

## **JOB 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary (Illuminations)**

**CL Seow**

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**T**he mere size of the publication, the extent of the background information, as well as the articulated commentary and theological interpretation of the first 21 Chapters of the Book of Job may intimidate the reader at first glance. However, the avoidance of stilted speech and preference of sound, logical and reader-friendly discourse soon arrest the attention of the reader irresistibly.

The comprehensive *Introduction* (248 pages!) captures all background issues of the text, manuscript transmissions, text integrity, setting, genre, artistry, reception history in different traditions, as well as in artistic depictions in literature, visual arts and music. This background together with the indexes of authors, subjects and textual references (both biblical and non-biblical) may be viewed arguably as the most helpful resource currently available for the critical study of the Job text.

The two sections I found most illuminating are the *Integrity* (26-39) of the text and the *Theology* (87-109) of the text of Job. Without assuming a seamless text, Seow provides convincing argumentation to maintain the text in its entirety for purposes of interpretation. The “theologies” of the different voices of the text are represented individually without jeopardizing the over-riding theology of the implied author. Lucid and insightful argumentation prepares a pathway opposite to those current tendencies to split the text into irreconcilable “theologies” without any attempt towards a “theology” of the Book of Job. [I use the inverted commas as I’m not really comfortable with the concept “theology” in this respect.]

The commentary is guided by sound grammatical and rhetorical analysis, intra- as well as inter-textual biblical and extra-biblical references. Clear cases in point are Seow’s interpretation of the “adversary” of the frame narrative. He is of the opinion that it denotes metaphorically divine doubt in a non-dualistic manner still prevalent in the Persian period, and that it does not represent a direct opponent to God. Seow’s interpretation of the brief response of Job’s wife steers clear between old fashioned male chauvinistic demeaning of a foolish wife and a feminist exoneration of Job’s wife as the true hero of the story. The wording of the text marks her response as an important narrative and dialogue motif and accentuates her disregard for ethical correctness.

The translation Seow provides, ranks amongst the best available. The articulated close reading of the text and profound theological insight ensure that this commentary is currently unequalled amongst scholarly enquiry into the text of Job. The brief sections *History of Consequences* amidst the commentary of chapters are real jewels for the attentive reader. The commentary certainly sets a standard hard to challenge. One can only

hope that the well-deserved scholarly reception of the first part of the commentary would encourage the author for the mammoth task of the second part of Job for which there is already ardent anticipation.

This illuminating commentary will undoubtedly remain an invaluable source for the study of the Book of Job for many years to come.