

Thesis: Factoring time into classical retribution theology does not make Job fit with the teaching of Proverbs.

Proof: Classical retribution theology involves the notion of a response flowing necessarily from an action: blessing from obedience and punishment from disobedience. The book of Deuteronomy, which describes the time-sensitive covenant of works between God and the Israelite nation regarding the Land promises, more naturally fits with the retribution theology taught in Proverbs (see Deut 4:25-31). The driving tension in the book of Job centers on the apparent absence of righteous retribution. According to God, Job is “a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil,” (Job 1:8) yet he his possessions, family, and health are literally pummeled at the seemingly merciless hand of God. Adding a degree of time does not solve the problem for Job, even though he is restored and vindicated at the end of the test (Job 42:7-16), for the theology of retribution requires that Job not suffer *at all* because he did nothing to deserve such anguish. It is the retribution theology of Job’s three friends and Elihu (“Job suffers because he has sinned”¹) that invites the final rebuke from God. “As a result, he [Job] became an intercessor for his friends, who had advocated a false wisdom of mechanical retribution.”² The divine rebuke experienced by Job at the end of the book disallows the interpretation that retribution theology eventually carries the day. The end of Job’s harrowing tale teaches us that he never merited the suffering or blessing that came upon him, that God alone is wise and that the book “promotes an attitude that acknowledges the power and wisdom of the God of the universe.”³

Refutation: It is true that retribution theology plays an important role in the book of Job, but the passing of time does not justify its application to Job, rather it is conclusively defeated. It is also true that we must read Job (indeed all of the Old Testament) “in the light of the revelation of Christ in the New [Testament].” In the fullness of time Jesus is justified (and thus via the mode of imputation justifies His people) by the retribution theology inherent in the Adamic Covenant of Works. But what is rightly applied to the life of Christ is inappropriately applied to the life of Job.

Conclusion: One lesson from the book of Job is to prevent us from reading Proverbs and becoming foolish like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Wisdom’s first duty is applying proverbs to the proper situation. The proverbial theology of retribution, even given a lifetime for God to bring it to fruition, simply doesn’t fit with Job.

References:

1. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman III, p. 204.
2. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman III, p. 205.
3. *How to Read Proverbs*, Tremper Longman III, p. 86.