

# The Testament of Job

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this first case study, I will investigate one of the earliest extensive interpretations of the canonical book of Job. It is a folkloristic retelling of the story of Job in the style of Jewish haggada.<sup>1</sup> The genre is that of the Jewish testament literature of the Second Temple period. All the figures of the canonical Job are there: Job, his wife, his children, and his friends, but all of them are portrayed from a new perspective. The text is fascinating in that it consists of a mixture of rather simplistic storytelling and beautiful narrative and poetic art. This makes the text entertaining and sometimes humorous.

## 3.2 STORY

Although the *Testament of Job* (*TJ*, below) is clearly an interpretation of the *Biblical book of Job* (*BJ*, below), it is so much a story of its own that it is worth telling that story before comparing it to *BJ*. Telling the story gives readers the opportunity to get a taste of the character of *TJ* over against that of *BJ*.

When the story opens, Job, having fallen ill, calls his sons and daughters to give them his final instructions and exhortations. He introduces himself, his wife and children in the following way:

I am your father Job, engaged in endurance. But you are a chosen and honored race from the seed of Jacob, the father of your mother. For I am *from the sons of Esau*, the brother of Jacob, of whom is your mother Dinah, from whom I begot you. (My former wife died with the other ten children in a bitter death.) (1, 5–6)<sup>2</sup>

Then, Job begins to tell the story of his suffering. Job is an Egyptian king who lives near a temple in which an idol is worshipped. He wonders whether the god venerated in the temple is the true God. One a night, a voice in a very bright

<sup>1</sup> For a recent survey of available literature, see A. Lehnardt, *Bibliographie zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* 6.2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999), pp. 275–278.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from *TJ* have been taken from Rudolf P. Spittler, ‘Testament of Job’, in: J.H. Charlesworth, editor, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, volume I (Garden City, New York etc.: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 829–868.

light appears, telling Job that the idol worshipped in the temple is the devil, whereupon Job asks the voice whether God would give him authority to destroy the temple: "Who is there to forbid me, since I rule this region?" (III, 7) The Lord grants authority to Job, but the light warns him that destroying the temple of Satan would raise a battle with Satan. Satan will bring many plagues upon Job, although Satan will not be allowed to take his life. If Job endures, however, the light promises him that he will receive twice of all that he will have lost. Finally, Job will rise again in the resurrection.

"For you will be like a sparring athlete, both enduring pains and winning the crown. Then will you know that the Lord is just, true, and strong, giving strength to his elect ones." And I, my little children, replied to him, "Till death I will endure: I will not step back at all." After I had been sealed by the angel when he left me, my little children, then—having arisen the next night—I took fifty youths with me, struck off for the temple of the idol, and levelled it to the ground. And so I withdrew into my house, having ordered the doors to be secured. (IV, 10–V, 3)

Now, the battle between Job and Satan begins. First, Satan disguises himself as a beggar, saying to the doorman that he wants to meet Job, upon which Job answers that he has no time. Satan returns and asks the doorman for a piece of bread. Again, Job sees through Satan's trick and gives the doorman a burnt loaf of bread. Then, an episode follows which nicely illustrates the entertaining way in which the *Testament* is written:

Then the doorman, ashamed to give him the burnt and ashen loaf of bread (for she did not know he was Satan), took the good loaf of her own and gave it to him. And when he received it and knew what had occurred he said to the girl, "Off with you, evil servant. Bring the loaf of bread given you to be given to me." The girl wept with deep grief, saying, "Truly, you well say I am an evil servant. For if I were not, I would have done just as it was assigned to me by my master." And when she returned, she brought him the burnt loaf of bread, saying to him, "Thus says my lord, 'You shall no longer eat from my loaves at all, for I have been estranged from you. Yet I have given you this loaf of bread in order that I may not be accused of providing nothing to a begging enemy.'" When he heard these things, Satan sent the girl back to me saying, "As this loaf of bread is wholly burnt, so shall I do to your body also. For within the hour, I will depart and devastate you." And I replied to him, "Do what you will. For if you intend to bring anything on me, I am prepared to undergo whatever you inflict." (VII, 5–13)

The reader will have noticed the ambiguity of good and evil which is skillfully interwoven in this passage. Of course, Satan is eager to carry out his threat.

In the next chapters, an extensive description of Job's wealth follows, which is put entirely in terms of his benevolence to the poor. Job used his enormous amounts of cattle for serving the poor. He even lent his money to strange foreigners who promised to do business with it, aiming to give the money earned to the poor.

This description of Job's wealth, benevolence and piety is followed by Satan's depriving Job of his possessions, his children and, finally, his health. When Job sees the house with his children being destroyed, he gives an elaborate account

of his situation, which culminates in a quotation from *BJ* which is most fitting for the purpose of the author of the Testament:

I was unable to utter a thing; for I was exhausted—as a woman numbed in her pelvic region by the magnitude of birth pangs—remembering most of all the battle foretold by the Lord through his angel and the songs of victory which had been told to me. And I became as one wishing to enter a certain city to discover its wealth and gain a portion of its splendor, and as one embarked with cargo in a seagoing ship. Seeing at mid-ocean the third wave and the opposition of the wind, he threw the cargo into the sea, saying, “I am willing to lose everything in order to enter this city so that I might gain both the ship and things better than the payload.” Thus, I also considered my goods as nothing compared to the city about which the angel spoke to me. When the final messenger came and showed me the loss of my children, I was deeply disturbed. And I tore my garments, saying to the one who brought the report, “How were you spared?” And then when I understood what had happened I cried aloud, saying, “*The Lord gave, the Lord took away. As it seemed good to the Lord, so it has happened. Blessed be the name of the Lord!*” (xviii, 4–xix, 4)

A new scene then opens with Job’s first wife called Sitidos in the central role.<sup>3</sup> As Job has lost all his possessions, his wife becomes the maidservant of a nobleman in order to bring bread to Job.<sup>4</sup> When Sitidos goes to on the market for bread Satan disguises himself as one who sells bread. Satan asks for money, upon which Sitidos answers that she has none and begs for mercy because of all the evils that have befallen her. But Satan, says:

“Unless you deserved the evils, you would not have received them in return. Now then if you have no money at hand, offer me the hair of your head and take three loaves of bread. Perhaps you will be able to live for three more days.” Then she said to herself, “What good is the hair of my head compared to my hungry husband?” And so, showing disdain for her hair, she said to him, “Go ahead, take it.” Then he took scissors, sheared off the hair of her head, and gave her three loaves, while all were looking on. When she got the loaves, she came and brought them to me. Satan followed her along the road, walking stealthily, and leading her heart astray. (xxiii, 6–11)

Being in deep despair, Sitidos laments her lot in one of the laments that are characteristic of the *Testament*, followed by a lament *about* her which is considered by some scholars as a later addition. Job, however, does not show any weakness after this lament. He holds fast in the battle with Satan and calls him to stop hiding himself behind his wife: “Does a lion show his strength in a cage? Does a fledgling take flight when it is in a basket? Come out and fight!” (xxvii, 1) Satan comes out, but he is weeping, describing his defeat in the battle in an imaginative way:

<sup>3</sup> Spittler translates the Greek Σίτιδος with ‘Sitis as a derivation of ‘Ausitis’, the LXX translation of biblical Job’s home city: Spittler, ‘Testament of Job’, p. 850. Van der Horst, however, argues convincingly that the original spelling is correct: Pieter W. van der Horst, ‘Images of Women in the Testament of Job’, in: Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. van der Horst, editors, *Studies on the Testament of Job*, Monograph series / Society for New Testament Studies 66 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 96–97.

<sup>4</sup> Notice that bread is an important theme in the *Testament*. Satan asks Job for bread, Job provides bread for the poor, Sitidos even allows her hair to be cut off so as to get a loaf of bread from Satan, who has disguised himself as someone selling bread.

“Look, Job, I am weary and I withdraw from you, even though you are flesh and I a spirit. You suffer a plague, but I am in deep distress. I became like one athlete wrestling another, and one pinned the other. The upper one silenced the lower one, by filling his mouth with sand and bruising his limbs. But because he showed endurance and did not grow weary, at the end the upper one cried out in defeat. So you also, Job, were the one below and in a plague, but you conquered my wrestling tactics which I brought on you.” (xxvii, 2–5)

One might think that after Satan’s loss of the battle, the story would be over, but the scene switches again to Job’s conversation with the friends, portrayed, following the LXX version of *BJ*, as three kings. These kings come to see Job, and the most important elements in their performance in *TJ* are, first, that they ask Job whether he really is Job and second, the fact that – unlike Job – they do not show any patience and endurance in the battle with suffering and evil; rather they think about how rich and virtuous Job had been before all the evils came upon him. This is immediately clear from Eliphaz’s speech, which is introduced by Eliphaz saying: “Let us approach him and question him carefully to see if it is really he himself or not.” (xxxi, 1) After three days, during which the kings used huge amounts of incense to enable themselves to draw near to Job, Eliphaz repeats his amazement about this man being the former king Job. He cries loudly and laments Job’s lot while the other kings sing in response. From the lament, it is clear that Eliphaz’ only concern is about Job’s past wealth; he fails to encourage Job in his present condition:

Are you the one who established the sixty tables set for the poor?  
Now where is the splendor of your throne? (xxxii, 7)

Are you Job, the one who had vast splendor?  
Now where is the splendor of your throne? (xxxii, 12)

In replying, Job shows his radically different attitude by answering:

My throne is in the upper world, and its splendor and majesty comes  
from the right hand of the Father.

The whole world shall pass away and its splendor shall fade. And those  
who heed it shall share in its overthrow.

But my throne is in the holy land, and its splendor is in the world of the  
changeless one. (xxxiii, 3–5)

Eliphaz is annoyed by this response, and he proposes to the other kings that they leave. Bildad, however, reminds Eliphaz of how he felt when he was ill, and asks for patience with Job. He proceeds to investigate Job’s real condition. Bildad turns out to be primarily interested in the question whether Job is ‘emotionally disturbed’ and he inquires whether this is so by asking Job whether “his heart is untroubled”. Job repeats that his heart is fixed on heavenly concerns. Then, an interesting conversation follows:

So he [Bildad] said, “In whom is your hope?” And I said, “In the God who lives.” And again he said to me, “Who destroyed your goods or inflicted you with these plagues?” And I said, “God.” And again he replied and said, “Do

you hope upon God? Then how do you reckon him to be unfair by inflicting you with all these plagues or destroying your goods? If he were to give and then take away, it would actually be better for him not to have given anything. [. . .] Or who will ever understand the deep things of the Lord and his wisdom? Who dares to ascribe to the Lord an injustice? [. . .] And again I say to you, if you are sound of mind and have your wits about you, tell me why we see the sun on the one hand rising in the east and setting in the west, and again when we get up early we find it rising again in the east? Explain these things to me if you are the servant of God." (xxxvii, 1–8)

Job, however, has a tricky – and amusing – question for Bildad in order to show that his heart is sound:

Now then, so you may know that my heart is sound, here is my question for you: Food enters the mouth, then water is drunk through the same mouth and sent into the same throat. But whenever the two reach the latrine, they are separated from each other. Who divides them? (xxxviii, 3)

Sophar, the third king, does not say very much in *TJ*. He offers Job the physicians of the three kingdoms of his and the other two friends, upon which Job answers that he has his healing from the Lord.

After the appearance of the three friends, Sitidos makes her final entrance on the scene, weeping and asking the friends whether they remember her and her previous wealth. The friends make a great lament for her and Eliphaz seizes his purple robe and throws it about her. Sitidos asks the friends to order their soldiers to search for the corpses of her children in the ruins, so that they may be buried as a memorial to them. Job, however, forbids this because, he says, his children are in heaven. When the friends and his wife ask him how that is possible, he answers:

"Lift me up so I can stand erect." And they lifted me up, supporting my arms on each side. And then when I had stood up, I sang praises to the Father. And after the prayer I said to them, "Look up with your eyes to the east and see my children crowned with the splendor of the heavenly one." And when she saw that, Sitidos my wife fell to the ground worshipping and said, "Now I know that I have a memorial with the Lord. So I shall arise and return to the city and nap awhile and then refresh myself before the duties of my servitude." And when she left for the city she went to the cow shed of her oxen, which had been confiscated by the rulers whom she served. And she lay down near a certain manger and died in good spirits. (xxx, 1–6)

When her master finds her in the fields, she is buried near the ruins of the house of her children, and the poor of the city make a special lament for her.

Up to this point in the story, one of the friends, Elihu has been absent. He is the only one in *TJ*, who is said to have spoken insulting words against Job, inspired by Satan. *TJ* avoids mentioning these insulting words by referring to "The Miscellanies of Eliphaz". Subsequently, the Lord appears to Job through a hurricane and clouds, showing Job that Elihu was not human but a beast. Furthermore, the Lord says to the other three friends that they have sinned because they have not spoken truly about his servant Job. The Lord orders the friends to bring sacrifices so that Job may offer these for them, upon which the Lord forgives

them their sins. A hymn follows in which Eliphaz sings about the lot of Elihu and, more generally, the lot of the godless.

The appearance of the Lord is immediately followed by Job's restoration. In *TJ*, this restoration is connected with Job's beneficial acts towards the poor. All his friends come to ask him what to do, whereupon he answers that they should do well to the poor: "Let each one give me a lamb for the clothing of the poor who are naked." (xxxiv, 4) Then, all his friends bring a lamb and a gold coin and the Lord blesses all the goods he owns, and doubles his estate.

After Job's restoration, we enter the final scene of the *Testament*, a scene that some scholars have considered a later (Montanist) addition because of the peculiar mysticist imagery found in it.<sup>5</sup> Job opens the scene by addressing his children with a final exhortation:

And now, my children, behold I am dying. Above all, do not forget the Lord. Do good to the poor. Do not overlook the helpless. Do not take to yourselves wives from strangers. Look, my children, I am dividing among you everything that is mine, so each one may have unrestricted control over his own share. (xxxv, 1-4)

The estate is brought forth for distribution among the seven sons only, whereupon the three daughters are grieved:

"Our father, sir, are we not also your children? Why then did you not give us some of your goods?" But Job said to the females, "Do not be troubled, my daughters: I have not forgotten you. I have already designated for you an inheritance better than that of your seven brothers" (xxxvi, 2)

Job calls his daughter Hemera to bring three golden boxes. The three golden boxes contain three multicoloured cords:

And he opened them and brought out three multicolored cords whose appearance was such that no man could describe, since they were not from earth but from heaven, shimmering with fiery sparks like the rays of the sun. And he gave each one a cord, saying, "Place these about our breast, so it may go well with you all the days of your life." (xxxvi, 7-9)

The daughter Kassia, however, takes a rational approach. She asks: "Father, is this the inheritance which you said was better than that of our brothers? Who has any use for these unusual cords? We cannot gain a living from them, can we?" (xxxvii, 1). Job tells his daughters that they will not only live from them, but also be led into a better world, to live in the heavens. When the daughters wrap the cords around them, they receive a new heart that is no longer bound to earthly things, and they begin to sing hymns in the language of the angels.

After this, a completely new figure appears on the scene: Nereus, Job's brother, who records most of the hymns sung by the daughters. Job falls ill and after three days, he sees those coming for his soul. He gives musical instruments to his daughters so that they may welcome them. Finally, after Job's death, Nereus, the seven sons, along with all the poor, orphans and all the helpless lament the passing of Job in heartrending terms, and bury him after three days.

<sup>5</sup> See below, section 3.3.

## 3.3 TEXT, COMPOSITION, AND ORIGIN

Only six copies of the text of *TJ* survived. Four are medieval copies written in Greek. One is an Old Slavonic copy. These copies contain – as far as we know – the full text of *TJ*. In addition, we have an incomplete copy of the text on a Coptic papyrus which is probably from the fifth century CE. Two critical editions have been prepared during the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century. Brock prepared an edition on the basis of the ‘P’ manuscript from the National Library in Paris.<sup>6</sup> Kraft and others prepared an edition which primarily uses the ‘S’ (Sicilian) and ‘V’ (Vatican) manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> A critical eclectic edition based upon all available witnesses is not yet available. Although the differences between the available witnesses are numerous, they are usually of rather minor relevance, and affect neither the main story line nor the central message of the Testament.<sup>8</sup>

*TJ* generally conforms to the characteristics of the testament genre of the Second Temple period. Spittler mentions the following characteristics of Jewish testament literature:

- (1) an ill father, (2) near death, (3) and on his bed, (4) calls his sons, (5) disposes of his goods and (6) issues a forecast of events to come. The father (7) dies and (8) a lamentation ensues.<sup>9</sup>

*TJ* contains all of these elements. Of the other Jewish testaments, *TJ* most closely resembles the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Although *TJ* clearly embodies the characteristics of the testament genre, it also shows important deviations from it. The most important is that in *TJ*, story telling prevails over the ethical admonitions which usually make up the core of a testament. This places it somewhere between a testament and a haggada. Because of its strong emphasis on story-telling in an almost scenic way, Schaller suggests the dramatic genre of tragedy as a possible background of *TJ*, although he immediately adds that we have no certainty that the *Testament* was ever performed as a drama.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most debated questions about *TJ* is its literary unity. The text contains numerous minor and some major tensions and inconsistencies. A minor one, for instance, is that in 19:1, Job says that the final messenger, who will relate the death of his children, is coming. Talking about a last messenger (ἔσχατος ἄγγελος) presupposes that other messengers have come earlier in the story, but there is no mention of this.<sup>11</sup> The most important problem is the relation between chapters 46–53 and the rest of the *Testament*. In the final part of the story, the daughters of Job play a prominent role and the author makes extensive use of miraculous and magical imagery. As we will see when discussing the origin of *TJ*,

<sup>6</sup> S.P. Brock, editor, *Testamentum Iobi*, Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti graece 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Kraft et al., editors, *The Testament of Job According to the SV Text*, Texts and Translations 5: Pseudepigrapha Series 4 (Missoula, Montana: Society of Biblical Literature & Scholars' Press, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Spittler, 'Testament of Job', pp. 829–830; Berndt Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 3 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979), pp. 316–318.

<sup>9</sup> Spittler, 'Testament of Job', p. 831.

<sup>10</sup> Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, p. 313.

<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive list of problems, cf. Berndt Schaller, 'Zur Komposition und Konzeption des Testaments Hiobs', in: Knibb and Van der Horst, *Studies on the Testament of Job*, pp. 75–79.

some have argued that this part is of a later date, and possibly of Montanist origin. However, there is an emerging consensus in recent scholarship on the unity of the present form of the text, although most scholars accept different sources behind the final form of the *Testament*. J.J. Collins was the first scholar who insisted on the compositional unity of the final form.<sup>12</sup> He defends the unity and coherence of the Testament by focusing on the main leitmotifs that bind the different parts of the text together. The most extensive treatment of the composition of *TJ* is given by Nicholls.<sup>13</sup> Nicholls tries to trace the tradition history of the text back to four distinct sources. Finally, Schaller adopted a strictly textual approach to the compositional problems of *TJ*.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, he shows that the different parts of the text must have been intentionally connected to each other by the author or editor of the text.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Schaller gives a detailed account of the numerous errors and tensions in the text.<sup>16</sup> Schaller concludes that these errors and tensions throw serious doubt on the skill of the editor of the final form of *TJ*. He criticises Nicholls's distinction between four sources, concluding that on the basis of the present text of *TJ*, it is virtually impossible to delineate the different sources behind it with precision.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the origin of *TJ* has been a debated issue in recent scholarship. In the early research, several scholars assumed a (partly) Christian origin of the Testament.<sup>18</sup> Others proposed an origin among the Jewish sects of the Essenes or the Therapeutae.<sup>19</sup> Spittler, in the introduction to his translation of the *Testament*, accepted the Jewish origin, possibly among the Therapeutae, but added a new hypothesis. He argued that chapters 46–53 are a later addition that possibly originates from the second century Christian sect of the Montanists. In his view, the Montanists would have added this part of the *Testament* to have a scriptural example of ecstatic prophecy.<sup>20</sup>

Van der Horst argues, however, that we have no proof of either the origin among the Therapeutae or the addition of the last part of the Testament by the Montanists.<sup>21</sup> Among his arguments against Spittler's are that Tertullian's familiarity with the *Testament* – one of the reasons why Spittler thinks of the Montanist sect as a possible origin – does not imply anything about Montanist origins. Furthermore, Spittler's main argument does not apply, because if it were correct, *TJ* would never have been considered a part of Scripture by the Montanists' contemporaries.<sup>22</sup> Against the widespread hypothesis of an origin among the Therapeutae, he argues that the similarities between the *Testament's* contents

<sup>12</sup> J.J. Collins, 'Structure and Meaning in the Testament of Job', in: G. MacRae, editor, *Society of Biblical Literature: 1974 Seminar Papers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), pp. 35–52.

<sup>13</sup> Peter H. Nicholls, *The Structure and Purpose of the Testament of Job* (1982).

<sup>14</sup> Schaller, 'Zur Komposition und Konzeption', pp. 46–92.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–71.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75–79.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81–87.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf P. Spittler, 'The Testament of Job: A History of Research and Interpretation', in: Knibb and Van der Horst, *Studies on the Testament of Job*, pp. 12, 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>20</sup> Spittler, 'Testament of Job', p. 834.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, pp. 308–309.

<sup>22</sup> Van der Horst, pp. 107–109.

and Philo's description of the Therapeutae are too insignificant to base a theory about a Therapeutic origin on.<sup>23</sup> Van der Horst's conclusion is that we can be fairly certain about the Jewish character of *TJ*, but that we simply lack sufficient evidence to locate its origin more precisely.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.4 MESSAGE AND RELATION TO THE BOOK OF JOB

I have summarised the contents of *TJ* almost completely without mentioning *BJ* because it is important to see that although *TJ* is a retelling of the canonical book of Job, it is a story in its own right. Once we have seen that, and have appreciated *TJ* on its own terms, we can go on to compare the two texts in order to see how *TJ* functions as an interpretation of *BJ*. An interesting way of comparing the two books has been offered by Christopher Begg in a recent article.<sup>25</sup> He investigates the relation between *TJ* and *BJ* by comparing the characters and their transformation in the two books.

Begg deals with God, Job, and Satan as an interconnected set of characters. Compared to *BJ*, God is much more in the background in the Testament. This is the case in many different respects. For example, in all cases where *BJ*'s God seems to harm Job in any way, the author of *TJ* replaces God with Satan. Furthermore, God does not speak to Job directly as in the whirlwind scene of *BJ* 38–41.<sup>26</sup> This shift from God's opposition to Job to Satan's battle with Job leads to a completely different portrayal of Job himself. In fact *TJ* elaborates only on the patient, wealthy and virtuous Job of the first chapters of *BJ*, leaving out all the later doubt and anger which might harm Job's image as a hero. The portrayal of Job as a hero is strengthened by letting him know why and on behalf of whom he suffers. He is, in fact, allowed to choose whether or not he will suffer, and he is given the promise of eternal recompense if he endures. Thus, it is much easier to endure for the Job of the *Testament* than for the Job of *BJ*.<sup>27</sup> As we have noticed already, Satan is much more important in *TJ* than in *BJ*. Nevertheless, the position of Satan before God in *TJ* is the same as in *BJ*, because he has to ask permission for all the evils he wants to do to Job. We could even say that his position in *TJ* is weaker than in *BJ*, because Job is portrayed as someone who sees through all Satan's tricks and eventually wins the battle with him.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, in *BJ* Job does not gain real insight into the nature of his predicament.

One of the aspects of *TJ* that has attracted quite a lot of attention is the role of women in it.<sup>29</sup> *TJ* extends the role of Job's first wife Sitidos and the daughters of

<sup>23</sup> Van der Horst, pp. 114–115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Begg, 'Comparing Characters: The Book of Job and the *Testament of Job*', in: W.A.M. Beuken, editor, *The Book of Job*, Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium 114 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1994), pp. 435–445.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 437–438.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 439–440.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Van der Horst, 'Images', pp. 93–116; Susan R. Garrett, 'The "Weaker Sex" in the Testament of Job', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993), pp. 55–70; Peter Machinist, 'Job's Daughters and Their Inheritance in the Testament of Job and Its Biblical Congeners', in: William G.

his second wife Dinah. Whereas *BJ* talks about Job's first wife in a negative way, in *TJ* she appears as a virtuous woman who does all she can to help Job in his miserable condition.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, in confrontation with Satan, she is shown to be easily deceivable, having little insight into the real nature of things.<sup>31</sup> This is the main difference from the picture we get of the three daughters after Job's restoration. They are given garments through which they receive the heavenly insight that enabled Job to endure in his suffering. With this insight, they prove superior to Job's brother Nereus and his new sons, who all remain attached to the worldly regret about Job's death.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, in comparing the characters in *BJ* and *TJ*, we find that, due to the thoroughly positive portrayal of Job's endurance in the latter, the position of the friends needed to be changed. In *TJ*, they receive quite a dull portrayal as somewhat stupid people who are only interested in worldly things. Only Elihu is an exception to this common picture of the friends. Whereas in *BJ*, it seems that Elihu's contribution is evaluated neutrally, in *TJ* he is explicitly described as one inspired by Satan.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most obvious differences between the two accounts of the suffering of Job is, of course, the total absence of the discussion about theodicy in *TJ*. This moved Schaller to remark: "Das Theodizeeproblem wird gar nicht berührt."<sup>34</sup> This is true in the sense that the dialogues with the friends about the reason why Job is suffering are absent in *TJ*. In another sense, however, I would question whether the problem of evil is really absent from the *Testament*. The way in which the *Testament* deals with the problem of evil and the solution that it offers, is radically different from *BJ*. In *BJ*, the main topic of the book is the question of why Job suffers, a question that is given a series of answers of which, ultimately, none is wholly conclusive and satisfying—at least to modern readers. In *TJ*, however, no doubt is left concerning the reason for Job's suffering. The author does not simply leave out the dialogues, thus making the biblical Job fit better into the narrative form of the testament. Rather, by making clear for what purpose Job suffered, the *Testament* offers a popularised but coherent alternative to the intellectual and ambiguous approach to evil in *BJ*. The reason behind this might be that the author and the audience of *TJ* felt uneasy with the uncertainty about the cause of suffering suggested in *BJ*. Therefore, the author of *TJ* makes unambiguously clear who lets people suffer: Satan, who is ultimately under the control of God and of *people who suffer well*.

What suffering well amounts to is what the *Testament* wishes to show, thereby filling an important gap in *BJ*: how to live with suffering. The central theme of the *Testament* is Job's repeated admonition of endurance. This central theme of endurance is described in the *Testament* by three Greek terms (ὕπομονή, καρτερία, and μακροθυμία) that are all more or less synonyms for endurance. Although

Dever and J. Edward Wright, editors, *The Echoes of Many Texts: Reflections on Jewish and Christian Traditions*, Essays in Honor of Lou H. Silberman, Brown Judaic Studies 313 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 67–80.

<sup>30</sup> Begg, pp. 440–441.

<sup>31</sup> Van der Horst, pp. 99–101.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101–105.

<sup>33</sup> Begg, pp. 442–444.

<sup>34</sup> Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, p. 315.

the terms are largely synonymous, Haas (1989) has tried to isolate the specific semantic fields in which each of the terms are used in the Testament.<sup>35</sup> He argues that the terms stand for three different aspects of enduring in suffering. Where ὑπομονή is used, endurance means to stand firm in the battle with Satan. The semantic field of ὑπομονή is a battle.<sup>36</sup> Where καρτερία is used, the semantic field is that of a *pancratation*, which is a specific kind of man-to-man fight in the arena. Here, endurance as καρτερία denotes the “tirelessness, stamina, stubbornness or toughness by which Job as an athlete takes the blows etc. of his opponent Satan in order to hold out against him.” The term καρτερία specifies the way in which one stands firm in the battle (ὑπομονή).<sup>37</sup> Finally, endurance as μακροθυμία denotes the patience by which one endures. This word is used, for instance, in the LXX for God’s long suffering in delaying his wrath or judgement.<sup>38</sup> Haas describes the Job of the *Testament* as a proselyte and interprets the three terms used for endurance as pointing to various aspects of the struggle of a proselyte in a hostile society.

If we compare this main theme of *TJ* with *BJ*, two issues come to the fore. First, we find that the *Testament* promotes a radically different attitude towards evil by personalising it in terms of the devil. Although the prologue of *BJ* shows that both God and Satan have their role in the suffering of Job, it evidently does not advise people to fight against them to get rid of evil. By shifting the responsibility for evil entirely onto the devil, *TJ* presents evil as something one can do battle against, and even conquer by standing firm. Therefore, the *Testament’s* admonition to persevere and be patient in suffering does not end up supporting a passive attitude towards evil.<sup>39</sup>

Second, as we saw above, *TJ* removes much of the ambiguity of *BJ* by pointing out why Job had to suffer and how he had to cope with it from the very outset. On the one hand, we might see this is as an advantage of the *Testament* over the biblical account. On the other hand, it also makes *TJ* less open to fresh interpretations of evil and suffering than its biblical counterpart. *BJ* can be appreciated from a wide variety of perspectives precisely because its meaning is so ambiguous. This ambiguity gives readers the opportunity to read the text in a way fits their own interest. *TJ* resolves many of the ambiguities of *BJ*. Because of this, it was probably able to serve the religious community better in its own time. For other communities in different situations, however, the clearly demarcated message of the *Testament* might make it more difficult to apply this message to their own context.

Finally, a significant difference between both accounts of the story of Job is that in the biblical account suffering is, so to speak, a possibility. It is something that is not normal but can happen, and when it happens it should be possible to

<sup>35</sup> For another – disputable – interpretation of the three terms, see James Arthur Dumke, ‘The Suffering of the Righteous in Jewish Apocryphal Literature’, Ph.D thesis, Duke University (1980), p. 313.

<sup>36</sup> Cees Haas, ‘Job’s Perseverance in the Testament of Job’, in: Knibb and Van der Horst, *Studies on the Testament of Job*, pp. 118–119.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125–128.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128–129.

<sup>39</sup> Contra J.G. Schenderling and L. Cozijnsen, *I. Het testament van Job: een document van joodse vroomheid uit het begin van onze jaartelling. II. Het testament van Salomo: een document van joodse magie uit de eerste eeuwen van onze jaartelling*, Na de schriften 6 (Kampen: Kok, 1990), pp. 14–15.

give obvious reasons for it. The main problem of the biblical Job, then, is that in his case, he cannot see what these reasons are. One might say that the setting of Job is a context of privilege, in which evil is expected to be an exception to an otherwise happy life. This is radically different in the *Testament's* account of Job. The *Testament* takes the experience of evil for granted, and shows no surprise at the suffering of the righteous Job. Therefore, the *Testament* does not speculate about possible reasons for evil, but it suggests ways for dealing with it. If we look at the messages of the two Job narratives from this perspective, it might reveal something concerning the social setting of the documents. In the previous chapter, I argued that one of the tasks of hermeneutics is to locate the religious identity related aspects of interpretation, social identity being one of them. Although it is extremely difficult to locate the social positions of the texts because we know so little of the times and places of their origins, the comparison of their approaches to evil may give us some indication of their settings.

### 3.5 HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTION

The final question I need to discuss is this: How does *TJ* function as an interpretation of *BJ*? The first impression might be that it is a typical example of the fact that in many cases, readers are not at all interested in the historical meaning of a text. They do with the text, whatever they want to. However, on closer examination, this is not a fair judgement. In several respects, *TJ* is an ideal case for reflecting on the nature of religious interpretations of Scripture. It is too much of a story to allow the modern interpreter to project his own post-Enlightenment perspective onto it. We simply cannot say that *TJ* is meant as some sort of primitive pre-critical exegesis. Yet, *TJ* is in so many respects dependent on *BJ* that it challenges the reader to investigate in what sense it is an interpretation of the latter.

An important step in elucidating the hermeneutical mechanisms behind *TJ* is to recognise its 'midrashic' nature.<sup>40</sup> Peter Machinist has drawn attention to the midrashic character of the final chapters 46–53.<sup>41</sup> According to Machinist, we should not read this part of *TJ* as a piece of sheer fantasy, but as a serious attempt to interpret a problem in biblical Job in the light of the whole of Scripture. The problem that the interpreter of *BJ* is faced with, is why the daughters of Job share the inheritance with the sons, which is very unusual in the Bible. On the one hand, the author of *TJ* solves this problem by alluding to another part of Scripture, the Pentateuch, which mentions the case of the daughters of Zelophahad, who came to Moses to ask whether they may receive the inheritance of their father so that their family's goods may not be lost. In a similar way, the author of *TJ* lets the daughters of Job ask for an inheritance.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the author of *TJ*

<sup>40</sup> There is much debate in Jewish studies about the term 'midrash'. In recent studies – Boyarin's work for example – the term denotes a certain way of dealing with biblical texts. Others have rejected this loose way of using the term and propose to restrict it to one particular genre of Jewish exegesis. For an elaborate discussion of this problem, see Godelieve Teugels, *Midrasj in de bijbel of midrasj op de bijbel? Een exemplarische studie van "de verloving van Rebekka" (Gn 24) in de bijbel en de rabbijnse midrasj* (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Machinist, 'Job's Daughters', pp. 67–80.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70–75.

confirms existing social structures by not giving the daughters a material part of the inheritance. Rather, *TJ* gives the daughters a more desirable inheritance – in the eyes of its readers – namely, the possession of heavenly goods. The author tries to show that there is a biblical basis for this solution too, by referring to God’s command to Job in Job 38 and 40: “Arise, gird your loins like a man.”<sup>43</sup>

Whether or not we agree with Machinist’s analysis, his work on the final chapters of *TJ* supplies several valuable insights into the hermeneutical principles behind the *Testament*. First, in the midrashic approach to Scripture, the interpreter concentrates on the gaps in the text. The haggada offered in *TJ* rests partly upon the fact that in the text of *BJ*, many things are ambiguous or left open and therefore require the readers’ interpretative activity to fill in the gaps. The midrashic interpreter is very sensitive to this need to fill. One can easily add more examples from other parts of *TJ*, such as the fact that in biblical Job almost nothing is said about what righteous actions Job performed to justify the reference to his piety, which gives the reader the opportunity to tell in more detail what these actions were. We could take the *Testament*’s extensive treatment of Job’s benevolence to the poor as a solution meant to fill this gap. Another example is the attention of the *Testament* to the figure of Sitidos. It tells us in detail in what respects she did well in helping her husband, and in what respects she failed under the trials of Satan. This might be seen as an answer to the ambiguous character of the references to Job’s wife in biblical Job.

The second valuable insight that Machinist’s analysis offers is that, in the case of the inheritance of the daughters, the author of *TJ* uses Scriptural material – inside or outside *BJ* – to fill in the gap. This is a common feature of midrashic exegesis. In *TJ*, however, it is not so prominent as in some forms of later rabbinical midrash. Jacob Neusner makes a distinction between two kinds of rabbinical haggadic midrash.<sup>44</sup> One deals with scriptural heroes; the other with sages. He argues that one of the main differences between the two is that those that deal with a scriptural hero make extensive use of scriptural material throughout the narrative, whereas those that deal with sages quite naturally do not.<sup>45</sup> Neusner also discusses midrashim that seem to fall somewhere between stories about a scriptural hero and those that deal with a sage, such as midrashim about Moses.<sup>46</sup> *TJ* seems to fit into this category. Sometimes, we discern allusions to biblical stories behind a case of gap filling. *TJ*, for instance, seems to fill in the gap on what the word ‘God fearing’ of biblical Job 1:1 could mean. It tells us how Job destroyed the temple of an idol near his home. There is a biblical parallel to this story in Judges 6, where the judge Gideon destroys a sanctuary of Baal after an angel of the Lord visited him and told him to do so.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Machinist, p. 76.

<sup>44</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to Midrash: The Workings of Rabbinic Bible Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 191.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212, 222.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>47</sup> Allusions are always hard to prove. This one is no exception. There is a similar story in Jewish traditions about Abraham: Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. from the German by Henrietta Szold, 7 vols., 3rd edition (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967–1969), I, pp. 213–214; Spittler, ‘Testament of Job’, p. 840; Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, p. 327. Hence, it is uncertain whether the Gideon story directly influenced *TJ*, or whether the story was derived from

It is clear that to modern readers of Jewish midrash, this kind of gap filling may appear as a rather free floating way of dealing with the biblical texts. Boyarin, however, shows how these interpretive strategies are essential for maintaining the identity of the religious community based on the authority of their Scripture:

Studying the Torah – interpretation – is the dominant cultural practice of rabbinic Judaism. As such it does the work that alternate cultural practices do in other societies. One of the tasks of a successful culture is to preserve the old while making it nevertheless new—to maintain continuity with a tradition without freezing it. Intertextuality is a powerful instrument in the hands of culture for accomplishing this task. As Julia Kristeva has written, “every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text.” By absorbing and transforming, the textual system both establishes continuity with the past and renews itself for the future. The simultaneous rejection and preservation of tradition in midrash is shown in the all pervasive quotation which forms its very warp and woof.<sup>48</sup>

According to Boyarin, Scripture functions in the process of actualising itself as an *intertext*. In renewing the meaning of tradition for his own time, the midrashist weaves a web of scriptural material into a new story that retains its authoritative status by consisting of the old material. The scriptural associations function as a text in between the old and the new story – hence the term ‘intertext’ – the old material being taken out of its old context and arranged in such a way that it fits into the new.<sup>49</sup>

If my suggestion about the allusion to the Gideon story in *TJ* is correct, it provides a fascinating example of an intertextual process. As we saw above, the religious community of *TJ* may have experienced problems in living with the ambiguous and speculative character of *BJ*. Therefore, the author of *TJ* interprets the figure of Job in the light of another scriptural hero, Gideon, who fits better in the solution *TJ* offers to evil: fight against the evil powers in the world. The angel appearing to Gideon greets him with the words: “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” (Judges 6: 12, NIV) At first, Gideon is very much like the biblical Job, asking why Israel is experiencing so much suffering due to the oppression of the Midianites. Yet, the Lord answers Gideon in the same way as *TJ* answers all the ambiguity and speculation of *BJ*. The angel says to Gideon: “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” (Judges 6: 14, NIV). Thus, Gideon goes out and destroys the sanctuary of Baal and Asherah, followed by a battle with the Midianites, while the God fearing Job of *TJ* destroys the temple of the idol, followed by the battle with Satan.

The Gideon story, if indeed alluded to in the *Testament*, functions as a text in between *BJ* and the early Jewish interpreters. It helps the interpreters to overcome the difficulties they experience with the original text, and eventually enables the religious community to maintain the authority of *both* their interpretation *and* the original text.

the Abraham traditions, or both.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Overall, however, although interpretive strategies for maintaining authority are present in the *Testament*, it is not so much concerned with making truth claims. Therefore, the question whether it interprets the biblical original *correctly* seems somewhat out of place. There are two reasons, however, why it is nevertheless interesting to deal with the question. First, it is hermeneutically relevant to observe that, in spite of all our hermeneutical interest in true interpretation, many religious interpreters are not at all concerned with true interpretation—and trivially so! What the author of the *Testament* is interested in is an insightful, delightful, attractive story that people enjoy and that might help them to persevere in the struggles of life. If this is (an important) part of the religious interpretation of Scripture, and no doubt it is, then it is highly relevant for hermeneutics to realise this and to think about the implications of it for its focus on true interpretation. What *TJ* shows is that there is a connection between what we could call an ‘aesthetic mode of interpretation’ of Scripture and questions of truth. The author of the *Testament* presents a certain picture of the way the world is and the way in which we should live, but these claims are taken up into a narrative framework that keeps them within an aesthetic context. In a later chapter, we will investigate what this means for the status of these truth claims.

Finally, it is worth asking whether *TJ* interprets *BJ* truthfully because, as a matter of fact, history shows us that both the Jewish and the Christian tradition clearly placed this text outside their accepted religious traditions. Apparently, the tradition denied that it is a ‘true’ interpretation of Scripture.<sup>50</sup> We should not jump to this conclusion though. Although the text was not included in the Jewish and Christian canons, we do not know of any dispute about its authenticity, truth or appropriateness as part of Scripture. Therefore, I would like to suggest another reason why *TJ* did not make it as part of canonical Scripture. One might compare the relation between *TJ* and *BJ* to the relation between a historical novel and an academic book about a certain period. Both a historical novel and an academic work will – it may be hoped – share a certain amount of information. As an *historical* novel, the novel will accurately describe the situation during the period. If the novel has been skillfully written, it will contain an aesthetic surplus which will normally be somewhat parasitic upon the historical accuracy of the plot. When it comes to our final point of reference for information on the period, however, we will rely upon the academic work, rather than the novel.

In a similar fashion, we might say that *TJ* was appreciated at various levels in the tradition of the synagogue and the church as an aesthetic transformation of *BJ*. Yet it was not accepted as a definitive point of reference for the faithful—perhaps not primarily because it contained specific heterodox or erroneous views, but because it was simply considered as not intended for building one’s faith upon. This way of looking at the non-canonical status of the text corresponds to what I said earlier about the aesthetic orientation of the text.

<sup>50</sup> Schaller, *Das Testament Hiobs*, pp. 318–321; Spittler, ‘Testament of Job’, pp. 834, 836.

