

and state as a whole, so the theory went). Of many ancient texts discovered, two in particular have rebutted precisely these assertions. Composed in Egypt about 2280-2000BC, "A Dispute Over Suicide" records the dialogue between a man who wishes to die and his soul, which is persuading him that life is better. From Babylon, "The Babylonian Theodicy" (about 1400-1000 BC) chronicles a dialogue between a suffering man and a friend who attempts to answer his questions. Both of these works bear superficial resemblance to Job, but the Egyptian is mostly burdened by the social conditions around him and the conclusions of both books are vastly different from that of Job.

Nevertheless, if these texts have been accurately dated, wisdom literature existed in the ancient Near East long before Solomonic times and exhibited concern for both the individual and the question of an afterlife. Also, fragments of Job written in Paleo-Hebrew script were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and dealt a severe blow to attempts to put Job's authorship as late as 250 BC.

Keys to understanding Job include the study of the Prologue (1-2) and epilogue (42:7-17) -- both necessary for fully understanding the debate. Each of the three friends can be exemplified by a section of their arguments: Eliphaz (5:8-27, and especially 5:28), Bildad (8:2-10) and Zophar (11:11, 13-15). The reply of the Lord to Job is some of the greatest poetry in the world as well as the final key to Job's mysteries.

Here are some study tips: Read through Job once, not trying to grasp the nuances of every word or phrase, but trying to glimpse the flow of thought through the entire book. Read the articles on Hebrew poetry in a Bible commentary or dictionary (Francis I. Andersen's commentary on Job has an excellent introductory section on this). Read through the book a second time--how does the prologue-epilogue framework help in understanding the poetic section? How do the arguments of the three friends differ from that of Job? From each other? From Elihu's? How does the Lord's reply answer Job's questions?

Job in the classics: Willima Blake, a nineteenth century artist/poet, produced a series of illustrations for the book of Job which are masterpieces of his rather distinctive style. Quotations from Job appear in Handel's Messiah. There are also traces of its influence and allusions to it in Dante's Divine Comedy. Goethe's Faustus, and Milton's Paradise Lost. Archibald Mac Leish's play J.B. is a 20th century recasting of Job's immortal themes.

For the further reading, try AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETIC BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT by C. Hassell Bullock (Moody). Although written as a textbook it has helpful introductions and is easily grasped. JOB by Francis I. Andersen, (IVP) is an excellent commentary with an outstanding introduction to the book and the study of Hebrew poetry. "Interpreting the Book of Job" by E. W. Henstenberg in CLASSICAL EVANGELICAL ESSAYS IN OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION, (Baker), is an older essay finding the key to Job in the speeches of Elihu. DOCUMENTS FROM OLD TESTAMENT TIMES (Harper) as edited by D. Winton Thomas, is a useful and interesting collection of ancient Near Eastern documents with introductions relating them to various sections of the Old Testament. Both the "Babylonian Theodicy" and "A Dispute over Suicide" are in this book.

b. There are a number of points we will want to study further as time allow:

--Job's family

--The heavenly confrontation