

**Webb, Barry G.** *Job. Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2023. 469pp. + 20pp. (front matter) + 28pp. (back matter).

Barry Webb is an OT scholar, now retired from Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. He is the author of the commentary on Judges in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament, the author of the Isaiah and Zechariah volumes in The Bible Speaks Today series, and the author of *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther* in the NSBT series.

Webb understands Job to be a historical figure, largely because Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and James 5:10–11, 17–18 treat him as such. While noting strong connections to the patriarchal era in terminology and setting, and while rejecting critical arguments for a late date, Webb suggests that Job is post-Solomonic and possibly postexilic because it interacts with Proverbs and quotes from Psalm 107 (a postexilic psalm).

Webb outlines the book as a broken chiasm (22):

- A Prologue (1:1–5)
- B Two exchanges between God and Satan (1:6–2:10)  
(The arrival of the friends) (2:11–13)
- C Job's opening lament (Chapter 3)
- D Three rounds of speeches between Job and his friends (Chapters 4–27)  
(Author's interlude) (Chapter 28)
- C' Job's closing statement (Chapters 29–31)  
(Elihu's four speeches) (Chapters 32–37)
- B' Two exchanges between God and Job (38:1–42:6)
- A' Epilogue (42:7–17)

Webb finds thematic significance to this structure: “The way the Elihu's speeches break the dominant chiasmic structure reflects the tension in the book as a whole between order and disorder, and the way he has no place to belong mirrors the futility of his attempt to recover the breakdown that has occurred in the preceding three cycles” (23). That said, the overall order of the book points to the order that will prevail in the book because of God.

The central theme of Job is not “the issue of innocent suffering” (27). Webb also denies that Job was written to counter the theology of Proverbs. He takes the book's central question to be: “What is the essence of wisdom for human beings?” (26). The book's answer to that question is: “to fear God and to turn away from evil, not to know all the answers” (26). That said, Webb does believe that the purpose of the book (which he distinguishes from its theme) is “to comfort those who . . . find themselves experiencing suffering for which there is no simple explanation” (77).

As is standard in the Evangelical Biblical Theology series, Webb includes a lengthy treatment of biblical-theological themes in Job. He begins with a substantial treatment of wisdom from Genesis to Revelation before turning to ten other themes in the Book of Job. In the commentary proper each pericope is usually dealt with under the following headings: *Scripture* (which provides the text in the CSB), *Relation to surrounding context*, *Structure*, and *Exegesis*. This last section includes comments on

sections of verses that are usually big-picture explanations of the meaning of the verses, including theological significance. Webb engages with the Hebrew text as well when doing so is significant for the meaning of the passage. For instance, he argues that *שָׂטָן* refers to Satan. He notes that the article is sometimes present with proper names and serves to indicate that the person is characterized by their name. At the end of each exegesis section is a subsection labeled “Bridge.” In this section Webb brings out the theological significance of the passage and makes personal application. For instance, in the bridge section for 1:6–12 Webb contends that God remains sovereign over all but that other actors in creation still bear responsibility for all that they do. He argues that God’s sovereignty should be a comfort to the suffering believer. He also claims that the undeserved sufferings of a man with “perfect integrity” prefigure the sufferings of Christ.

Webb sees a devolution in the friends’ speeches. He finds Eliphaz’s speech in chapters 4–5 to be “impressive in many ways,” noting that Hebrews quotes it (Heb 12:5–6), and yet he observes that Eliphaz misapplies the wisdom he knows to Job and is overly credulous in receiving what he takes to be special revelation. Eliphaz’s second speech against Job is harsh and excessive. It contains no comfort, as his previous speech did. Eliphaz’s speech in the third part of the debate continues his emphasis on the consequences that the wicked can expect. He then exhorts Job to repent so that he can stop suffering. Webb concludes that Eliphaz’s poor theology makes him a poor comforter to Job.

While Webb defends Job against the charge that he cursed God in chapter 3, he does not find Job’s responses to be always correct. For instance, in chapter 21, Job replied to Zophar by denying the principle of retribution and by speaking of the prosperity of the wicked. Job did not deny that the wicked ever suffer, but Webb holds that he grossly overcompensated for his friend’s teaching. Webb proposes that Job lost his temper and was speaking rashly. This, he acknowledges, is at odds with the tradition of the patience of Job, which Webb says originated in a moralizing tendency in the LXX translation of Job and was carried on by the KJV translation of James 5:11. Webb suggests that a better translation of James 5:11 is “endurance” (CSB) or “steadfastness” (ESV).

Webb interprets Job canonically, distinguishing what Job could know at his stage of redemptive history and what Christians today know. In 16:19 Job speaks of a witness in heaven. Webb argues that Job does not identify this witness with either God or Christ because “he *doesn’t know* who his heavenly advocate is” (225). Christians today, however, know that this advocate is Christ. Similarly, Webb argues against the idea that Job conceives of the redeemer referred to in Job 19:26–27 as God. Rather, he identifies the redeemer with the unidentified witness of Job’s previous speech. Webb affirms that the passage teaches the resurrection of Job, but he does not think it says anything about the resurrection of the redeemer. In the context of a wider biblical theology, Webb does identify the redeemer as Jesus.

Webb acknowledges that Elihu is young and sometimes brash (like Joseph in Genesis 37), but he also sees positive elements in Elihu’s speeches. “He was right not to speculate about [the reason Job was suffering] and focus instead on how Job was *responding* to his pain. He was also right to be less bound by a theology of retribution than Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar had been” (327–73). Elihu gets some important things right in his speeches, but he has some misunderstandings as well. Nevertheless, Webb finds Elihu to progress from harshness to greater compassion and concern for Job. His concluding speech also prepares the way for the theophany that follows.

The speeches of God establish for Job how little he knows of the world that God rules. This silenced Job, but it did not lead him to repentance. The second divine speech features Behemoth and Leviathan. Webb suggests Behemoth could refer to “the megafauna that once roamed the earth in the distant past” or to the hippopotamus, but in the end, he concludes the Behemoth is a “symbol of all that is most beastly and beyond human control” (439–40). Webb recognizes in the name and description of Leviathan connections to a mythological beast. He does not, however, wish to acknowledge the existence of mythological beasts or to disconnect these creatures entirely from the natural world. Thus, Leviathan too he takes as symbolic of “all that is most extreme in the animal world” (448).

God’s second speech leads Job to recognize that he had erred in his speech about God and to repent for these errors in speech. Webb emphasizes that Job did not repent for any sin that may have triggered his suffering. God vindicated Job before his friends, and he commissioned Job to intercede for them. Webb sees Job’s intercession as anticipating the intercession of Christ.

The difficulties in interpreting Job run along different lines. There are difficulties in translating the Hebrew text. A commentary like Garrett’s (see previous review) gives detailed attention to the Hebrew text. Webb’s does not. Webb does an excellent job handling significant translation difficulties in brief, non-technical language. His commentary is focused on a different problem in the interpretation of Job, however. It is sometimes difficult to get one’s bearings in a large and theologically complicated book. Before wading into the details found in multi-volume commentaries such as those by Clines or Seow, or even a commentary such as Garrett’s, it is often helpful to consult commentaries that, while based on deeper research, provide a big picture view. The best commentaries that I have found for this purpose are Layton Talbert’s *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* and Christopher Ash’s commentary on Job in the Preaching the Word series. Webb’s commentary may now be added to this list.

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