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Review of Duck-Woo Nam, *Talking About God: Job 42: 7-9 and the Nature of God in the Book of Job*

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Duck-Woo Nam, *Talking About God: Job 42:7-9 and the Nature of God in the Book of Job* (Studies in Biblical Literature 49; New York: Peter Lang, 2003). Pp. xix + 240. Cloth, \$65.95. ISBN 0-8204-6139-3.

As its subtitle indicates, Duck-Woo Nam's book *Talking About God* is an attempt to understand what the Book of Job has to say about God by analyzing it in light of God's remark to Job's three friends, לֹא נִכְוֶנָה דְבַרְתֶּם אֵלַי נִכְוֶנָה. The book's purpose is to attempt to answer "In what has Job spoken about or to God more נִכְוֶנָה than the friends?" (1). A brief introduction (including two pages of "Personal Background" which are not in fact very personal or revealing) sets up the problem. This is succeeded by a chapter analyzing Job 42:7-9, followed by three chapters discussing "the nature of God" in the speeches (respectively) of the three friends, Job, and YHWH. (For religious reasons, I will substitute these letters for the full name spelled out, as Nam uses it. Oddly, though this name is printed throughout the book in roman type, every other divine name used—e.g., *El*—is printed in italics.) A brief conclusion summarizes the work. There is a bibliography, separated (for some reason) into separate sections for books, articles, and dissertations, and two indices, one of sources (mostly biblical) and another of the many modern scholars to whom reference is made. Endnotes are unhelpfully grouped at the end of each chapter. Hebrew text, fortunately, appears in Hebrew characters, but the difficulty this poses in an English work has led to a few mistakes: misarranged text when a phrase runs over to a second line (35, 93) and cases where characters appear inappropriately in the opposite language (e.g., m for מ, p. 101; דְנָא for "and," p. 130; seghol for comma [?], p. 156).

Nam is clearly familiar with a wide range of scholarship, both Jewish and Christian (he is a pastor by profession); but the three pages devoted to "The Meaning of נִכְוֶנָה" (pp. 22-24) left me dubious about the potential value of the book for scholars as opposed to those with a primarily religious interest in the book of Job. He notes that the words "you have not spoken about me" are misleading if the rest of the line is not taken into account (22), since the friends have indeed spoken about God; but this is obvious. He plausibly argues that an adverbial usage of נִכְוֶנָה seems more syntactically appropriate than a verbal one, first proposing translations of "reliably" or "what is sincere" (23). But the translation he finally chooses, on which the rest of the book will be based, is justified in only a single sentence: "As the root (כּוּן) suggests something established, the adverbial word נִכְוֶנָה can be rendered as 'constructively'" (23). The important points he derives from God's use of the phrase are that "one may conclude that Job has spoken about God constructively (*erectum*) and to God in the manner of Y's servant (*directum*)" (24); *erectum* and *directum* are taken from a comment of Delitzsch. The friends, by contrast, never address God directly, and their comments are not נִכְוֶנָה, not "constructive."

An analysis of the friends' speech about God demonstrates that (with minor differences) they all view him as being at the top of a hierarchy, from which position he offers the proper retribution for human actions. This picture is not "constructive," apparently because they have not responded adequately to Job's challenge; "the friends' God is shaped as the object of lifeless systematization, without being formed into a constructive portrait.... This may be the reason why [YHWH] gets angry with them in

terms of their theological testimony that needs to be deconstructed” (59). Job, by contrast, agrees that God is transcendent, but *not* that the failure of correct retribution shows that God is indifferent to humanity; he insists that “the divine power sometimes overwhelms divine justice and mercy” (106). The constructive element here would seem to be that “Because of Job’s questions and challenges ... God has to remove his curtain and to break his silence in order to take his turn in the disputation...” (107).

God’s own words present him as (1) wise designer of creation who upholds the world order; (2) sovereign lord; (3) sustainer of creation (134f.). We thus learn that, though God is the “ultimate legal authority,” he is “willing to have disputation with his servant.” The introduction of Behemoth and Leviathan reshapes Job’s “moral vision” by assuring him that “there are no powers in the world beyond the control of God.” The upshot of YHWH’s presentation of himself is that “it is certain that God is unconventional by normal human standards” (163). All of these points are “more compatible with the speeches of Job than with those of the friends” (164). It would seem, then, that Job has spoken constructively in two ways: (1) by forcing God, with his challenge in direct address, to speak to him, that is, to encounter humanity directly; and (2) by creating a situation in which Job himself can develop theologically, by “elucidating divine power and freedom which are not restricted to the law of retribution ordinary humans understand.” The friends, by contrast, demonstrate no theological development because “they do not take Job’s human existential inquiries seriously” (191). The book concludes that Job is a model for correct behavior: “Therefore, whoever seeks God in the same manner as Job may experience a new vision from [YHWH] the personal God and find a favor in him” (192).

Though framed as a work of scholarship, the book succeeds better as a work of theology (though even here it is not to my taste). I cannot see any justification for the contention that נכונה implies that Job spoke “constructively” and directly “to” God as a “protesting servant” (108, 164, 189). The latter point has absolutely no connection with the word, while the former point is contradicted by נכונה’s being a Niphal and not an active form. Job’s words may be “constructed,” but they cannot be “constructive.” More seriously, Nam’s approach fails to take into account the real reasons for God’s actions, which we the readers know but Job is never told, even in the speeches “from the whirlwind,” when God pretends to take up his challenge. There is a higher level of reality that Job is not privy to, but no “higher levels of moral order” (190) are found there, as Nam wishes to show.

There are a number of observations in the book for which I am grateful: a comparison of Job 7:21 and Exod 34:7, showing (among other things) how נצר is reversed in the Job verse (83 f.); his remark that the ostrich רננים in 39:13 is a counterpoint to Job’s “May no sound of joy [רנה] be heard in it” (3:7) (142); and his juxtaposition of Job’s belief in an “advocate / witness / interpreter in heaven” with “the opposite fact” that the frame story gives Job not an advocate but an Adversary (98). Beyond these, I found little here that I will add to my presentation when next I teach the book of Job.

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