

Erica Williams
Campus Location: ATS/NY City

Ancient Near Eastern Context of the Bible

Comparative Research

**A Sufferer and A Friend in Babylon and The Book of Job
OT504: The Hebrew Bible & the Eastern Mediterranean World**

Abstract

The intent of my paper will be to compare both the similarities as well as differences that exists between Ancient Eastern Times literature and the book of Job. The ANE writing that I will be using to make this contrast is titled: A Sufferer and A Friend in Babylon as well as a ANE poem entitled: An Ancient Babylonian Discourse on Human Piety and Divine Justice. My thesis statement is Gods deity supersedes the laws of retribution and to explain why. If God operates by the retribution principle, then he will impede the development of true righteousness, because people will behave righteously only to gain the reward. On the other hand, if God does not operate by the retribution principle, then people like Job will conclude that God is unjust. The story of Job is a testament of God's reward to the righteous and to his faithful servant to even in times of uncertainty.

Central Thesis

The Book of Job is the Old Testament (OT) text that I have identified to compare with an Ancient Near Eastern text (ANE). Although I reviewed multiple ANE sources that are connected to the OT book of Job I will focus on comparing the book of Job in a reflection of the ANE writings entitled *A Sufferer and A Friend in Babylon* as well as a ANE poem entitled *The Babylonian Theodicy: An Ancient Babylonian Discourse on Human Piety and Divine Justice*. In this paper I will be providing research provided by theologians, commentaries, articles, and secondary literatures. With the assistance of all these sources I will clearly demonstrate that God's deity and divine nature moves beyond the retribution of sin. Though scholars have unveiled the many characteristics of God such as his love, his power, and his wisdom just to name a few; we can never know the full extent of his love completely or exhaustively. For us to know any single thing about God exhaustively; we would have to know it as he himself knows it. Secondly, we would have to know its relationship to God and to God's plan for all of creation. The bible reminds us in Psalm 139:6 *"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain."* It is true that we can never know everything about God, but we can know God Truly. God is love (I John 4:8), God is light (I John 1:5), God is spirit (John4:24) and God is just and righteous (Rom.3:26) Everything written about scripture is true. It is God's inability to change that supports the claim that his deity supersedes any retribution for sin. God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises remain consistent. In the book of Job both God and Job are spotlighted in the presence of oppression and obscurities. It is the character of Job on display and not God Himself. Gods' intentions, plans, purposes, and promises are immutable. The word of God is sure and lacks nothing; Psalm 102:25 -27 ²⁵ *"In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.²⁶ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them, and they will*

*be discarded.*²⁷ *But you remain the same, and your years will never end.*” God is both infinite and personal apart from the bible no system of religion has no other. For example, the gods of the ancient Greek and Roman mythology were personal they interacted frequently with people, but they were not infinite.

Secondary Literature

The ANE text that will be compared with Th Book of Job is A Sufferer and A Friend in Babylon. This text is about a story and a dialogue about human disappoints and failure. This OT parallel is a acrostic. Archaeologists reconstructed twenty-seven stanzas with eleven lines each of A Sufferer and a Friend in Babylon from tablets that Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) recovered from Tell Nimrud in 1845. They are presently persevered in the British Museum in London. “I am Saggilk-kinam-ubbib, priest, cantor , and servant pf the divine assembly and of the Great King.” It is a parallel to the book of Job. Both are conversations, dialogues, or arguments. It is also parallel to the book of Ecclesiastes. Both argue that a world filled with suffering and evil proves that the divine assembly cannot be just. As the Sufferer lines 1-20 (Job 29:12) mirrors a answered as to how God was to them as a oppressed people. because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist them.¹ As a Friend Your story is too sad. OT compares Fear the Lord, you his holy people., for those who fear him lack nothing. As the Sufferer in lines 67-77 ¹ the ANE mirrors Job 21:7-16 and Isa 58:2-3 “and prayers and fasting got me nowhere” Here is the frustration of the righteous. Jer12:1 Finally lines 235-242 as Friend contrast with Job 18:5-21 and Job 8:5-7. Where Jobs friend questions innocents Lines 243-53 as the sufferer OT mirrors Eccl 3:16 and Gen 25:27. The comparison between the two literatures was interpreted as a blaming or claiming who was at fault. The

culture of the ANE would take offense that anyone who blame God by not owning what was perceived as reciprocation for doing something wrong. Through OT scripture Jobs friend accusation accused him bringing the calamity upon himself when he was being proven to be worth of all that he had. From the ANE perspectives the gods could not have done anything in error, and they attributed calamity with retribution for a sin committed. ANE worshipped multiple Gods in the form of polytheism where Israel practiced Monotheism.

Waltons NIV Commentary on Job shared the Mesopotamian

Literature chart that included similar literature containing discussion surrounding a pious but suffering individual(p.31)

Mesopotamian Literature Compared with Job

Literature	Status	Condition	Resolution	Outcome	Philosophy	Theology
Babylonian Theodicy (Akkadian)	Claims piety	Family gone poverty	none	none	Purpose of gods remote;RP Unreliable	Gods make people with evil inclinations and prone to suffering
Job (Hebrew)	Claims righteousness and conscientious piety	Family taken social outcast; illness; wealth	Yahweh offers ne perspective based on wisdom	Restoration at all levels	RP unreliable; divine wisdom is foundation	God's justice is granted given his wisdom

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The above selected chart compares Job and Babylon Theodicy ; I selected these the two because the philosophy of suffering was the same containing Retribution Principle (RP) Similarities are that all are suffering. Only one is restored (Job). Both present their suffering before God and or their friends attempting to understand their suffering. Walton reveals that when comparing ANE and the bible going beneath the surface reveals many significant differences. Further analysis of the ANE society practices and expectations concerning deity. In the ANE ritual offense was the most common misdeed a person could commit. In the Mesopotamian pieces deity is eventually appeased, whether by prayers, laments, or rituals. This appeasement of the deity is necessary in these scenarios because the deity is presumed to be angry or inexplicably moody. In Job there is no appeasement of Yahweh, for Yahweh is not angry; furthermore, Job specifically rejects the path of appeasement urged by his friends (27:2-6) Walton (p.33) In addition the practice in ANE culture the Mesopotamians pursued appeasement because they considered themselves to be in a symbiotic relationship with the gods. Job although in the culture he didn't engage in the acts of appeasement.

Display of Analysis and Argument.

The principle of retribution practiced by the ANE culture were principles that was opposite of Gods deity and his divine characteristics. The God of Israel desired relation from the very start of creation and still desires relationship throughout the bible. The Present principal is referred to as the retribution principle. In its most basic form, it contends that the righteous will

prosper, and the wicked will suffer² Most Israelites believed that if God were to be considered just, rewards and punishments in this life would have to be proportional to the righteousness or wickedness of the individual. Another comparison is that they are different, but they can still be reflective of one another. The book of Job is written in monotheistic context in the view of God where the ANE literature is constructed in the concept of Polytheism. Fear that the gods would not protect them and would remove their protection. One commentary says the ANE population believed that the gods that they served in the ANE culture were inconsistent and carried their own agendas summarizing they were unreliable and could change in any moment. My insight suggest that this wasn't the same for Job because Job knew that God that was in control of his past, his present and his future. I walk away viewing Job's experience as a testimony of God's unwavering love and commitment to cover and protect but not without a test first. The ANE insight of this torment for is again a form of reciprocation but conflict is present in the story because Job is the epitome of righteousness. ⁱⁱ This non-Israelite setting would find support in the use of divine names other than Yahweh. Yet, at the same time, Job is notably Israelite-like in his beliefs. Primary names used for God in the book of Job are El, Eloah Elohim and Shaddai. No clear description is referenced in the bible that address divine characteristics of Job's God. Commentators conclude that Job inhabits the ANE world and its mythologies, but he doesn't share the polytheistic worldview.

As I bring my paper to a close, I would like to reaffirm my position that God's deity supersedes any crisis that life may present. After the research of the literature, it is agreeable that people will suffer for no specific cause and the lesson in that isn't necessarily the persons response, but the suffering activates deity and divine nature of God. I walk away with a different

² <https://faith-seeking-understanding.org/2022/03/08/the-ancient-near-east-and-job/>

outlook for the book of Job. My insight is that it wasn't Job that was on trial, but it was the deity and the response of God that was on full display. Job's friends were of the ANE mindset that he must have done something wrong, and he hadn't. My theological focus is on the deity of a faithful God

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ⁱ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=job+29%3A12&version=NIV>

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