

Wisdom Literature

BOT252



"Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? ²¹ It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. ²² Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.' ²³ God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells,

NIV Job 28:20-23

Authorship and Date

The Period of the Patriarchs has long been the traditional view. It was written c. 2000 B.C. by an unknown author or Job himself. The evidence for the book's antiquity is supported by the following factors:

1. No *priesthood* or *shrine*
2. His *long life* of *140 years* is matched by the patriarchs
3. The descriptions of his *possessions*, like Abraham and Jacob, are *measured in terms of sheep, oxen, donkeys, and servants*
4. His *lands* were subject to *pillaging raids* of tribesmen

The problem with this view is that no other biblical document that we know was written outside a constituted people of God who would have received the book and thus canonized it. In a traditional understanding of the formation of Scripture, it is difficult to separate the issues of inspiration, canon, and community.

Some scholars have posited arguments for an early date for Job because of its similarity to other wisdom literature of the Ancient Near East.

Parallel literature from Egypt:

- "The Protests of the Eloquent Peasant" (dated to 21st century B.C.).
- "The Admonitions of Ipu-wer."
- "A Dispute over Suicide" (3rd millennium B.C.)

Parallel literature from Mesopotamia:

- "Man and His God (2nd millennium B.C.)
- "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom" (The most famous parallel, also known as "The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," or "The Babylonian Job", 1st millennium B.C.).
- "The Babylonian Ecclesiastes" (Or "A Dialogue about Human Misery" ca. 1000 B.C.).
- An untitled text; only present in fragments (16th century B.C.).

All of these texts deal in some way with the theme of suffering, and have, at certain points, some affinity to Job, whether in subject matter, or in the predisposition of divine involvement.

Others point to the time of the Monarchy as a possible date for Job. Because Job is such an extraordinary example of the wisdom genre, many contend that its composition must have been borne during the period of Israel's history when wisdom literature was at its zenith.

Some of the reasons given are as follows:

1. Solomon's era was a *prosperous* one, filled with *leisure* and *literary* pursuits.
2. The age of Solomon was particularly interested in *wisdom*, especially as they pertained to the discipline of "*higher wisdom*."
3. There are many allusions to *Canaanite* religion, as well as similarities between *Job* and *Ugarit* literature; a time where Israel was flirting with *Baalism* and other forms of idolatry that were rampant before the Exile.
4. The similarity of texts such as *Proverbs 8* and *Job 28*. Hartley in his commentary argues for a *7th century* dating of the book based on the number of affinities that Job has with other Old Testament books.

A note of caution; because a book is set in a particular time period, does not mean that was when the composition was written.

Lastly, some have proposed an exilic/post-exilic date, somewhere between 500 and 450 B.C. There is no internal evidence that points to a late date and there is no other biblical wisdom literature dating from this era.

Some validate their positions by arguing over the following features:

- Similarity to the *Aramaic* language.
- The figure of *Satan*.
- The insistence of a *rational order* for the universe.
- A developed theme of *retribution*.

These arguments are all debatable when scrutinized, which leaves an exilic/post-exilic dating the least likely of the three options.

As far as authorship of the book, the author is anonymous. The names of Moses and Solomon have been presented as possible authors but there is no unanimity of opinion when it comes to the matter of authorship or dating for that matter.

Hartley does though, present us with some insights into the character of the author:

1. He was a *wise man*, committed to the principle of "*the fear of the Lord.*"
2. A keen interest in the *literature* of other nations.
3. An intimate knowledge of *nature*.
4. Interested in human *ingenuity*.
5. Informed about other *nations* and *cultures*.
6. An interest in *antiquity*.
7. The *spiritual realm* as primary to the issues of life.