

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## SOME THEORIES ON THE DATE OF THE BOOK OF JOB

THE Book of Job is unique in Old Testament literature and is universally acknowledged as a masterpiece. Carlyle even goes to the point of saying that it "is the greatest thing ever written with pen . . . there is nothing written, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit". The date of Job constitutes one of the most difficult problems in the history of Old Testament literature. The dates suggested range from the time of Moses to the fourth century B.C., but the general trend of modern scholarship is to accept none earlier than the sixth century or later than the first century B.C. For the last date there exists incontrovertible external evidence. Eusebius quotes (*Praep. Eb.* ix. 25) a passage from Alexander Polyhistor (80-40 B.C.) which gives a resumé of the prologue of Job and a bird's-eye view of the remainder of the book. Polyhistor in turn quotes this passage from Aristeas. Some scholars, for instance, Duhm, question the integrity of the book. He regards the prologue and epilogue as belonging to ancient folklore and the dialogue as a modification of the dialogues of that ancient drama. The question of date is bound up with the integrity of the Book of Job, a discussion of which, though helpful, does not lie within the scope of this treatise, but that the book is the product of a single mind is here assumed. The book, robbed of its prologue and epilogue, loses its unity and much of its beauty, and above all its climax, while its lack of a conclusion would leave us completely in the dark.

### I

#### THE ARGUMENT FOR THE MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP

Ancient Jewish opinion was by no means in agreement in accepting the Mosaic authorship, and consequently rabbinic scholarship produced almost as many theories as modern times.

Their arguments for the Mosaic period are based primarily on the occurrence in Job of certain words found in the Pentateuch.

Whereas it is said, "Moses wrote his own book, and the passage about Balaam and Job," that agrees with the words of Rabbi Levi bar Lachma, who said, "Job lived in the days of Moses," for it is written in one place, "O that (epho) my words were now written" (Job xix. 23), and it is written in another place, "For (epho) wherein now shall it be known?" (Exod. xxxiii. 16). But he might be said to have lived in the days of Isaac, for it is written, "Who then (epho) is he that hath taken venison?" (Gen. xxvii. 33), or, again, in the days of Jacob, for it is written, "If it be so now (epho), do this" (Gen. xliii. 11). Or, again, in the days of Joseph, for it is written, "Where (epho) are they feeding?" (Gen. xxxvii. 16). But you are not to think so, for it is written, "Oh that they were inscribed (ויורקו) in a book," but Moses is called "the Inscriber" (מהוקק), as it is written, "And he provided the first part for himself, for there was the law-giver's (Inscriber's מהוקק) portion reserved" (Deut. xxxiii. 21)<sup>1</sup>:

By similar argumentation rabbis assigned Job to the age of the judges, of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), of the Kingdom of Sheba, land of the Chaldeans. It is apparent at once that such reasoning is fanciful. But even if the rabbinical evidence as to the period of Job were convincing, it would by no means prove the date of composition, nor even throw light on the subject.

## II

### THE ARGUMENT FOR THE SOLOMONIC PERIOD

Among those who advocate the Solomonic Age as the time of the composition of the Book of Job are Luther, Delitzsch, Keil, and von Orelli. It is unnecessary to let all these protagonists speak, since their views find by far the best expression in the words of Delitzsch. He says that the entire book reveals the marks of the period in which the Hokhma—wisdom—thrust its roots into the soil of the Solomonic Age, an age characterized by deep religious reflection, an age in which the traditional art found manifold intelligent expression, a golden age in which literary development went hand in hand with the political glory of the State. The scientific knowledge displayed in the book springs from a background of learning gleaned during long years of observation. He sees similarities between Job and the rest of wisdom literature, maintaining that a comparison of the treatment of wisdom in Proverbs iii

<sup>1</sup> See the Talmudic tract *Babba Bathra* as quoted in Ryle, Herbert E., *The Canon of the Old Testament*, p. 287.

with Job xxviii shows further development in the former where the supereminent wisdom is spoken of as playing a rôle in secular affairs and acting as an agent in the creation of the world. Delitzsch also points to striking allusions to Job in Psalms lxxxviii and lxxxix in which the sufferer laments his pitiful condition. (Their authors, Heman and Ethan, the Ezrahites, are contemporaries of Solomon mentioned in 1 Kings i. 11 (Hebrew) and should not be confused with the chief singers of David bearing identical names.)

The concensus of Roman Catholic scholars is that the date of Job is not earlier than the time of Solomon and not later than Ezekiel. They, therefore, concur in placing the Book of Job within the golden age of Hebrew poetry.

### III

#### THE ARGUMENT FOR THE POST-EXILIC DATE

By far the greater number of scholars assign a Post-exilic date for Job. To mention a few: Renan, Ewald, Dillman, Sellin, Davidson, Driver, Cheyne, Koenig, Budde, Cornill, and Jastrow. The arguments in support of their dates, ranging from 650—400 B.C., rest primarily on historical and philological facts believed to be established through a comparative study of Job and the remainder of Biblical literature. Out of the many parallel passages we quote a few:

<i>Job</i>	<i>Deut.</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Psalms</i>
v. 14	xxviii. 29	vii. 7	viii. 15
v. 18	xxxii. 39	x. 9	cxxxviii. 8
<i>Job</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Isaiah</i>
iii. 25	x. 24	ix. 8	xliv. 24; xlv. 12
vi. 3	xxvii. 3	xii. 9	xli. 20
<i>Job</i>	<i>Jerem.</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Lamen.</i>
iii. 3-10	xx. 14-18	ix. 18	iii. 15
vi. 15	xv. 18	xvi. 13	iii. 12

Because of the above alleged similarities Sellin thinks that Job follows a trodden path. In view of the professional manner in which Job's three friends expound the doctrine of retaliation he advocates a date for Job between Jeremiah and Malachi (600—450 B.C.). He admits, however, that because of the author's intellect and his international outlook, the usual means for determining dates cannot be employed here and therefore

nothing can be said with certainty. Sellin raises the question whether the author may not have been a member of the Jewish colony in Palestine, which attained a considerable population in the sixth century and boasted great literary activity of an international character.

Similarly, W. T. Davidson argues in the *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* that the Book of Job reveals an advanced state of society, and a vast knowledge of the author of natural history and human life, which is impossible to a member of a primitive society. The great political upheavals portrayed in Job xii. 17-21, the dethronement of kings and exile of priests naturally suggest a date later than the fall of the Northern Kingdom (721) and according to McFadyen probably later than that of the Southern. The latter has no doubt that Job used Jeremiah since in his words, "Jeremiah was in no mood for quotation" (cf. ch. iii and Jer. xx. 14-18). The problem of Job, McFadyen holds, was not discussed in pre-exilic times. This belief is also shared by Peake, who holds to a date not earlier than Jeremiah, since in his view it was only at that time, when the pillars of the Jewish State were beginning to totter under the Chaldean attack, that the established conviction of the close connection between righteousness and prosperity began to be questioned. Peake sees a close connection between Job and Isaiah xl-lv which he holds to be earlier since the suffering of the nation comes first and only at a later date was the individual considered of much consequence. He further contends that attention to angelology is late, only after the return from the exile, likewise that mention of Satan occurs late, only in Zechariah and Chronicles. Peake favours a date after Ezra's reformation, because, so he holds, such a lofty poem could not have blossomed from the uncongenial soil of legalism.

Eduard Koenig advances a date at the time of the carrying away of Jehoiachin into captivity (597), on the ground that in this period the good had to suffer for the bad, an outstanding example of which was Josiah's death in the battle of Megiddo in 609. Above all, Koenig stresses the linguistic argument for his date, words of later use as well as Aramaic and Aramaic-Arabic terms, for example:

1. Plural endings in iv. 2; xii. 11; xv. 13; xviii. 2; xxiv. 22; xxvi. 4.
2.  $\text{יִּהְיֶה}$ —hen—"behold" in ix. 11f.; xii. 14f.; xix. 7; xxiii. 8; xl. 23 as in Jer. iii. 1 and in later times.

3. שֹׁהֵד—sohed—"witness" (xvi. 19), word used by Laban, the Aramean (Gen. xxxi. 47).
4. תִּקַּף—tqaf—"be strong", overcome (Eccl. iv. 12; vi. 10).
5. אֲנִי אֲנֹכִי—ani, anoki—are used for the personal pronoun "I". In Job the ratio is 14: 22 and in Jeremiah 37: 53.

Jastrow places the date about 400 B.C. on the ground that not until then would there be found a group of independent thinkers with sufficient temerity and advanced to such a stage of development as to attack the highly difficult questions created when religion forsakes the primitive level on which the principal characteristic of God is "strength arbitrarily exercised" to that high eminence where the divine government of the universe is conceived of as moulded by ethical considerations.<sup>1</sup> With Peake he likewise asserts that before the time of the prophets the problem did not exist, since with their introduction of a god of righteousness and justice the problem of evil became acute. Furthermore, he says that older religions conceived of God as one exercising arbitrary power. The old gods were irresponsible,—they did as they pleased. When the gods sent misery upon man there was nothing to be done but wait till their wrath had passed away.

#### IV

##### CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE THEORIES

Definite internal evidence throughout the book makes the acceptance of a date of the composition of the Book of Job in the Mosaic period, or Solomonic, or Exilic, or post-Exilic difficult, if not impossible.

1. The epilogue states that Job lived 140 years after his restoration. His total age was probably over two hundred years, while Abraham lived 175 years (Gen. xxv. 7), Isaac 180 (Gen. xxxv. 28) and Jacob 147 (Gen. xlvii. 28).
2. Job must have lived an agrarian life. His wealth is given in cattle and slaves (cf. Gen. xiii. 26).
3. Job sacrificed as the head of a family in the manner of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob without the mediation of a priest. He brought burnt offerings, while in later codes definite expiatory sacrifices were prescribed.
4. The "Mesitah" (xlii. 11) was a primitive, uncoined piece of metal mentioned only in Genesis xxxiii. 19 and Joshua xxiv. 32.
5. The oldest Semitic names for God, *El*, *Eloah*, are found fifty and the name *Shaddai* thirty-one times in Job, and rarely elsewhere in the Old Testament.

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Book of Job*, p. 17.

The Book of Job shows definite progress, a fact often overlooked. Job did not start out with an advanced conception of life and God. He approached his problem by holding to the doctrine of a righteous God, who in retaliation deals justly with man. Job began with a limited outlook upon life. His world had a static nature, since its construction was complete; the Sovereign ruler had merely to maintain it. This pre-scientific world was very small to Job. It consisted of some fields, herds, a sky, a family, and some friends, all complete and to be maintained now and for ever under the same order. This world was characterized chiefly by a social group in relation to a divine patron, who was, however, invisible and remote. Only gradually, step by step, does Job discover a larger world with its many and manifold problems.

If Job was written at the time of Solomon or at a later age, it is difficult to understand why the author chose to portray a universal problem against a pastoral background. A great piece of literature does not necessarily predicate a late age in the history of a nation, as creative genius and vitality are frequently found in the beginning of a literature, for example, Dante, the first luminary on the horizon of vernacular Italian letters has not been eclipsed in subsequent centuries. Homer, who felt the pulse of life so keenly and wrote with a freshness and originality unrivalled in literary history, lived in the childhood of the Hellenic race.

Job is the product of a genius, remarkably original in his observation, judgments and expression. The alleged dependence of some passages in Job on Deuteronomy would be proof of a post-exilic date only if it could be proved that the Pentateuch is not Mosaic. Recent archæological discoveries, however, tend to confirm the remote antiquity of the early books of the Bible. A comparison of parallel passages shows that no case can be made of the imitation of some portions of the psalms and of Jeremiah, as it is next to impossible to decide on whose side lies the priority. If Job was written after the exile, it is strange that the author shows unfamiliarity with Isaiah liii. Even if we suppose that the author found no comfort in the solution offered there would he, at least, not have referred to that passage? As to the Aramaic words found in Job, Barth<sup>1</sup> well says that it is unwarranted to infer the date of Job from them

<sup>1</sup> *Beitraege zur Erklarung des Buches Hiob*, p. 5.

because it is impossible to decide which of them are old Hebrew words, which became obsolete in later times, although many are without doubt old Semitic words preserved in some dialects, and above all, because one cannot evaluate a book with a unique style by means of other books in the Old Testament "if one does not wish to compare incommensurable quantities". The Aramaisms would seem to prove that the author actually lived outside of Palestine where he acquired provincialisms in his associations with Aramaic and Arabic speaking tribes.

It was mentioned that the vast amount of information Job possessed, his mature judgments based upon close observation of life, are taken by some scholars to indicate an advanced stage in literature. However, we must guard ourselves against another unwarranted assumption that during the patriarchal age of the Hebrews the more advanced civilization of a neighbouring country, e.g. Egypt, was not familiar to the author. There was always a certain amount of travel along the Fertile Crescent, or, as Eduard Koenig well remarks, the author could have presupposed such social and political conditions among other nations, if he could not learn them through trips and caravans (vi. 8).

Furthermore, the theme of the author by no means indicates an advanced stage in history, since the problem of suffering is as old as the human race. On the contrary, definite traces of primitive conceptions are discoverable in Job. His conception of God at a time was primitive, for he thought of the divine power as being arbitrarily exercised, and that consequently it was useless for man to try to contend with God. Only gradually did he fight his way from a primitive to a higher conception of God. The position taken by the three friends of Job, that suffering is the result of sin, is likewise a primitive conception, very shallow in its outlook. This theory, we grant, was perhaps questioned at a later period, but is it unreasonable to suppose that a man who could produce an immortal work, a genius, could have expressed opinions long before their general acceptance? Our conclusion is that the Book of Job is an ancient poem strongly and definitely suggesting a pastoral age and therefore we would assign it to the age of the Patriarchs.