

Background

The Book of Job is one of the most celebrated, complex, and beautifully written books of the Hebrew Bible. Many see the Book of Job as questioning the Deuteronomistic Theology that dominates the first two parts of the Hebrew Bible. Deuteronomistic Theology is the idea that God has made a covenant with the Hebrew people: if they worship God and obey God's laws, they will be a great nation. If they don't, they will suffer. In essence, God punishes the good and rewards the bad. But this is certainly NOT what happens in Job.

Structure

1. Prologue. We begin with a prose story written in everyday, folk tale-ish language about a "man in the land of Uz called Job: a sound and honest man who feared God and shunned evil." In Heaven, Satan (we'll talk more about this figure in lecture) questions whether Job is actually loyal to God. His logic goes like this: of course Job loves God: he's been blessed with children, lands, livestock, rank, and good health. God gives Satan permission to "test" Job to see whether, when everything has been taken away, Job remains loyal. Satan proceeds to take away everything from Job and Job does not curse God. **(Your excerpt includes all of this.)**

2. Job's soliloquy. At this point, we shift dramatically in style from prose to a verse section that is not unlike Greek drama. It begins with Job cursing the day of his birth (but not God). **(Your excerpt includes some of this.)**

3. Three cycles of discussion between Job and his three "friends." Job's friends, who have come to "comfort" him as he mourns the death of his children, assure Job over and over that the Deuteronomistic Theology is intact. Job *must* have done something wrong to receive such suffering. Job insists that he is innocent. He wishes he could see God in a court so that he could plead his case! Job believed in Deuteronomistic Theology, but it is not matching his experience and what he knows. **(Although this is the bulk of the Book of Job – your excerpt only contains a bit of Job's responses to the "friends.")**

4. Elihu. An additional friend appears seemingly out of nowhere and has his say. (Most scholars believe this is a later addition.) **(We might look at some of this in seminar. I like Elihu.)**

6. The Voice From the Whirlwind (or Storm or Tempest). God speaks to Job and gives an "answer" to his questions. **(Your excerpt includes some of this – it's quite long.)**

7. Job repents. **(Your excerpt includes all of this)**

8. Epilogue. We return to the prose frame. Job gets new children and new livestock and has his health restored. **(Your excerpt omits this.)**

Some questions to consider:

1. Job's suffering is causing him to ask many questions. What are some of them?
2. How does God answer Job's questions? Does he? What is his purpose in speaking to Job?
3. God himself says the Job is righteous. God is omniscient. So... why let Satan do what he does?
4. How does the Book of Job question Deuteronomistic Theology

One more note:

There does not appear to be a concept of Heaven in The Book of Job, only Sheol, which is a similar vision of the afterlife to what we see in Hades in *The Odyssey* – a place where the dead congregate silently in shade form without distinction and without awareness of what they once were.