

There are several Mesopotamian texts which wrestle with the concepts of justice and evil, particularly when evil strikes someone who is presumably innocent.

“A Man and His God” tells the story of a man who believes he is an innocent sufferer, confused that he should be afflicted with illness. This is similar to Job. Unlike Job, this man assumed he must have done something wrong, so he confessed an unknown sin; then the god responded with an oracle of deliverance for healing.

“Poem of a Righteous Sufferer” is similar in form to a declarative praise psalm, with stereotypical poetic language and imagery for suffering. This man claims to be suffering with numerous afflictions despite trying to be loyal and faithful. This is similar to Job. Unlike Job, this man lamented that he wished he knew if what he did was pleasing to the gods, but there was no way to know the moral reasoning of the gods. This man assumed he did something wrong, and tried several occult solutions; in the end he received deliverance from his god.

“Babylonian Theodicy” is a dialogue between a presumably innocent sufferer and a friend. This is closest in genre/form to Job, in which Job discussed his situation with friends. Unlike in Job, this man’s friend said there is no way to understand the ways of the gods – not because they transcend us in wisdom – but because they are morally capricious. This friend also said the gods made mankind in such a way that it is evil and unjust [a theological implication of believing people were created from the body of a rebellious god].

All three of these texts are shorter and structurally more simple than Job, and do not attempt to rebuke the folk theology as occurs in Job. Job also appears to be unique in theodicy literature for having a narrative frame around the dialogue. The perspective of God is much different in Job also, in that while the sufferer wrestles with the reason for his suffering, he never slips in his confidence in God to the point of thinking God is on a moral level with humans and capricious like humans.