

Theodicy in Job : ancient word, modern reflections

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Abstract:

The Evangelical community of faith uses the Bible in order to understand events in people's lives. The Bible helps people to make sense of existence and to orientate themselves in their lives. The Bible provides the community of faith with material that helps us to react to existential questions. It is for this reason that this present study consults a biblical text – the book of Job– in order to explore the issue of how to deal with the presence of suffering in this world. Reading the book of Job makes one recognise several elements in it which are also matters in the issue of theodicy. The leading character, Job, suffers innocently. He wrestles with his miserable fate, questions God's righteousness and looks for reasons which can explain God's role with regard to his blameless misery. The book as a whole casts doubt on a specific form of theodicy, which was broadly found in the Ancient Near East. This is the view that God acts according to a strict relation between a person's actions and what befalls them. According to this theodicy, God rewards upright behaviour with prosperity and punishes wickedness with misery. Furthermore, the prologue of the book suggests the alternative that suffering might serve in order to test one's loyalty to God. Some of Job's friends suggest that evil has a pedagogical or warning function. Among other things these clues indicate that the book of Job somehow deals with aspects of the issue of theodicy and how one tries to understand God and the problem of evil.

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