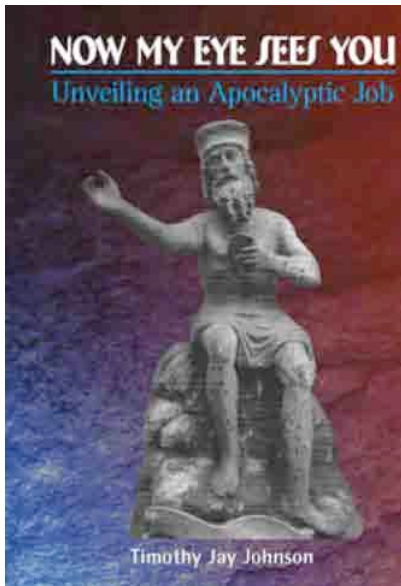


RBL 06/2012



**Johnson, Timothy Jay**

*Now My Eye Sees You: Unveiling an Apocalyptic Job*

Hebrew Bible Monographs 24

Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009. Pp. x + 198.

Hardcover. \$85.00. ISBN 9781906055738.

Michael S. Moore  
Arizona State University  
Scottsdale, Arizona

Much like Brevard Childs's iconoclastic *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), this high-priced Marquette dissertation attempts to offer a similarly iconoclastic introduction to the book of Job. Where Childs champions a "canonical" approach to biblical interpretation generally in order to review several thorny, centuries-old problems through an idiosyncratic lens of his own making (an approach many find to be uncomfortably heuristic), Johnson similarly champions a unidimensional, heuristic approach to the book of Job. Working through the pros and cons of several well-known approaches—sapiential, comedic, tragic, lamentational, *rechtslebenlich*, poeticized folktale, parodic, polyphonic, redactional, pluralistic, *sui generis*—the opening *forschungsgeschichtliche* chapter emphasizes the flaws of each in order to clear the ground for yet another one.

None of this is new, of course. Most dissertations follow this kind of methodological format. It is just that when one begins to weigh the proposals laid down in subsequent chapters, one begins to wonder whether the flaws embedded here are any better than the flaws flagged in previous analyses. In a nutshell, what this dissertation proposes is that most, if not all, attempts to interpret the book of Job are myopically imbalanced, largely because they fail to explain the form and function of the wisdom poem in Job 28 as well

as the Elihu speeches in Job 32–37. This insight is not new, of course, yet, following Katharine Dell’s suggestion that Eliphaz’s vision (Job 4:12–21) resembles an “apocalyptic revelation” (*The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* [BZAW 197; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991], 104), the present volume seizes on this suggestion to argue that three Joban texts—Eliphaz’s vision in Job 4, the wisdom poem in Job 28, and the whirlwind speeches in Job 38–42—are all (proto)apocalyptic “revelations.” To “prove” this hypothesis, it then attempts to move this Hebrew masterpiece onto a Procrustean grid constructed by the SBL Study Group on Apocalyptic, a 1970s taskforce originally commissioned to categorize and define the structure and contents of universally recognized apocalyptic texts such as Daniel, Enoch, and the Sibylline Oracles.

The results are tantalizing, if not convincing. Laid upon such a grid, Job *does* seem to radiate several (proto)apocalyptic features. The long-pondered question regarding the identity of the “umpire/witness/redeemer” in Job 9:33, 16:19, and 19:25, for example, resolves itself as soon as one presumes him/her/it to be an otherworldly mediator of the sort itemized on the aforementioned “master paradigm.” The roles enacted by the “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1), the “spirit” (4:15), and “the satan” (1:6–12; 2:1–7) also become clearer once the decision is made to reassign them to the “master paradigm’s” miscellaneous category of “otherworldly elements.” Further, should Job be “legitimately construed as a nascent form of apocalypse” (158), then the most important theme of the book (singular), like the Testament of Job and LXX Job, might well be *perseverance* (159–60).

Yet the whole of this thesis, for the following reasons, does not equal the sum of its parts. First, the constant assertion throughout the volume that the wisdom poem in Job 28 is an apocalyptic “revelation” (however “nascent” or “undeveloped”) is just that—an assertion. Never is this assertion “proven,” no matter how earnestly the author attempts to anchor it next to Stephen Geller’s off-the-cuff remark regarding Job 28’s “revelatory” possibilities (“Where Is Wisdom? A Literary Study of Job 28 in Its Settings,” in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* [ed. J. Neusner et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 48). The same might be said for its repeated attempts to apocalypticize the vision of Eliphaz (Job 4:12–21), attempts that remind me of several twentieth-century attempts to apocalypticize the Balaam oracles in line with those Second Temple tradents who manipulate it as such (e.g., b. Sanh. 106b; Rev 2:14; contemporary references cited in M. S. Moore, “Jesus Christ: Superstar [Rev. 22.16b],” *NovT* 24 [1982]: 82–91).

Second, too much important critical research on Job 28 has to be overlooked in order to make this hypothesis attractive. Susan Niditch, for example, following Claus Westermann’s suggestion that the poem in Job 28 be read as a *Rätselwort* (*Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1956], 130), proposes that the material in Job 27, 29, and

30—the immediate literary context enveloping the chapter 28 wisdom poem—is designed to preserve an encoded set of “imaginative illustrations.” For Niditch, this is why chapters 27 and 29 so deliberately begin with Job “taking up his *māšal*” (*Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 85). David Clines basically agrees with this line of reasoning, arguing that Job 28 is best read as “instruction which takes the form of *extended riddle*” (*Job 21–37* [WBC 18A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006], 906, emphasis original). More recently Scott Jones argues, in his Princeton dissertation, that Job 28 is a “metaphorical pastiche which draws upon and alters various kinds of material found throughout the ancient Near East: the royal expedition of the ‘first discoverer’ (vv. 1–11), the royal survey of a temple site (vv. 23–27), and, in its canonical version, the merchant’s account (vv. 15–19) ... all stretched across a proverbial frame (vv. 1a, 12a, 28aβ)” (*Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry* [New York: de Gruyter, 2009], 237). Thus, should the Westermann-Niditch-Clines-Jones “riddle” trajectory be taken seriously, the “apocalyptic revelation” hypothesis begins to lose much of its momentum.

Third, where scholars like Jones dedicate serious attention to the “great literature” in Job’s literary-historical context, Johnson focuses entirely too much attention on (1) hypothetical, abstract questions about genre and (2) the foreground of the book as preserved in selected Judeo-Christian texts. While attention to the latter helps readers understand how later tradents might have manipulated the Joban tradition before later audiences, foreground does not equal background. Put bluntly, where scholars like Jones and Marvin Pope (*Job: A New Translation and Commentary* [AB 15; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965]) do the tedious linguistic work necessary for conducting serious intertextual analysis, the present dissertation does not. In fact, the only reference I could find to one of the most important comparative witnesses to Job is diacritically misspelled in the briefest of mentions (*Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* [sic], 24 n. 49).

The good news, of course, is that even though many find Childs’s “canonical” approach uncomfortable, his *tour de force* introduction stimulates a great deal of conversation about the Bible—important conversation that might not otherwise occur. Similarly, one hopes that the concisely written volume under review will have the same effect on contemporary conversation about the book of Job, even among those who reject its primary thesis.