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Book review:
Wolfers, David. *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job, Essays and a New Translation.* Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, and Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995.

# BOOK REVIEWS

David Wolfers. *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job; Essays and a New English Translation.* Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing, 1995. 549 pp.

Job is a penetrating and beautiful, yet extremely obtuse book. Its language is difficult and replete with obscure words, expressions, and wordplays,[1] and its dialogues are preoccupied with internal references and insults with often unclear referents. It is no surprise that for centuries it has resisted cogent and consistent translation and interpretation.

David Wolfers (ז"ל) attempts to remedy this situation by offering a radically different interpretation, one that is based on a rethinking of the philological work of previous scholars, and more significantly, on a reassessment of the overall message of the book. According to Wolfers, Job is "an allegorical figure representing the people of Judah and their King Hezekiah in the time of the Assyrian conquests" (p. 15). The book, therefore, "is the veiled story of national disaster, the rupture of Covenants between the tribal desert God and His Chosen people, and the trial of faith of Israel in exile . . . while the superficial layer, treating of personal disaster, betrayal and temptation, is merely an exceptionally effective and compelling disguise and vehicle" (p. 15). Thus, Wolfers sees the composition of Job as having taken place "during the 8th century BCE culminating in the siege of Jerusalem in 701 (or 700)" (p. 53). His proposed historical context for Job persuades him to conclude that the author's purpose in writing Job was "to re-draw the nature of the relationship between the people of Israel and their God by demonstrating that the Covenants were no longer in operation, that they had become unilaterally abrogated by the Lord, or in the alternative, so transgressed by the people, that they had become inoperative" (p. 15). From here, Wolfers opines that the "entire book of Job is in one sense a thesis on the Messianic idea of God in history" (p. 93) composed by none other than the first Isaiah (pp. 54–59).

While at first blush Wolfers's thesis is both academically refreshing and philologically inviting, a closer look leaves one unconvinced and critical of

1. See, e.g., my *Janus Parallelism and the Book of Job,* JSOT Supp. 223 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Wolfers's highly idiosyncratic treatment of the text and his methodology, as well as his acerbic style.

Wolfers's hypothesis primarily rests upon what he feels to be intertextual references to the books of Deuteronomy (especially chap. 28) and Isaiah (mostly chap. 38). In most cases these parallels appear forced, and upon further scrutiny one finds insufficient linguistic evidence to draw the parallel. Moreover, Wolfers nowhere considers the possibility of popular idioms to account for his proposed similarities, even though in the few cases where similarities do appear striking, this is precisely the explanation the evidence warrants. For example, Wolfers sees the mention of being smitten from "the sole of the foot to the crown of the head" in Job 2:7 as a direct reference to Deut 28:35, where a similar expression appears in conjunction with Yahweh's covenantal curses to the disobedient Israel. He further claims that "Isaiah also 'quotes' from this verse in Deuteronomy," though he does not give us the verse to which he refers (p. 115). Yet, the idiomatic nature of this expression is demonstrated by its appearance in Akkadian texts as well, such as the Poor Man of Nippur (ll. 134, 155). Moreover, M. Weinfeld has demonstrated convincingly that many of the covenantal threats in Deuteronomy are of a type shared in common with other Near Eastern covenants/treaties.[2] Wolfers's argument for intertextuality, therefore, is considerably weakened. Nevertheless, after listing his suggested references to Deuteronomy 28, he asserts that "Job's trials must be interpreted as the fulfillment of the curses in the Covenant between God and Israel. For this to be the case Job must be a figure representative of the people of Israel, and the events of the prologue an allegorical presentation of national events affecting the people" (p. 116). In antiquity covenantal notions were perceived as existing on both national and individual levels.[3] Therefore, while Job's personal life could be seen as a breach of covenant (and clearly this is how Job's friends saw it), it does not follow that we must interpret this breach allegorically on a national level.

This also raises a methodological problem for Wolfers's thesis, namely the dearth of evidence for allegorical interpretations of Job. As Wolfers admits (p. 116), there is no evidence for such an interpretation before the cryptic remarks of the kabbalist Solomon Molcho (1500–1532 CE), and it appears

2. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

3. See, e.g., Saul M. Olyan, "Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 201–218.

that an allegorical reading for Job never dawned on any of the sages before Molcho. Even if we compare the famous allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs (which Wolfers nowhere mentions), we must agree with R. Kimelman that it cannot be traced before 70 CE.[4] Therefore, while we can remain open-minded about the possibility of an allegorical interpretation for Job, we also must admit the paucity of evidence for such a reading.

Moreover, Wolfers often evinces fanciful explanations for his allegorical readings which depend more on inconsistent self-assertion than on linguistic evidence. Job's ten children are the ten northern tribes of Israel, his firstborn child is Samaria in Ephraim, and Job's wife is Benjamin. Later, Wolfers identifies the Behemoth as both Job and Judah, and the Leviathan as the Assyrian king (p. 175). In Job 40 it is the ostrich who represents Job and Judah, while the horse is Assyria, the falcon is Edom, the vulture, the Philistines, the wild ass, the Ishmaelites, and so on for each of the animals named.

Contrived renderings of the text are commonplace. The Land of Uz "is an area in the South (the Negev) of Judah" (p. 88). The reference to the Behemoth's eating of grass in Job 18:3 means that "he chews the cud (and therefore, is not a hippopotamus)" (p. 92). The aleph in the word אבנים (Job 8:17) is treated as prosthetic, and the line is read: "He beholds the House of his descendants" (p. 105). לחמי in Job 6:7 becomes Lahmi, Goliath's polydactylic brother of 1 Chron 20:5![5] Job's illness is no longer a disease of the skin but rather "an allegory of the destruction of the cities of Judah and the siege of Jerusalem" (p. 56). The crux בעבי גבי מגניו in Job 15:27 is translated "with the beams of his tall ones of shields," which makes little sense to me (p. 147). Wolfers takes בול in Job 40:20 as a reference to a specific Canaanite god, but renders generically (and in the plural!) "Gods of the hills sustain him" (pp. 172–173). The crux קנצי in Job 18:2 becomes a dialectical variant for קנזי "Qenezites" (p. 196).[6] And I could go on.

4. Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third-Century Jewish Disputation," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 567–595.

5. Moreover, nowhere in the Bible is Lahmi called a polydactylic! In addition, Wolfers glosses over the conflicting reports as to who killed Goliath (Elhanan in 2 Sam 21:19, but David in 1 Chron 20:5) by labeling the 1 Chronicles account the "authentic version" (p. 141, n. 1). Given the Chronicler's frequent whitewashing of David's career (e.g., he does not mention the affair with Bathsheba), one would expect Wolfers to argue the opposite view.

6. For a thorough treatment of the problems with Wolfers's reading here, see my "Another Look at Job 18:2,3," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 23 (1995): 159–161.

Among the work's most annoying features, however, is Wolfers's nearly incessant egotistical brashness, rivaling that of Elihu, in taking all preceding translators to task for not "getting it right." Wolfers would have us believe that there is a programmatic conspiratorial effort by translators to mistranslate Job: "Translators are usually more resourceful in disguising what they have done. There is an art of mistranslation which has to be learned, and at the risk of being thought flippant, I will add that it is taught in the Bible study departments of Universities" (p. 27).

Equally unpalatable is Wolfers's claim that he knows the tendentious motivations of previous translators. Regarding the various renderings of לאשר הביא אלוה בידו in Job 12:6, for example, he asserts: "All these mistranslations are culpable because all translators have either shied away from, or have dismissed in incredulity, the blasphemy of the true translation" (p. 293). The implication of Wolfers's self-admittedly hostile remarks (pp. 27–28) is that he is free from bias and error. This rhetorical positioning undoubtedly explains his all-too-frequent claim that he is offering the "true translation" or the "correct reading." Indeed, from the onset Wolfers informs us that since he feels previous scholarship on Job to be misguided and built like a tel upon mistakes of the past, he will dispense with a review of the literature, appropriate what he feels are acceptable readings and ideas "without acknowledgement" (p. 22), and provide no bibliography.

Similarly, Wolfers often declares his contempt for scholars who render the same Hebrew word with different English equivalents within the same text (e.g., p. 128), but this is sometimes required to render the well-known literary device of antanaclasis.[7] Moreover, in this book he is guilty of the same thing. He renders the tetragrammaton sometimes as Lord and other times as Yahweh. He translates שאול as "hell" (p. 330), but elsewhere as She'ol (e.g., p. 334). The identical Hebrew expressions in Job 1:7 and 2:2 are translated "trampling around upon it" and "trampling about upon it," respectively (pp. 317–318); and I could cite many others.

In addition, after Wolfers takes such pains to condemn previous scholars for their lack of attention to philological detail (pp. 25–46), one is surprised to find him glossing over many linguistic problems without comment. To cite one example, nowhere does he discuss the anomalous form יגרתי in Job 3:25.

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7. Jack Sasson, "Word Play in the Old Testament," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), pp. 968–970; A. Ceresko, "The Function of Antanaclasis (mṣ' 'to find'// mṣ' 'to reach, overtake, grasp') in Hebrew Poetry, Especially in the Book of Qohelet," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 551–569.

Similarly, Wolfers takes liberties with his translation that he clearly would never have accepted from others. For example, יבעתהו כמרירי יום in 3:5 is rendered "Let those who make Cimmerian the day overwhelm it" (p. 319); he takes נתעו in reference to a lion cub's teeth (Job 4:10) as a spelling variant of נטעו "are planted," implying "erupt" (p. 380); כמים עברו תזכר in Job 11:16 he translates as "Remember it as water under the bridge" (p. 330); and שטח לגוים וינחם in 12:23 he renders as "Spread the nations abroad, and abandoned them" (p. 332); to list but a few.

Another looming methodological problem is Wolfers's frequent application of what he calls "synthetic parallelism" (p. 199) to support his renderings and conclusions. Synthetic parallelism allows him to create parallels from wholly unrelated verses from different books and use them to explain passages in Job. For example, he cites the use of זכרון in Isa 57:8 and גב in Ezek 16:31 in order to explain the parallel between זכרניכם and גב in Job 13:12. Thus, he concludes that זכרון and גב in Job represent "an object of deviant worship, the זכרון a miniature household image, the גב a publicly erected idol or mound or phallic symbol" (p. 199).

All of this is difficult to reconcile with Wolfers's assertion that "there is no theory in my translation" (p. 23), which should have been worded, "I follow no theoretical framework in my translation," for indeed, any reference to or discussion of modern advances in biblical intertextuality is completely lacking. As written, his statement appears to this reviewer as inherently hypocritical, especially in the light of Wolfers's hostile dismissal of every reading and scholarly insight that does not fit neatly into his idiosyncratic understanding of Job. For example, Wolfers discards the reading of Daniel in Ezek 14:14 as the Ugaritic figure because he considers it too "pagan," and therefore "intrinsically unlikely, for acknowledgement of the supreme virtue of a pagan would have run counter to Ezekiel's life purpose" (p. 52). Instead, he insists, the reference is to Daniel the prophet. Nowhere does Wolfers address the problem of dating implied by this remark; namely, how could a sixth-century prophet name a figure whose book dates several centuries later?

Then there are the stylistic and editorial infelicities. Errors in the Hebrew, either in spelling or in word order, appear on pp. 38, 88, 123, 145, 264, 269, 397, 474, and 486. Sections of the text of Job and also the quotations from previous scholars frequently appear without citation throughout, and there are numerous typographical errors which I shall spare the reader.

In all, notwithstanding the provocative suggestion that Job should be read as an allegory (and this perhaps will remain an inviting avenue for

exploration), this tome is little more than a tendentious armchair commentary plagued by circular reasoning and devoid of philological acumen.

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Claudia Setzer. *Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30–150 CE*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, viii, 254 pp.

This book began as a doctoral dissertation under the direction of Raymond E. Brown at Columbia University/Union Theological Seminary. However, in contrast to what we have come to expect from the genre of doctoral dissertation—a detailed and highly specialized treatment of the smallest possible unit of material—this work makes bold to survey multiple texts that span a 120-year time frame. In fact, the author admits that she began by defining her project even more broadly, to "gather all the explicit statements about what Jews and Christians were saying and doing about one another" (p. 7). Recognizing that many others have studied what Christians were saying about Jews, she limited herself to materials that report Jewish reactions to Christians, and attempts to provide the first systematic collection and evaluation of these sources.

As Claudia Setzer carefully explains in her introduction, the very terms "Jews" and "Christians" beg some of the fundamental questions behind this study. Setzer wants to discover "when did Jews begin to see other Jews who believed in Jesus as beyond the pale of the people of Israel, no longer eccentric or deviant Jews, but outsiders? When did Christians begin to see themselves as distinct from other Jews?" (p. 1). Thus, her work is to be situated within the context of discussion in recent scholarship that goes under the nomenclature of "the parting of the ways" or "the process of normative self-definition."

In Part I (over three-quarters of the book in terms of number of pages), Setzer works systematically through the "Materials That Report Jewish Reactions to Christians." In this category, she includes the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters, the Synoptic Gospels, the Book of Acts, the Gospel of John, Revelation, Josephus, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the Gospel of Peter, and selected Christian apologists (Diogenes, Justin Martyr). A final section goes somewhat beyond her rather arbitrary boundary and surveys

"Jewish and Christian Writers after 150 CE." In the much shorter Part II, Setzer isolates what she sees to be major trends in Jewish response under the general heading "Tolerance, Physical Attacks and Verbal Reactions."

For the most part Setzer's final conclusions do not differ radically from what others have observed over the last decade. She makes an interesting suggestion that examples of tolerance may have been much more common than the written evidence leads us to believe; acceptance does not make for literature that survives. She emphasizes that we are dealing with a gradual separation (and thus older theories about *birkat ha-minim* as a decisive break-point are not supported by the texts); that the different reactions do not follow any simple chronological or geographical line; and that the interpretation of Scripture became increasingly the focus of debate. Her "most striking conclusion" is the claim that Jews did not see themselves as separate until the middle of the second century, while Christians made such a claim for themselves and their self-identity considerably earlier.

In some ways, the strengths of this book are also its weakness. Setzer directs us to look at the large picture, the whole panorama, and to think about texts in relationship to one another that have often only been considered in isolation. But in a book of under 200 pages, individual authors and complex passages can only be treated in a relatively superficial manner. In addition, it is not always clear whether Setzer is writing for her academic peers or for a very general audience (as when she attempts to describe the Synoptic problem). Setzer's penchant for further reducing everything to one- or two-page charts, while perhaps helpful to some readers, only heightens the appearance of an enforced simplification, in spite of her repeated protestations about the complexity of the material and what we cannot know. Often it is not clear how she makes her judgments about the historical validity of her sources other than to fall back on a commonplace "it is likely that . . ." approach.

Although the book was published in 1994 and there are occasional bibliographic references up to 1991–92, most of the interaction with other scholars is with works from the middle and late 1980s. And although the title contains the word "History," there is little discussion of how historical events, especially the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 CE and the Christian response (flight to Pella or not?), entered into shaping the Jewish response to early Christians.

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