

[*MJTM* 14 (2012–2013)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

John H. Walton. *Job*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 469 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780310214427.

This commentary conforms to the organization and objectives of the series; it is written for pastors and educators, with three sections for each literary unit: Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance. This commentary succeeds admirably in assisting pastors with the kinds of questions they inevitably face from those people who read *Job*, and in providing illustrative material that can both instruct pastors and provide life examples in helping people deal with pain.

Walton brings to this commentary the strength of his vast knowledge of ancient Near Eastern literature and his unique creativity in bringing clarity to the meaning of texts with associated theological implications. He argues that *Job* is not about suffering; it is about Wisdom, the question of how God runs the world. Reading it as Wisdom literature, it is important for us not to be distracted by historical questions, which do not assist in understanding the book. Rather, it is important to understand Wisdom in its context; this Walton does in a comprehensive and yet comprehensible manner. A chart provides information about literature related to *Job* (p. 32) and an extended discussion shows how *Job* is unique among all of these. This is a most helpful pedagogical tool for understanding the genre of *Job* and therefore its message.

Suffering is the topic around which the questions of Wisdom are debated in the book of *Job*. Suffering is the means through which our own understanding of God and his governance of the universe can be clarified. Invariably these are the issues all sufferers must come to terms with. Walton assists in that respect by developing an extensive dialogue with a former student named

Kelly, who suffered from a permanent disability and continuous excruciating pain as the result of a very severe car accident when she was a young girl. The accident was tragic for the whole family, but in her case tens of thousands of dollars on speculative surgeries only increased the pain and left her with enormous debts. Walton begins to develop this story in the first chapters of *Job*, which introduce the reader to the impact of the book of *Job* and its questions in a very contemporary manner. Kelly shares her pilgrimage in each Contemporary Significance section; the commentary concludes with the end of the dialogue in which Kelly explains how studying *Job* changed her life and faith. Her struggle and triumph will bring every reader to a fresh appreciation of the book of *Job* and of their own faith.

Walton also develops correctly some very key texts that are often misunderstood, usually because translations and notes themselves are misleading. A stellar example of this regards his discussion of the Challenger, his translation of the adversarial individual in God's court who is skeptical of *Job*'s righteousness. The ESV, for example, translates this as "Satan," and the accompanying note, in a most disingenuous linguistic association, provides as explanation links to Genesis 3, 1 Chr 21:1, and Rev 12:19. Walton discusses in a non-technical manner the theological issues concerned and then explains in detail the linguistic issues with this term and other related biblical passages that have come to be falsely associated with the devil. There is not a better resource than this to help pastors deal with the many wrong ideas that have been brought to these texts because they have been identified with the devil in translation or other interpretation.

A second example of a most helpful exegetical clarity concerns the confession of *Job* in 42:6 that is also frequently and completely misconstrued. Here the ESV says "I despise myself and am comforted," suggesting that this meaning relates to *Job*'s quest for comfort. Comfort, however, is virtually the converse of *Job*'s concern; *Job*'s question is God's justice (40:8–14), which he has presumed is something he can understand and should be entitled to. *Job*'s confession is exactly what Walton says: "*Job* does not suggest behavior change but rather wishes to retract his previous statements" (p. 432). Walton has a lucid discussion of

the Hebrew verb concerned (*nĥm*), which is frequently used in the sense of regret. The context here is all about Job's regret for the things he has said. This confession is not about Job being comforted, but about coming to a whole new level of trust in God.

Those who know Walton expect to see charts. These are a most helpful technique for putting information into perspective. The dialogue in Job is repetitive and often seems to make little progress. The chart on p. 271 traces a way of following Job's aggressive attack on God, showing how Job makes the mistake of inferring the nature of God from his experiences. It is a most helpful guide in following the content of the cycles. Another chart (p. 403) helpfully provides a list of the animals in the first speech of God and the distinct links among the characteristics drawn from each one. A technical appendix explains Walton's translation of several difficult texts. One of these is the Challenger "enticing" God in Job 2:3. Two charts outline the biblical occurrences of this verb, its syntactical relationships (pp. 449–50), and the significance it has in relation to God and the Challenger. Another unique feature of the commentary is dialogues that are created by Walton to help put theological questions into perspective. A conversation between Job and Qoheleth (the preacher of Ecclesiastes) is used to address the error of seeing immediate retribution as justice. Rhetorical development between Job and the friends is also outlined in dialogue fashion.

Given the length of Job and the many challenges in understanding it, this is a concise commentary on questions of text and exegesis, which are unusually abundant in Job. At the same time it makes original contributions to various critical interpretive issues that are comprehensible to readers who are entirely reliant on translation. It is also a stimulating resource for those that have a particular need to relate the book of Job to contemporary questions, whether linguistic, theological, or existential.

August H. Konkel  
McMaster Divinity College