

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 218

Authorship and Date of the Book of Job

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Episode Summary

Many Christians believe the book of Job is the earliest book of the Bible, written sometime before Moses in the patriarchal era. Few Old Testament scholars assign any merit to this idea. Why the disagreement? Is there any basis for thinking Job is earlier than the time of Moses? Is there any way to know when Job was written and who might have written it? Does any point of biblical history or theology depend on the answer? We discuss all these issues in this episode of the podcast.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible podcast, episode 218: Authorship and Date of the Book of Job. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Pretty good, pretty good. Finally sort of normal. I feel normal—sleeping schedule, routine. It's wonderful.

TS: It took me that whole week coming back, but I'm back in the groove and, unfortunately, back at the day job, which is fun.

MH: [laughs] Communal lament. Yeah, but it's just good to be back in routine. Like I've said many times, I thrive in routine. I love it. So I'm glad. I'm happy.

TS: Yeah, and I'm happy about the Naked Bible Conference. We're almost halfway sold out. So again, I would recommend not to wait to get registered for that conference because it's selling quickly. So that's awesome.

TS: Yeah, it's going to be really exciting to meet everybody there.

MH: Yeah. That is the downside... you sell it quick, and that means it sells out quick. So yeah, you're right. You don't want to wait. And then also, Mike, we're going to be voting on the new book of the Bible that we're going to cover, probably sometime in this month. So in the next two or three weeks be looking for that.

MH: Another Bible book popularity contest! [laughs]

TS: Who would have thought?

MH: Yeah, really. It's just too bad. We did Obadiah already so we can't put that out there. [laughs] We'll find something else just as obscure.

TS: Yeah, there you go. Well, for this week, it looks like we're going to be covering the book of Job.

MH: Yeah, the authorship and date of the book of Job. Of course, we just got done talking about the authorship and date of the book of Isaiah. So this is one of the same kind. Now, I have to admit I'm a little more sympathetic with the question regarding Isaiah because there seems to be something at stake there, even though I think it's a misconception—about predictive prophecy being up in the air. If you listened to our discussion about the authorship and date of Isaiah, they said even if you have multiple hands and post-chapter-40 is written later, that doesn't eliminate predictive prophecy at all. Because you've got Isaiah 53 and you've got other things like in Isaiah 66 that are certainly not fulfilled in the time of these other hands doing their work. So there seems to be something at stake there.

But again, I think it's a misconception about multiple authorship when it comes to Isaiah. We covered that last time. In this case, I've got to be honest with you: I don't see anything at stake with the debate over the authorship and date of the book of Job. But since I get asked about it enough, here we are. We're going to do a topic on it. And I have some other reasons, too, that I thought this is worthwhile, but we'll get into why in a moment.

5:00 Now to jump in here, it's no surprise that various dates for the book of Job and proposals of authorship have been offered by scholars—evangelical scholars or non-evangelical scholars. There are a number of possibilities. I will say that that is a debate that happens away from the world of apologetics—the world of the apologist. This might sound a bit harsh, and maybe it is, but it's also true. It's very unusual to find in the world of Christian apologetics anybody actually discussing the problems with a presumed early date for the book of Job. All you ever seem to hear from apologetics folks is stuff like, “Oh, the book of Job is the earliest book in the Bible.” Well, everybody says that, but nobody examines it in the world of the apologetics researcher. If you're a text person—if you're an Old Testament scholar—nobody's even thinking about that because those are the people who are aware of the reasons why, “No, it's just really not possible that Job is the earliest book of the Bible.” And so that's kind of what we're going to talk about in this episode—why that just doesn't work and, I think even more importantly, why it doesn't matter. There's just nothing that really hangs on this in terms of historicity or in terms of some point of doctrine. There's nothing at stake here. But what you do see happen is you have apologetics types operate on this

assumption and then they extrapolate from it into certain arguments they make for various things and it really makes their position vulnerable. And so since I'm concerned about that and I don't want Christian apologetics arguments to be vulnerable, I figured hey, we should say something here. So we're going into it.

I'm gonna start with a sample before we get into the nuts and bolts. And this is from Hartley's commentary on Job. It's part of the *New International Commentary of the Old Testament* series, just to give you a bit of a smattering here about the date and the authorship issue. And again, those two things are linked. So Hartley writes:

The dates proposed by contemporary scholars fall into three periods: early 7th century B.C., during Hezekiah's time (e.g., Andersen); mid-6th century B.C., after the fall of Jerusalem (e.g., Terrien, Guillaume); and the 4th-3rd century B.C., the era of the second temple (e.g., Dhorme, Fohrer, Gordis) [that would be the Intertestamental or Second Temple Period]. The evidence cited for the last date includes the following: the order in the list of officials, kings, counselors, and princes in 3:14-15 corresponds to the hierarchy of the Persian empire (cf. Ezra 7:28; 8:25; Esth. 1:3); Job's request that his words be inscribed in stone outlined with lead (19:23-24) may allude to Darius's world-famous Behistun inscription (ca. 520 B.C.)...

Now, let me stop there. Right away you have two fairly clear features of the book that have pretty direct correspondences to material that is demonstrably unquestionably late.

A sixth-century date has two points in its favor. The Babylonian captivity, a trauma for Judah, certainly could have provided the milieu for this work on suffering. This position is strengthened by the close affinity between Job and Isa. 40-55, which many scholars believe was written ca. 550 B.C. In addition, the few points of contact between Job and Jeremiah [demonstrably **right there on the cusp of the Exile**], particularly Job 3:3-13 with Jer. 20:14-18 may support a sixth-century date.

So what Hartley is saying is there are close textual affinities between these parts of Job and material that is certainly late, and even if you don't take multiple authorship of Isaiah, this would be 8th Century BC. That is not before Moses; that is not in the patriarchal era. So these things (regardless of your view of authorship of Isaiah, and you have to recognize Jeremiah's lateness) point to Job in terms of lateness, not in terms of being early. But the apologetics guys never get to this kind of stuff. There's a whole lot more, trust me. We're going to spend the episode on it. Back to Hartley:

While this book, if extant at the time of the Exile, would have been a source of inspiration to those who were suffering under Babylonian lordship, it is highly unlikely that it was composed to address the issue of suffering under foreign captivity, for it looks at the suffering of an innocent person while the Exile is interpreted as the nation's punishment for the gross iniquities of the preceding generation (e.g., 2 K. 22:15–17)...

So Hartley is saying, "Well, here's how it could be connected with the Exile." But Hartley's telling you that he kind of doubts this because Job is an innocent person, whereas the exiles are anything but innocent. Back to Hartley:

10:00

Another point against an exilic date is the unlikelihood of an author's associating either the hero or his closest companions with Edom, because after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, Edom apparently took over some Judean cities, thereby stirring up in Judah a deep national hatred of Edom (cf. Ezek. 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Ps. 137:7)...

Now, we actually talked about this a lot in our series on Obadiah because Obadiah has a lot to do with Edom. And so Hartley is saying, "Look, it wouldn't make a whole lot of sense to have Job (because he is an Edomite—he's connected with this part of the world) as the hero of the story to be identified with Edom after the Exile because Edomites were hated. Edom was hated." So he's going to move it back and say that 6th Century, maybe 7th Century BC, right before the Exile, makes a little more sense to him. So he's kind of giving you the lay of the land here and interacting with it. Back to Hartley:

An early seventh-century date has more support than these later dates. The many allusions to Canaanite religion and the numerous contacts between the book of Job and the texts found at Ugarit are more easily accounted for in a book written when Israel was flirting with Baalism, i.e., before the Exile...

We're going to say a lot more about that when we interact with Francis Andersen's commentary in a moment.

Finally, the heavenly council scenes in the prologue [Job 1 and 2] are more similar to the ninth-century vision of Micaiah (1 K. 22:19–23) than to the one found in Zech. 3 from the late 6th century B.C.

So that sort of just gives you a little glimpse into the kinds of things that scholars have noticed that are in Job and in other parts of the Old Testament. They're looking for intertextuality. They're looking for cross-fertilization of ideas. They're looking for similarities and themes to help them with the date of the book of Job, because Job itself doesn't give you a date. It doesn't give you an authorship. So this is how scholars approach it. They're looking for things... This is what text

people do. They're looking for intertextuality connections between the book of Job and other parts of the Hebrew Bible and things that have somewhat secure historical possibilities. In the apologetics communities, it's just like, "Oh Job's offering sacrifices. That must mean this is written during the patriarchal period." That kind of thinking is extraordinarily simplistic. Again, I wanted to do this episode because it's important not to think simplistically, especially if you are in apologetics, because your arguments need to be just better informed to have weight—to just sort of stand the test of time, as it were, or to hold up under scrutiny. And so that was one of the reasons why I figured it was important to do this topic.

Now I'm going look at Francis Andersen's commentary here. This is in the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* series, and I'm going to quote from him. This is an extended quote. And again, this is also before we get into the nuts and bolts, just to prep you for the kind of things we need to think about in this episode. So Andersen writes in his introductory section:

We do not know who wrote the book of Job or when he lived. Nor do we know where. If several persons were involved, we still know nothing about them. Unless the author was a professional Wisdom teacher, we have no idea of his place in society. And even then, as a member of the intelligentsia, we cannot discover any institutional setting for the composition of such a work, whether the royal court, a shrine whose officers could read and had books, or, later, the synagogue.

A wide range of dates has been proposed, extending from the time of Moses to the Hellenistic period. The preceding discussion has already indicated how vexed this question can become.

Again, this is part of his introductory section.

The options would be narrowed if we could place the language of the book in its right period in the historical development of Hebrew. On the one hand, its abundant archaisms and numerous parallels with old Canaanite literature suggest that it is early, with the age of Solomon as a real, but perhaps the earliest, possibility. But, if such features are explained as a later injection through Phoenician contacts [we'll be saying more about all that], then the alleged Aramaisms can be marshalled to support a late, even a post-exilic, date. Freedman's study of orthography has now, however, in our opinion, made any date later than the seventh century hard to uphold.

15:00

Another way of tackling the date of Job is to work out where its ideas fit into the historical development of Hebrew thought. Here it is hard to find our bearings without a lot of *a priori* assumptions. Job does not refer to any historical events, not even those that were always in the mind of an Israelite—the call of Abram,

the Exodus, the Conquest, the Exile. The awareness of living in covenant with the Lord who had guided his people through all this long history is focused so intensely in the experience of one man that all the historical background becomes a shadow. Nor does Job refer to any of the familiar institutions of Israel—the monarchy, the temple, the prophets. It is quite astonishing how detached from all these matters the book is. It has been supposed that, just as Job and his friends are not Israelites, so all this national background has been deliberately suppressed by the author so as to give his work a neutral or more universal setting in the Gentile world. But his characters are not pagans, and it could be argued with equal cogency that the author has simulated the pre-Mosaic world of the patriarchs, and has succeeded in concealing his own day and age by avoiding detectable anachronisms.

Since the search for clues in concrete historical events or identifiable institutions fails, we are left with the more abstract theological ideas of the book—its concepts of God, of sin, of ethics, etc. It has been inferred from the allegedly ‘advanced’ stage of its thought that the book is late. In particular, it has been claimed that the specific way in which the book grapples with the problem of suffering... was only possible after Israelite thinkers had to cope with a monumental national calamity of the scope of the Exile. Hence the book was written during or after that period.

But we have already observed that there is nothing explicit in the book to link the sufferings of Job with those of Israel as a nation. There is no hint of allegory. The questions raised in Job did not enter people’s heads first with the collapse of the Judean state. As we have seen ... even outside Israel sensitive and reflective souls had been searching for an explanation of human misery from the dawn of literature, and the plight of the righteous, destitute person is an ancient and persistent theme in Israel’s historical writings.

So again, all of these things from both Hartley and Andersen, these are things to think about. If you're still asking yourself, “Why an episode on this topic, then? If all of this is so inconclusive, why an episode on the topic?” Well, because I've been asked about it, and I've got to be honest with you: it's irritating to hear people (especially, again, people in apologetics) draw conclusions about theology, about science, and about Israelite religion in light of the assumption that Job is the earliest book of the Bible. That can in no way be verified. So I guess the message from me to those listening who might be in the apologetics world is: “Just stopped doing this. Just knock it off. Don't make arguments based on your assumptions about the date of Job. You don't need them. You just don't need them.

What I want to do for the rest of the episode is just take the early data arguments one by one and then show how tenuous (and therefore weak) the “oldest book in

the Bible” idea for Job really is. I'm going to be reading a lot from Andersen's commentary—his introductory section—and I'm doing it for one reason. And that is to show that all of this material is just a commentary away, and frankly, that the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* set is an old one. It's a standard set in evangelical circles. I mean, it was around when I was in high school, and all of this is just a commentary away. So let's just use resources instead of making unsubstantiated claims about a book. Let's just do a little reading, okay? It's not hard.

20:00

You know, for all the good apologetics ministries do (and they do a lot of good), when they make careless assertions about the biblical text, then those ministries become vulnerable at those points. And I don't want apologetics ministries to be vulnerable. They need to stop pretending that they're doing biblical scholarship if they aren't doing the sort of research that I would expect an undergraduate to do in this matter. Again, I'm being a little blunt here because I care about ministries that focus on apologetics. I think you all know that I've had people on the podcast that play this role in the church. It's an important role. So let's not be careless and leave ourselves open to criticism and vulnerable to having something we say easily overturned. That's just not good. It's not good, again, for what we're trying to accomplish here. So let's take them one by one. All of this is a commentary away, which is why I'm going to use Andersen a lot.

So the first argument that Job is the oldest book of the Bible is that it bears the marks of the patriarchal era, which would be before Moses. So early dates are presupposed. Now this kind of pre-Mosaic thing... This earliest date idea is presupposed because Job ignores major events in Israel's history, like the Exodus. It doesn't say anything about that, doesn't say anything about giving him the law, doesn't say anything about the law itself, doesn't say anything about the Sabbath or circumcision any of that stuff. And he also offers sacrifices like the patriarchs did. And if you drill down a little bit more in the book, like if you maybe used an interlinear or something like that, you'd find out that there are a lot of archaic names for God in Job. These are *EI* names as opposed to the divine name—Yahweh. So people look at this and say, “Yeah, this is the earliest book in the Bible. Look at this stuff.” Well, the logic is just not sound. Biblical persons in the era before there was a temple offered sacrifice legitimately: Gideon (Judges 6), Samson's dad, Manoah (Judges 13), and the “people of Israel” do it (Judges 20, Judges 21).

So the fact that you have people offering sacrifice doesn't give you a date at all. I mean, people conveniently forget that. Look at the logic from another perspective: Job doesn't mention the temple so is Job post-Exilic? “He should be talking about the temple if the temple existed, so Job must be post-...” This kind of logic based upon what *isn't* in the text is not sound. This is not a good way to approach the issue.

The name of Yahweh—the divine name, not the archaic *EI* names... Guess what? The name of Yahweh does appear in the book 32 times. So the names are not an indicator of the date. Esther doesn't use the divine name or mention the law or circumcision or the Sabbath. Does that mean Esther is the oldest book in the Bible? People would say, “Well, of course the absence of those things in Esther is expected. They're in exile. There's no temple.” Of course, that's my point. People are going to use those absences and they're going to look at Esther and they're gonna say, “Well, why can't Job have been written in the same period, just with the more ancient setting created for the sake of the story? These are all very late features. So it's just as easy, if you're arguing on the basis of absence, to put the books somewhere else. Again, this reasoning is not sound.

Even more than that, think about the point of analogy in the early date assumption: “In the patriarchal era they're offering sacrifices. It doesn't talk about this stuff. It must be the patriarchal era, must be before Moses.” So here's the first question: hey, the patriarchal stories... when were they written? Were they written before Moses? Well, of course not; they are in Genesis. They're part of the Torah. They're part of the Law of Moses. So why would other material that bears some similarities to the patriarchal era have to be written before Moses when the patriarchal stories themselves can't possibly have been written before Moses? If you take Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, they're written by Moses. They're not written before Moses. Here's the real problem: this assumption confuses the time of composition with the setting given in the story. Those are two different things. The same assumption would mean, again, that anything in the Law of Moses prior to law-giving was pre-Mosaic, but that's absurd because it's all coming from the law of Moses, which if you believe it was written by Moses, it obviously can't possibly have been written before he wrote it. You get the logical disconnect here. So in this whole approach there's a transparent illogic: trying to argue something on the basis of what isn't in the text. That's item number one.

25:00 Another way that that people try to support the “oldest book in the Bible” idea... Number two would be, “Well there are similarities with ancient Near Eastern literature, and we know a lot of that ancient Near Eastern stuff was earlier than Moses. So if we can find some similarities there, that must mean that Job is written before Moses in the patriarchal era. Again, the reasoning is not sound. I'm going to quote Andersen here—use him as a point of jumping into this one. He writes:

Many similarities have been observed between Job and other writings from the ancient world, particularly the Wisdom literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt. These other works supply valuable background and help to interpret many parts of Job. They also raise the question of how much of such literature the author of Job actually knew, and perhaps used as a source of his ideas or even of quotations...

The suggestion that an Akkadian work entitled *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi* could be called 'The Babylonian Job' was first made in 1906.

This particular Akkadian work is also known as the "Poem of the Righteous Sufferer" or "The Babylonian Job." You'll actually see it referred to title-wise in those ways. Back to Andersen:

Evidence for the text has gradually accumulated.

That's important because back in 1906, this Akkadian work was known only in part, but other parts of it are now known today. There's more of it available.

The work is actually a hymn of thanksgiving to Marduk for recovery from an illness. Form-criticism of prayers of lamentation and songs of gratitude has shown a close affinity between such compositions, in spite of their totally opposite moods of grief and jubilation. For in each the sufferer recounts his plight, in the first to arouse the pity of the gods, in the second in thankful reminiscence. Each tells the story of the poet's sufferings, although from a different point in time. The so-called 'Babylonian Job' belongs to this genre, and here the resemblance to the biblical work ends... while a story lies behind the Mesopotamian poem, it is only a monologue and lacks the elaborate dramatic form of Job. Furthermore, Babylonian polytheism could never approach the questions raised by Job.

Some would say, "Well, maybe whoever wrote Job adapted this older story for monotheism." Well, sure, there's probably some of that going on, but that doesn't produce a date. In other words, somebody living after the Exile could get ahold of this story and write the book *then* for the same purpose—the same theological purpose. Similarity and repurposing content or polemic does not give you a date unless the thing that is clearly used has its own secure period—its unsecured time before which it didn't exist. Then you can talk about something. But there are so many other features that point to lateness in Job that it just doesn't work.

Now I went and looked, and this is something you can't get out of a normal commentary (so we're getting away from Andersen here)... There's another book. The author's last name is Oshima, and it's called the *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul Bel Nemeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy*. It was written in 2014 and the author, speaking specifically of this Akkadian text writes this:

As Lambert had already noted in 1960 [Lambert is a very famous Akkadian literary scholar], long as the knowledge on this Babylonian poem was restricted to the second tablet [there are 4 tablets to the poem], such modern interpretations expressed in titles like "The Babylonian Job" or "The Righteous Sufferer" might have been justified. However, as more portions of the text have been recovered,

it has become quite evident that, on the whole, the basic schemes of the book of Job and *Ludlul bel Nemeqi* are quite different.

30:00

That's page 4 of Oshima's book specifically on these texts. Now you say, "Well, okay, maybe that one's not a good candidate." There's an older parallel from Sumeria. People have tried to argue that Job was the earliest book because of these touch points with these earlier texts. Andersen (back to him again) comments on this one.

An even older work for Mesopotamia is a Sumerian poem which attains more narrative development.

So I'll break in here again. Part of the problem with the first text was that it wasn't a story. It was just sort of a lament, and Job has more story—more narrative—elements here. So back to Andersen. Andersen says there's this work from Mesopotamia that looks a little bit more like Job in terms of narrative inclusion.

An even older work from Mesopotamia is a Sumerian poem which attains more narrative development. Samuel Noah Kramer has called it 'the first "Job"'. It is, however, not a story or a dialogue, but an edifying tract intended to encourage a person in affliction to keep on glorifying his personal god (a minor deity), and by bitter wailing, whose volume should be increased by the assistance of his friends and the hiring of professionals, to move the god to pity. The point is made by citing a specific case, and here there is some resemblance to Job's experience, including the happy ending. There are also similar expressions of misery, but these are quite conventional. While the Sumerian poem shares with Job a tragic sense of the burden of sin, the justice of the gods is never questioned. It is not even assumed. All a man can do is weep. The simplistic advice of the Sumerian sage is just like the discreditable theology of Job's friends. While there can be no question of direct influence from a work more than a thousand years older than Job, the Sumerian poem shows how ancient is the theory that guilty man's only hope is to move God to compassion.

And Anderson says elsewhere:

So far as the *form* of Job is concerned, its prominent dialogue invites comparison with the extensive 'contest' literature of the ancient Near East. This gives a clue as to how the debate works. It does not proceed, by closely woven dialectic, to confute an opponent by irresistible logic; it is intended rather to impress an audience by brilliant rhetoric. A well-known example...

I'm gonna break in here. All the examples he gives are *late*.

A well-known example is the insertion into 1 Esdras of the elocution contest between three courtiers of King Darius (1 Esdras 3–4). Another is the submission to Absalom of the contradictory advice of Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Samuel 17). These situations make clearer the role of Elihu, and later of Yahweh, as adjudicator in the debate between Job and his three friends.

I'm going to stop there. What he's getting at here is Job has lots of dialogues. These other Akkadian and Sumerian texts don't have dialogues. So there's similarity between them when it comes to the problem of suffering, and your only hope is that the gods relent or God relents or something like that. But you notice, even if you go back to Job and you compare to that other Sumerian work, it's not about suffering extending from sin, because Job is blameless. So even that's a disconnect. So you've got conceptual disconnects. You've got content disconnects. You've got structural disconnects (dialogue is a big example of that), and then the lack of narrative in the other one. So again, proponents of the old view will say, "Well, Job is using some of these texts or interacting with them." What Andersen is saying is, "Look, the problem with suffering goes back to the beginning of humanity—the beginning of literature. You don't need a specific parallel to have a person write about suffering and appealing to a higher being or higher power for help. That's all over the place for the beginning of literature."

So number one, you don't need a specific polemic to be in view here. And if you're going to make one of these texts the candidate that the biblical writer is responding to and interacting with... He's just missing a lot of material and structurally the texts are just not the same. They're really not even close. The only thing that makes them close or even candidates is the concept of suffering and the appeal to God or the gods to make it right, but that's ubiquitous. That's just all over the place. So we've got a problem here with specifically connecting Job to any specific text in the ancient Near East. Andersen concludes with this observation. He says:

The literature of the ancient Near East has not yielded another 'Job'. There is a considerable list of writings from this region, and a few from further afield, which remind one of Job in this way or that. But none comes close to Job when each work is examined as a whole.

35:00 Andersen in his Tyndale commentary (it's not a hard to find resource) goes through actually a pretty long list of these ancient Near Eastern texts, and he points out why they're part of the conversation and what the disconnects are. So it's really not a good argument.

The third argument to say Job is the oldest book in the Bible would be Job's Edomite or non-Israelite background. Now, Hartley said this sort of rules it out. It rules lateness out, anyway. But some people will turn around and say, "Well before the Exile it might have been okay to make the hero from Edom." And so

people try to take that and push it really back before the Mosaic era. Andersen again, says:

Whether the land of Uz is located in the north or in the south... Job's homeland is somewhere to the east of Israel proper. Israelites living in northern Transjordan would be more influenced by Aramaic than those living west of the river, especially since some of their territory was often under the control of Damascus.

Job was set—the person, the figure, the character—is set in the Transjordan (the other side of Jordan, east of the promised land, where Jordan would be today). That's where it's set. And there's a northern and a southern candidate, as far as scholars looking at this. And the reason why you have two candidates is that, as we're going to talk about when we get to the language of Job, there's Aramaic stuff in Job. And because of that Aramaic stuff, that's evidence for lateness. Aramaic would have been more influential or more in use in the northern Transjordan than the south, so that's why Job is certainly set in Transjordan someplace in the north. Scholars gravitate toward that because the Aramaic and Aramaisms in the book itself.

Those to the south, on the other hand, would be in contact with peoples speaking languages akin to ancestral Arabic.

This is *ancestral* Arabic, a precursor to what we now know is Arabic.

But in this direction, contact is less likely so long as the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom (who spoke South-Canaanite languages more closely akin to Hebrew and probably intelligible to Israelites)... A grave difficulty lies in the fact that the more Job is placed within the range of Phoenician culture, the less likely it is that it was similarly nourished by contributions from the 'children of the East' (Qedemites) to whom Job himself belonged.

To summarize that, what he means there is that we've got a southern candidate, too, because there are things in Job that are just oddities—either vocabulary or features of grammar that are similar to south Arabian dialects. And that is not unexpected because that's in the Transjordan region. But he's saying that's probably not a good candidate because there are still other things in the book that align with Phoenician. So if you're getting the impression that Job linguistically is just a hodgepodge of stuff (Hebrew, Aramaic, south Arabian, Phoenician), yeah, it is. And a lot of that stuff, linguistically speaking, is late—demonstrably, unquestionably late.

I'm hoping that you're seeing my earlier point clearly now. Apologetics people don't talk about this. Apologetics people do not grapple with the nuts and the bolts of the text. They don't do text work. They don't do ancient Near Eastern languages. They do apologetics—philosophical theology, argumentation,

rhetoric, logic, that sort of thing. And we need that. Gotta have that. There's a significant pay-off for that. It has a significant role in the greater enterprise of advancing the kingdom of God and evangelism and all that stuff.

40:00

For those of you who are football fans, I'm going to adopt the Bill Belichick approach to this: "Just do your job." Okay? If you're a text guy, do your job. I'm a text guy. That's what I care about. I try to be data-driven when it's textual stuff. Now, since I love theology and I was sort of weaned and raised on theology, I have a mind to take the nuts-and-bolts text stuff and use those data to do theology, but the reverse doesn't happen. Because if you're an apologetics or a systematic theology guy, you don't take ancient Near Eastern languages in grad school or seminary. You might get a year of Hebrew and you might get a year of Greek. You're not taking Aramaic, you're not taking Phoenician. You're not taking Egyptian. You're not taking... You don't do that stuff. And so it's really not possible to work in the other direction. And that's fine because the kingdom needs all of us. It needs the text geeks. It needs the systematic people—the philosophers, the people who gravitate on logical argumentation. It's all important.

So I say again, let's just do our job. Let's not pretend we're doing somebody else's job. Let's do *our* job. And my concern here... You think it might be getting a little overblown (it probably is), but I want to reinforce why we are even doing the topic. It's because it really bugs me when I see apologetics books make arguments like "Job is the oldest book in the Bible" and then use that to argue an important point somewhere down the line, maybe about the nature of scripture or science or something like that. It really bothers me because I know I could blow that to bits in three minutes. And if I can blow it to bits, somebody who's hostile to the Bible can blow it to bits, too, and will do that and love it, and then they'll use it to undermine that ministry—that person and that person's work—unjustly overall. But here, yeah, that guy's wrong. *What else is he wrong about?*

I just don't like that because in my Christian life growing up, as a new believer I read apologetics books. They were important to me. They were valuable. That stuff's important. It really is important for new believers, especially, to realize that none of the stuff that they're going to run into that is critical of scripture—that makes scripture the butt of jokes, that seeks to destroy it... None of those questions or issues are new. They've all been brought up before, and really smart people on the other side with a high view of scripture have thought very deeply about those things and they do have answers, and the best of them know where to find data from the text geeks to help them make their argument. That's important to know. It's important to tell people that there is this material out there—that Bible believers or people with a high view of scripture are not going to be flabbergasted by this YouTube video, like they have no answer for it. They've probably got a hundred pieces of published research that could address that—or a thousand, in some cases. People need to know that, and that's what apologetics folks do. They direct people to data. They show the inconsistencies

of thinking. They show the importance of coherent thought. That's their strength. And it's very essential, so it troubles me when they weaken their own status. They take away from the job that they have to do by just doing poor research in some other area. That irritates me because I was the beneficiary at one point in my life of apologetics kind of stuff. And I know how important it is. That's my little hobby horse for the day, I guess. Back to Andersen here, Andersen says:

The idea that Job has an Edomite background is as old as the LXX, which equates Job with Jobab, king of Edom (Gen. 36:33).

Again, that is not gospel truth. Just because the Septuagint translator (one of a committee—there were lots of translating hands that went into the Septuagint)... Just because one guy saw Job and said, "That sounds like 'Jobab.' Let's call him Jobab." That doesn't mean it's so. There are there are serious linguistic obstacles to that. So this is old as the Septuagint. Back to Andersen:

The theory that the book is an example of the world-famous, but otherwise lost, wisdom of the Edomites found its most serious modern supporter in R. H. Pfeiffer. It has not found many takers, if only because we know practically nothing about this language and have no literature from this culture.

45:00

You see the disconnect here? "The Septuagint says Job was Jobab, and that goes back to Genesis 33. It has to be older than Moses." Well, okay, let's think about that. So you've got Jobab writing a wisdom book, or he's the subject of this wisdom book of Job. Wouldn't it be nice if we actually had Edomite literature to compare it to? But guess what? We don't. We know next to nothing about the language in that area and we have no literature from the culture. Oops. Again, it's not a good argument to base the oldness based upon, what? One Septuagint translator decided he would do to just turn Hebrew *Job* into *Jobab*, translated *Jobab*. It's just a decision. There's no reason to do it. It's just a decision. It's a poor argument to make.

Number four... a fourth argument that Job is the oldest book: Ugaritic relationships—the stuff that's in Job that relates to Ugaritic material and has some parallel to Ugaritic literature. Back to Andersen again. Andersen summarizes this pretty nicely. He says:

Since the recovery of the language of Ugarit in the Ras Shamra tablets, and the accumulation of a considerable body of Canaanite literature in this language, the question of the linguistic affinities of the language of Job, as distinct from its literary affinities, has taken on a new dimension. There can be no doubt that numerous problems in Job have been cleared up by evidence derived from Ugaritic. This does not explain why Job is open to the application of such evidence. If it has more than its share of Canaanisms, this could be due either to the persistence of this background in some traditional streams of Israelite

literature from early times, or due to a fresh infusion of such influence, most likely through Phoenician channels, at a later date.

Okay, we'll stop there. You have to realize that there's stuff in Ugaritic about Baal in the Baal cycle that you will also find in Phoenician. Phoenician is later. So you see automatically sort of the tenuous nature of certain correlations that would be used.

Let's go with some examples, though, of why this doesn't work from the Hebrew Bible outside of Job. Remember the argument: Job has Ugaritic stuff in it, so it must be before the Mosaic period. That's the argument. Well, what about Deuteronomy 32:17, or Deuteronomy 32 generally? We talked about this at a Q&A recently—Deuteronomy 32:17. They worshipped the *shedim*. They worship gods, you know, not God. They worshipped other gods—the *shedim*—gods they had not known before. This is descriptive of what happens after the conquest, and Moses is already dead after the conquest. So how could that kind of stuff—Deuteronomy 32:17, Deuteronomy 32:8-9, the 70 nations, 70 sons of El... That's Ugaritic stuff at best. At earliest, it's Moses writing that stuff. So if Moses is writing it, how can it be before Moses? What it shows is that you can have Ugaritic material used in a period later than the patriarchal era. It's so obvious.

How about Joshua? We spent a whole episode in the podcast on the relationship of the book of Joshua (part of it) to the Keret epic—the Qirta epic. Joshua was not written before the law of Moses—before the Mosaic period.

How about Psalm 82? Psalm 89? Again, Psalm 89 references the king—the Israelite king—as Elyon. There's no way that's before Moses, and Psalm 82 draws on Deuteronomy 32. So if Moses wrote Deuteronomy 32, then Psalm 82 is going to be later. And even if it was written at the same time, if Moses is writing it, it's not written before Moses.

50:00

How about Psalm 74—Leviathan? I've mentioned this many times. This comes right out of the Baal Cycle material—Leviathan. There's no way that Psalm 74 is pre-Mosaic. Why? Because it references the Exodus and the journey through the wilderness. So this criterion—this affinity with Ugaritic stuff—that doesn't prove at all an authorship that's pre-Mosaic. In fact, you can demonstrate that there are texts in the Hebrew Bible with clear relationships to Ugaritic language, Ugaritic terms, and scenes in Ugaritic literature that are demonstrably Mosaic (at earliest) and post-Mosaic. So this assumed argument is just dead on arrival. It just is.

Five—fifth one. Let's get into the language issues (the language of the book). Back to Andersen:

The language in which Job is written presents many peculiarities. These have baffled scholars, who have attempted to account for them in several quite

different ways. There are four main kinds of theory: the language of Job is either *a.* a dialect of genuine Hebrew; or *b.* an artificial literary language; or *c.* an admixture of Hebrew with some other language translated into Hebrew, or *d.* the book of Job itself is a translation of some other language.

Namely, the south Arabian. I'm not going to get too far into the fourth one. That's pretty esoteric, and Andersen goes on to sort of poo-poo that one. But let's talk about what's actually there and why it's difficult. Back to Andersen:

If it is Hebrew, it varies considerably from the standard of the language which dominates most of the Old Testament. The prestige of David's court established the dialect of Jerusalem under the united monarchy as a norm which controlled Israelite literature until the time of the Exile.

Let me stop there. Do you realize that even in the Hebrew Bible there's a southern Hebrew dialect and there's a northern dialect? There are features of different books, even if they're writing about the same subject, where some of the parts of the grammar and the vocabulary will differ. And that tells scholars, based upon their parallels to other Hebrew literature in these geographical regions, where the particular text was written or where the scribe was from because of the way he does things. The easiest way to illustrate this is the *shibboleth* incident. In the Book of Judges, can you say *shibboleth*? "*Shibboleth*, you're dog meat now!" It's a dialectical difference in the pronunciation of a particular term that distinguished where a person was from. In that case, the wrong answer meant you were gonna die. Historically this is just the case and linguistically this is the case. There are different dialectical issues going on in the Hebrew of the biblical period. So back to Andersen:

Quite apart from the high incidence of unusual words (the book has about one hundred words not found anywhere else), Job deviates from the vocabulary of standard Hebrew in the area of ordinary words, and also in grammar, particularly morphology [word formation]. To pinpoint the language of Job as a sample of a distinct dialect of Hebrew has a bearing on the date and location of the book, but until more specimens are found, we cannot say when or where such a dialect might have been in use...

In a general way, of course, most Hebrew poetry stands squarely on the foundation of the old Canaanite tradition, and here Job is no exception. Indeed, Job has more than its share of affinities with what little survives of this older literature. The numerous Canaanisms in Job could be genuine, either genuinely ancient, or genuine survivals of ancient forms, although some might be due to later cultural contact with the Phoenicians. The tendency of the text to preserve primitive spellings is quite marked. This leans to an earlier date for its origin, and supports the authenticity of its archaisms. But the antique flavor [the old

patriarchal setting] could be cultivated [deliberate or intentional] on the part of the writer.

A footnote here in in Andersen's book. He has a footnote at this point where he says:

An analogy is found in the poetry of Spenser, whose diction abounds in genuine and spurious archaisms.

So he takes an example from British lit (Spenser), and how an author can do this. English, of course, has evolved over a long time: Old English, Middle English, and so forth. Spenser was a guy who would intentionally use older forms of words in his poetry to create the appearance of antiquity for the document. So that's Andersen's footnote there. Writers do this. Back to Andersen:

This could be the reason why such effects are not consistently secured.

55:00 Let me just stop there. Not every part of Job (or not even most parts of Job) have this archaic stuff in them. They're sprinkled into the 42 chapters. You've got them sprinkled here and there, so you would think if the book was really written in the old Canaanite period before Moses the whole document would be like that, but it's not. There are little sprinklings, little things here and there, and so scholars look at that and say, "Maybe somebody is just familiar with that literature and is either sprinkling it in deliberately to create the appearance of an older era or maybe referencing an Ugaritic text, wanting to create the linkage and make it a little more transparent. And so he's doing the older linguistic stuff for that reason."

So a real literate reader would know where he's getting his information from, but he is still late as an author. Maybe that's the best explanation because it's not everywhere, or even most places. To repeat: you would assume that if someone writing in the period before Moses—the pre-Mosaic period—when we have examples of Semitic writing from these periods... You would think that the word formations and the vocabulary and features of the grammar and the syntax... You would think that it would consistently look like that old stuff. But it doesn't. It's only here and there. It's only a smattering. Why? Why mix that with all this late stuff, too? Because there are late things in Job. It just looks like it's not a work that was composed in the more ancient period because of this inconsistency. Back to Andersen:

It is hazardous to infer anything about the date of the language from the morphology [word formation] or orthography of the surviving text [that's a word that means the spelling of the surviving text], for the data admit of several possible explanations. They do, however, make an exilic date unlikely, and a post-exilic date highly improbable, unless the alleged Aramaisms are felt to outweigh the Canaanisms in significance.

And so what Andersen was saying is, “Well, it depends which one you weigh more. Maybe that’s why there’s disagreement. So he’s trying to argue that you can’t get too far removed from the old period and still have people dipping into this older stuff. The polemic maybe wouldn’t mean as much or they would lose knowledge of old morphology and old spelling. It would have seen a sort of gone by the wayside, given 1000 Years or 1500 years removed. So he’s just saying, “Old/late—it’s all in there. Which one do we care about the most?” And again, he’s gonna come out and say, “I’m going to move it back.” Andersen favors a seventh century date, which is only 700 years for the Mosaic period removed, and he said that’s closer to the era than 1700. So he’s going to give the older stuff the benefit of the doubt. But he doesn’t put it in the pre-Mosaic era for both linguistic reasons (the late stuff that’s in there) and all these other reasons we’ve been talking about.

Now again, this gets pretty esoteric unless you know Hebrew and some Semitic languages, and so we’re not going to drill down much further in this. There’s one point I’m going to illustrate it with, but this is a far cry from any kind of certainty that Job is the oldest book of the Old Testament. This is a *far cry*. When you actually look at the text, there’s just really no way to make that argument.

1:00:00

By the way of an example of language ambiguity, let’s take some late stuff. There are places in Job where instead of an ‘*im* ending (like *elohim*, the ‘*im* ending—that’s the way Hebrew masculine plural nouns end: ‘*im*)... Instead of that, we have ‘*in*, and that’s Aramaic. Andersen writes that this ending (the ‘*in* ending for plural nouns) is found in Arabic and Aramaic. It’s not in Canaanite. It’s not in Phoenician. It’s not in Ugaritic. Those languages use ‘*im* (the ‘*im* ending like Hebrew does). Both kinds of endings are found in Job. Well ‘*im* is standard in Hebrew and ‘*in* is occasionally found in the Old Testament apart from the occurrences of Job—Yeah, typically the Aramaic stuff.

This variant cannot be attributed solely to late Aramaic influence, for it is found also in some ancient poems. And its use in the Mesha Inscription (Moabite) suggests that it was a dialectal variant within the South Canaanite languages spoken by the Israelite tribes and other closely related peoples.

You say, “Aha! We’ve got into the Moabite Stele—that means that’s a good argument for being before Moses!” Pardon me, but have you ever read the Moabite Stele? It’s from the Omri Dynasty period. Omri, Jehu, the days of Ahab, all that kind of... It’s not before Moses. It’s not before Moses, okay? So we don’t need to drill down any further in the language stuff. That gets really hairy and esoteric.

I think we enumerated five ways that it’s argued that the book of Job is the oldest book in the Bible and they all fail. Some of them fail spectacularly. Some of them

just fail because of ambiguity. So where does this leave us? Well, I would say it leaves us right where we started, and that is: nobody knows when Job was written or by whom. Period. They just don't. So let's stop pretending that we know, because we don't. We should not be making apologetic points on the basis of a presumed extreme early date of Job. We should not be saying the Bible teaches X, Y, Z on the basis of an assumed date. Doing so makes the Bible and its defense vulnerable to criticism. And again, that's just unnecessary. Why do it? There's nothing to be gained by insisting on an early date for Job. There is no point of biblical truth that depends on an early date for Job. So let's just give it a rest. Let's just give it a rest. It's not important, even though we spent a lot of time here talking about it. But again, I hope you realize why I decided to do this as a topic. Even in small things like this, I don't like when the good work of good people in apologetics or philosophical theology or just pastors or whoever is saying the stuff... I don't like when the good argumentation—the good work of good people—is easily undermined by saying stuff that is just a demonstrably not true by taking positions that can't be effectively defended on the basis of data. And when the data is right in the text, it creates questions like, “Well, didn't you ever look at that?” Like, did you pull a commentary off the shelf and look? Why would you make that argument? How can I trust the rest of your research? That's an overblown conclusion to draw, but I can tell you right now that there will be people in the militant atheist crowd (or with whatever axe they want to grind) when they can undermine an argument by your favorite apologist over here in just a couple minutes. They're going to use that to call into question that person's research ability—that person's acumen for giving you real data and thinking well about data. There's just no point to allowing that to happen.

And so, when it comes to the authorship and date of the book of Job, just nestle up to the ambiguity. It doesn't matter.

TS: All right, Mike. There you go. It doesn't matter. That could be my motto about everything: “It does not matter.”

MH: We spent a lot of time on something that doesn't matter.

TS: There you go.

MH: Well, I'll kick myself in the pants later. [laughs]

TS: Speaking of “doesn't matter,” our next week's topic is baptism for the dead. [laughter]

MH:: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, honestly, we're not doing that either. So I guess you're right: it doesn't matter.

TS: We're done. No more podcast.

MH: I'll say that one matters a little bit more because of the way... I don't want to sort of tip my hand here too early, but there are groups out there that do believe that if I'm baptized for a dead person, that helps that dead person get into heaven. So that's important. It's more important than the authorship and the date of Job, but on the scale of things, yeah, it's kind of low, but not quite this low.

TS: Well, there you go. All right. I'll tell you what does matter is you getting your tickets to the Naked Bible Conference at www.nakedbibleconference.com. So hurry and get those tickets before they sell out. And with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.