



# Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies)

Dan Mathewson

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The Book of Job functions as literature of survival where the main character, Job, deals with the trauma of suffering, attempts to come to terms with a collapsed moral and theological world, and eventually reconnects the broken pieces of his world into a new moral universe, which explains and contains the trauma of his recent experiences and renders his life meaningful again. The key is Job's death imagery. In fact, with its depiction of death in the prose tale and its frequent discussions of death in the poetic sections, Job may be the most death-oriented book in the bible. In particular, Job, in his speeches, articulates his experience of suffering as the experience of death. To help understand this focus on death in Job we turn to the psychohistorian, Robert Lifton, who investigates the effects on the human psyche of various traumatic experiences (wars, natural disasters, etc). According to Lifton, survivors of disaster often sense that their world has "collapsed" and they engage in a struggle to go on living. Part of this struggle involves finding meaning in death and locating death's place in the continuity of life. Like many such survivors, Job's understanding of death is a flashpoint indicating his bewilderment (or "desymbolization") in the early portions of his speeches, and then, later on, his arrival at what Lifton calls "resymbolization," the reconfiguration of a world that can account for disaster and render death - and life - meaningful again.



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