

The Book of Job: Part 4

God's Final Words to Job and Job's Friends

Ch.42:7-9 (NSRV)

[7] After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

[8] Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.”

[9] So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

Because these verses are in prose, some authors associate them with the prose ending. However, God says in verse 7 that Job's friends have spoken incorrectly about God. In the prose beginning of the book, Job's friends do not speak so it seems that these verses, although in prose, are intended to close the poetry section.

The primary disagreement between Job and his friends was over whether God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Although he initially believed it, Job argued that this conventional wisdom was just wrong. Job's friends said that conventional wisdom had to be right. God rejected the traditional wisdom that God interacts with humanity on the basis of rewards for the righteous and punishments for the unrighteous. God also hopefully recentered Job's idea of what constitutes competent management of the world.

This story challenged the prevailing theology of that time which formed the basis of the OT Covenant. It also challenges the dominant OT model of God's relationship to God's “children” which was one of a parent with young children; a relationship in which discipline and coercion are normally appropriate. Is the writer of Job suggesting a different model?

Job accused God of mismanagement and acting unjustly. These were insulting to God. The friends claimed no one should talk like that and not be punished. God's speeches to Job convinced Job that he was not qualified to make such accusations. However, God does not punish Job for his arrogance.

How does the Prose Tale Ending work with Job's encounter with God?

It clearly is not a reward for Job having done something right. Could it be compensation for having been treated unjustly in that, coinciding with the Prose Tale, God had allowed Job to be mistreated for no reason? Is justice always a reward?