

Literary History of the Book of Job: A Sketch

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The Hebrew Book of Job has a history of at least two hundred years of emergence in the (5th)4th–2nd century BCE (cf. Dell 1991: 162; Kaiser 1994: 74; Witte 1994). The literary history of Job has numerous layers, which have been unravelled only broadly; the following overview tries to explain it in a more detailed way:

1. First, independently from each other, the Poem of Job and the (frame) Story of Job were written, maybe also several single poems (cf. 6 below), which editors of the book later took up:

a.) thereby, the **Poem of Job** was significantly shorter than in the received Masoretic text, including chapters 3–31* + 38–39* in their unedited form²; it discussed the ambivalent human experience – Job’s lament growing out of his specific experience of suffering and the general wisdom originating in the life experience of friends – that explain human fate in their own way but none of them is exclusively true, as presupposed by God in his speech by listing his superior and intangible divine creative acts; the poem draws on the Ancient Near Eastern tradition of thousands of years that casts in words the most existential reflections of the humankind;

b.) the brief (**Frame**) **Story of Job** originally contained only parts where neither Satan nor the friends appeared; this was a didactic story of a man with steadfast morals who did not abandon his God despite his utmost suffering.³

2. As next, the poem and the story were combined, and the **Book of Job** came into being, the so-called **book editor** is responsible for that. Thereby, the story of Job grew significantly: 1:6–12; 2:1–13 (3:1); 42:7–9 (Syring, Kaiser) and the poem was extrapolated with prose introduction of speeches 3:2; 4:1; 6:1; 8:1; 9:1; 11:1; 12:1; 15:1; 16:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1; 38:1 (Syring, Kaiser).

3. The combination of the poem and the frame story caused two crucial tensions which engaged all later editors: a.) Job turns to God too brusquely and talks about justice too controversially; b.) the passage 42:7–9 provides a clear-cut assessment of Job and his friends. Following editorial processes were triggered, which are likely temporally close and partly intermingle; exact chronological details cannot be reconstructed anymore:

a.) it is difficult to assess how much the book editor extrapolated the poem,⁴ but the speeches of Job got **extrapolations critical toward friends**, at least in 6:15–20; 13:9–12;

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² To be exact: 3:3, 7–8, 10–15, 17–22, 24–26; 4:2–11 + 5:1–8*, 18–21, 23–27; 6:2–13*, 21–30 + 7:19, 20b–c, 21c–d; 8:2–8*, 10–14, 16–22; 9:15–16*, 19–20, 27–28, 30–35 + 10:1b–c, 3a–b, 6–15b, 18–21(?); 11:2–5, 7, 10–18, 19b–20; 12:2–3b + 13:5–8, 13–27* + 14:13, 15–17; 15:2–10, 17, 20–28b*, 29, 30b–c, 32–35; 16:2–4, 7–9*, 12–16, 18–19, 21–22 + 17:1–3, 6–7, 13–15; 18:2–3, 4b–21; 19:2–9, 13–24; 20:2–9, 12–15, 18–22, 23b–26*, 27–29; 21:2–15, 17a–b, 18, 27–33b, 34; 22:2–11, 13–16, 19–23, 26–30; 23:2, 4–7, 10, 13, 15, 17 + 27:2–4 + 30:20–23* + 31:35b–37*; 38:2–9, 12–18, 21–22, 24–25, 28–33, 35 + 39:1–2, 5, 7, 9–10, 19–20, 26–27 (maybe the ending missing, cf. 41:26).

³ According to Syring, the original story included 1:1a, 2–3, 13–19, 20a, 21aα; 42:11aα, b, 12b–13.

⁴ According to Syring, it has been a rather significant process.

16:4c–6; 16:9c–11⁵; 27:5–6 and 27:11–12, which always respond to Eliphaz’ speeches and additionally to the first round of friends’ speeches (Nömmik), then again in 32:11–17 (Nömmik, cf. Pilger); later, several **extrapolations underlining Job’s piety** were added in 31:17–21, 24–28, 29–34, 38–40 (Nömmik);

b.) at the same time or at least before some of the extensions mentioned above, **Elihu’s primary speech** was added (cf. Pilger) in its earliest form 32:1, 6–7, 9–10, 18–22 + 33:1–3, 5–14, 16–22 + 36:22–28, 31–33 + 37:6–14⁶; Elihu’s speech declares Job’s suffering to be a pedagogical undertaking and substantiates the claim of the mightiest teacher (God) by describing his marvellous creation acts;

c.) probably at the same time, the extensive wave of editing of Job’s speeches began by adding **extrapolations underlining God’s majesty (Witte, Kaiser) and fear of God** (van Oorschot) (*majesty redaction / fear-of-God redaction*),⁷ in the beginning, likely in 9:2–14 and 12:7–25* (and 13:1–2; cf. 6a and 6b below); emerging out of this wave were more or less also 5:9–10 (depending on 9:10); 22:12; 22:24–25; 23:3, 8–9; 38:10–11; 38:19–20 (depending on 28); 38:23; 38:26–27; 38:34; 38:37–41; 39:3–4, 6, 8; 39:11–12; 39:28–30.

4. The new wave of extrapolations focused on the divine order, which is superior to Job and his friends and which guarantees both the downfall of the wicked and the deliverance of the righteous and the poor; a critical tendency toward the elite emerged provoking, in turn, a need to justify Job as a representative of the elite:

a.) the **righteousness redactions** are connected to other similar redactions in the Hebrew Bible (particularly in the psalms) and mean several larger and smaller additions here and there by many authors during a more extended period of time, both before and after Job’s final speech (see 4b below) was added⁸: in the speeches of the **friends** 5:11–17; 11:8–9(?); 20:10–11; 22:17–18; in the speeches of **Job** 9:23–24(?); 10:3c; 17:8–10(11–12); 21:19–22; 24:1–11*, 21–25* (likely in several steps, cf. also 7c); 27:7–10, 13–23; in the speeches of **God** 38:13b, 14a, 15; 40:7–14; in the **speeches of Elihu**, adding, firstly, 32:11–17 and 36:5–6, 7b–12, 15 (discipline opens the eyes of the poor and needy) and, secondly, increasing the number of speeches instead of one by adding following passages: 33:31–33 + 34:1–6, 10b–15, 29–33*, 36–37* (the second speech comes into being, God is not guilty, Job adds rebellion to his sins) and 36:1–4 (the beginning of the fourth speech); then 35:1–7, 13–15 (the third speech comes into being, rebellious Job has to wait for his judgement), probably together with 37:19, 23–24 (new ending of the speeches); then 34:16–19b, 21–25a, 26–27* (God destroys the influential people impartially); then in unspecified succession 34:7–10a and 34:34–35 and 35:16 (Job is taunting) and 34:28; and later also in **Job’s final speech** 30:1c–8* (cf. 8a below); 31:11–12, 15, 17, 20, 23 (cf. 3a above);

⁵ If the passage is not a product of the righteousness redactor.

⁶ Cf. Pilger 2010: 130–134: **32**:1, 6–10, 18–22; **33**:1–14, 15a, b, 16–25, 29–33; **36**:22–23, 27–33; **37**:6–14.

⁷ According to van Oorschot, the fear-of-God redaction is responsible for the book editing; Elihu is younger.

⁸ The additions partly reflect a fierce opposition of the righteous to the wicked but, on the other hand, do not offer any solution of eternal life (cf. The Epistle of Enoch in Enoch 91–105), which allows to date many of the additions rather to the second half of the 3rd century and surely before 170 (the Epistle is dated before 170 by Collins 1998: 66; Nickelsburg 2005: 114; VanderKam 2022: 123). According to Schunck (1994: 502), the high priest Onias II (according to him, ca 260 – ca 220) was confronted with the polarization of the society and stood on the side of the poor / pious, which also would date the problem of the poor to the second half of the 3rd century.

b.) **Job's final speech** or the **Poem about the innocent suffering of a noble king** 29–31* reacts to the critical social sentiment of the righteousness redactions⁹ and revises the beginning of the original final speech of Job in 23* and 27:2–4 by reusing its single strophes 30:20–23* and 31:35–37* (Witte, Kaiser).

5. The book was decisively revised by the lowliness and transience redactions, which were to some degree connected but the exact relative chronology of which is impossible to evaluate:

a.) the **lowliness redaction** is dated by Witte (1994) and Kaiser (2006) to the beginning of the redaction history of the book but should be dated similarly to van Oorschot (2007; cf. Syring 2004) to the end-phase of the literary history of Job: the extrapolations underlining the fundamental incomparableness with God, the inability of the humans of being righteous and the lowliness, primarily in friends' speeches (4:12–21; 15:11–16; 25) and then in Job's short answers to God (40:3–5; 42:1–6), make the book of Job into what we know – Job acts correctly in terms of attesting to his lowliness; whether the division of the divine speeches into two results from this redaction is unknown¹⁰;

b.) the **transience redactions** usually apply the keyword *'enōš* instead of *'iš* or *'ādām*; among them are complete poems, such as 7:1–10; 7:11–18 and 14:1–2+5–10*; but also, single additions 9:21–22+25–26(?); 10:4–5; 14:18–22; 19:10–12(?) and 21:23–26, perhaps further, in some passages of chapters 23–24 and in 34:19c–20 (Nömmik);

6. Several single poems have been added so that they are difficult to date and to ascribe to any particular editor, even though previously mentioned redactions deliver impulses for such additions:

a.) **Creation myth** 26 is related to the majesty redaction and praises God who helps the weak human;

b.) **Wisdom hymn** 28:1–13*+20–23+25–27 describes the relationship between God and wisdom and is related to the majesty redaction and wisdom texts in Proverbs, which are influenced by Hellenistic thought;

c.) **Poem about horse** 39:21–25* interrupts the depictions of animals arranged initially in pairs of bicola;

d.) most of the second divine speech, the **Poem of Behemoth** 40:15–18+21–24 and the **Poem of Leviathan** 40:25–41:26* convince the reader that the God capable of contesting enormous monsters must be capable of destroying the wicked people (cf. 40:7–14);

e.) **Poem cursing Job's birthday** 3:4–6+9 is a poem of unknown origin taken over to Job 3 (Loretz);

f.) **Poem about the enemies of light** 24:12–16+18+20(?) is related to the righteousness redactions (Nömmik);

⁹ If reminiscences to the Torah piety (in the context of the elite) are true, the final speech might be close to Ben Sira in the beginning of the 2nd century BC; cf. Opel (2010: 275–325) who suggests parallels to Ben Sira but sees the final speech as part of the original poem. Remember that Ben Sira mentions Job.

¹⁰ However, since the beginning of Job's last answer is problematic (quotations from 38:2–3), there might have originally been only one short answer of Job created by the lowliness editor which was then developed into two. The dating depends on the only example of creational sinfulness in a vision context known beside Job, in Enoch 81:5 (Witte 1994: 198, but cf. the broader context in vv. 5b–9); the Astronomical Book of Enoch (72–82) is dated to an earlier time than 200 BCE (VanderKam 2022: 90), however, Nickelsburg (2005: 114) underlines that 81:1–82:3 are redactional but close to earlier material in The Book of Watchers (Enoch 1–36) and the Epistle of Enoch (see footnote 7).

g.) **Poem about the angel saving from the pit** 33:23–30 attests to the faith in angels known from the Hellenistic period;¹¹

h.) **Poems about thunder and clouds** 37:1–5 interrupts the connection between 36:33 and 37:6, and 37:15–18.

8. The latest extrapolations that are difficult to ascribe to any particular editor:

a) **thematic passages** missing in the OGJob and likely in its *Vorlage*, the so-called Masoretic extra-material 28:14–19; 30:2–4?; 31:1–4?; 39:13–18 (ostrich).

b) **commentaries** and **glosses**: 3:16; 3:23; 4:20b; 5:(3)4–5; 5:22; 6:4b; 6:10c; 6:14; 6:27 (cf. 4a above?); 7:20a (Job takes the blame); 7:21a–b (see the latter); 8:6b; 8:9 (cf. 6b above?); 8:15; 9:17–18 (levels up tensions described in 3c above); 9:29 (see 7:20a); 10:1a; 10:15c–17 (related to 31 together with its extrapolations); 10:22; 11:6 (cf. 3c above); 11:19a; 12:3c–6 (text corrupt, grown in several steps); 12:9; 13:3–4 (perhaps in two steps, cf. 3a above); 13:17; 13:27c; 13:28 (comments on the addition in 14:1ff); 14:3; 14:4 (cf. 4a above); 14:11–12 (cf. 6b above); 14:13c; 14:14 (cf. 6b above); 16:17; 16:20; 17:4–5; 17:11–12 (cf. 4a above); 17:16; 18:4a; 19:25–27; 19:28–29 (cf. 3a above); 20:16–17; 20:23a; 20:25bβ; 20:26c; 21:16 (cf. 4a above); 21:17c; 21:33c; 23:11–12 (cf. 3a or 4a above); 23:14; 23:16; 24:17; 24:19; 28:3c; 28:4c; 28:24; 28:28; 29:17–20 (cf. 4a above); 29:25c; 30:3c; 31:7c; 31:18; 31:35a; 32:8; 33:4; 33:15; 34:25b–26α; 34:28 (cf. 4a above); 35:8–12 (unintelligible content); 36:7a; 36:13–14; 36:16–21* (unintelligible content); 36:29–30; 37:20–22; 39:24b; 40:1–2 (something has happened to the text); 40:19–20; 41:9(?); 41:26(?).

NB! The literary history of the book and the hermeneutical process can also be understood as a thought process where ideas emerge from various textual impulses and develop in different directions.

¹¹ The last two additions reflect topics known from apocalyptic literature, surely from the 2nd century.