cue from hints in the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah (also a response to those perplexed by a topsy-turvy world in which the heathen prospered and the devotees of the Lord were humiliated), the apocalyptic visionary of Daniel perceived the suffering of the righteous as a necessary phase in a determined sequence of universal salvation. Thus he lent a significance to the reasonless suffering of his community which was outside the categories of ordinary justice.

Is the retention in the biblical canon of Proverbs alongside Job, or the Torah and the Prophets alongside the apocalypses of Daniel, just thoughtless conservatism?

The religious sensibility apparently absorbs or even affirms the contradictions embodied in these books. That may be because these contradictions are perceived to exist in reality. One can see in individual life as in collective life a moral causality (which the religious regard as divinely maintained; indeed, as a reflection of God's attributes): evil recoils upon the evildoers, whether individual or collective; goodness brings blessings. At the same time, the manifestation of this causality can be so erratic or so delayed as to cast doubt on its validity as the single key to the destiny of men and nations. Hence the sober believer does not pin his faith solely on a simple axiom of the divine maintenance of moral causality, but neither will he altogether deny its force. No single key unlocks the mystery of destiny: "Within our ken is neither the tranquility of the wicked nor the suffering of the righteous" (Abot 4.17), but, for all that, the sober believer does not endorse nihilism. Wisdom, Torah, and Prophets continue to represent for him one aspect of causality in events which he can confirm in his own private experience. But one aspect only. The other stands beyond his moral judgment, though it is still under God: namely, the mysterious or preordained decree of God, toward which the proper attitude is "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13.15, *qere*).