

I have been arguing that there are different views of the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible. The dominant view is that all people go to Sheol when they die — either they stay in the grave or there is some place that they all gather, a completely uninteresting, dark, dreary place where nothing really happens. Some authors, though, suggest there is no afterlife at all. Ecclesiastes, in one or two places, seems to suggest this, as does the book of Job.

Before looking at the relevant passage in Job, I need to say something about the book as a whole, since it is one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible, in part because most readers don't realize that the book comes from the hands of two different authors, living at different times and places, with very different points of view. Here is how I explain it all in a post I made over four years ago, in the context of a thread dealing with how biblical authors deal with the problem of suffering.

In my previous post I mentioned that the book of Job is almost certainly the work of two different authors, with two different views – of Job, of Job's relation with God, of the reason for Job's sufferings, of Job's reaction to suffering, and just about everything else. I've been asked to give reasons that scholars have (long) thought that this is the case – that there are two different works that have been spliced together. Here I'll lift my introduction to Job from my yet-to-be-published textbook on the Bible, due to come out in the Fall. In my next post or so I'll say a few words at greater length about the views of suffering in the two different parts of Job.

One of the difficulties that most readers have with Job – possibly without realizing that they are having the problem – is that they do not realize that this book is not simply the work of one author with one consistent view of how to explain the problem of suffering, specifically the suffering of the righteous. The book in fact has two separate parts to it, and scholars have long recognized that these two parts almost certainly come from two different authors, writing at two different times. And most important, these two authors had two different views of how to deal with the problem of suffering. When someone later combined their two writings into one larger piece, it created all sorts of havoc for interpreters, since the beginning and ending of Job (both of these are from one author) support a different view of suffering from the middle (which is from the other author).

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