

The Suffering and the Servant: Who is Job?

Midwest Jewish Chaplains' Group – Yom Iyun

1. *What do we know and what have we learned previously about Job?*
2. *Do you think the story / idea of a person like Job speaks to patients in the hospital? Why?*

BACKGROUND: Quick Summary of the Book of Job

THE BOOK BEGINS BY INTRODUCING JOB AS “PERFECT AND UPRIGHT, AND ONE THAT FEARED GOD, AND ESCHEWED EVIL¹”: ESSENTIALLY, A “GOOD” PERSON. THEN, GOD BOASTS TO HA-SATAN ABOUT JOB’S PIETY, AND HA-SATAN WAGERS A BET WITH GOD THAT JOB MIGHT NOT BE SO FAITHFUL IF ALL OF HIS PRIVILEGES IN LIFE WERE TAKEN AWAY, SAYING THAT JOB WILL THEN, “CURSE YOU TO YOUR FACE” (JOB 1:11). GOD ENTERS INTO THIS BET AND JOB IS INFORMED THAT ALL TEN OF HIS CHILDREN HAVE DIED, HIS PROPERTY AND WEALTH ALL DESTROYED; AND THEN, A FEW VERSES LATER, HE DEVELOPS BOILS ALL OVER HIS BODY FROM HEAD TO TOE. THEN, CHAPTERS 3-42 OF THE BOOK ARE DIALOGUES ABOUT THE NATURE OF AND POSSIBLE MEANING(S) OF SUFFERING BY JOB AND HIS FRIENDS. JOB CHALLENGES GOD’S JUSTICE, CLAIMING HIS OWN INNOCENCE AND REFUSING TO ACCEPT HIS FRIENDS’ RATIONALES FOR WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN. GOD REPLIES TO JOB “FROM OUT OF A WHIRLWIND” (JOB 38:1) BLASTING HIM WITH ACCUSATORY QUESTIONS LIKE, “WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH?” - MOSTLY DESCRIBING GOD’S POWER AND MIGHT IN THE WORLD. THEN, IN A SUDDEN AND RADICAL SWITCH, GOD SAYS TO JOB’S FRIENDS, “MY WRATH IS KINDLED AGAINST YOU... “FOR YOU HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF ME RIGHTLY, AS HAS MY SERVANT JOB²”.

BEGINNING AT THE END (just after God speaks from the whirlwind):

Job 42:7 and 8

וַיְהִי אַחֲרַי דְּבַר יְהוָה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
הַתִּימְנִי חָרָה אַפַּי בְּךָ וּבִשְׁנֵי רֵעֶיךָ כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדֵי אִיּוֹב:

1. Translation from King James Version (1611/1769)

2. Translation from King James Version (1611/1769)

וְעִתָּהּ קָחוּ-לָכֶם שְׁבַע-פְּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים וּלְכוּ | אֶל-עַבְדֵי אִיּוֹב וְהַעֲלִיתֶם
עוֹלָה בְּעַדְכֶם וְאִיּוֹב עַבְדִּי יִתְּפֹלֵל עֲלֵיכֶם כִּי אִם-פָּגַע אִשָּׁא לְבַלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם
נְבִלָה כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדֵי אִיּוֹב:

כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדֵי אִיּוֹב - List of English Translations:

Revised Standard Version

ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath

The Bible in Basic English

you have not said what is right about me, as my servant Job has

Darby Bible

ye have not spoken of me rightly, like my servant Job

King James Version

ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job

Jewish Publication Society Tanakh

ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath

Webster's Bible

ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job

World English Bible

you have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has

Young's Literal Translation

ye have not spoken concerning Me rightly, like My servant Job

QUESTIONS:

1. What differences do you see in these translations?
2. What do you think Job did right and his friends did wrong?

MEETING JOB

Job 1:1

אִישׁ הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ-עוּץ אִיּוֹב שְׁמוֹ וְהָיָה | הָאִישׁ הַהוּא תָם וְיָשָׁר וְיָרָא אֱלֹהִים
וְסָר מֵרָע:

There was a man in the land, Uz³, his name was Job; this man,

3. "Uz" is a location with unknown origins, religious practices, beliefs. His offerings to God / religious practices are not specifically Jewish nor are they particularly not-Jewish. Job is meant to be "every-man".

he was "תָּם וְיָשָׁר" and he feared God and eschewed/shunned evil⁴.

English translations of "תָּם וְיָשָׁר"

- blameless and upright
- just and perfect
- perfect and upright
- whole-hearted and upright

THE BOOK OF JOB MEETS THEOLOGY

3. What (theological) purpose might the adjectives "תָּם וְיָשָׁר" serve in the Book of Job?
4. What questions enter the discussion now that Job is known by the Biblical narrative to be תָּם וְיָשָׁר?

Job 1:5 - Job's Personality, Parenting, and Psychology

וַיְהִי כִּי הִקְיִפוּ יְמֵי הַמְּשֻׁתָּה וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱיֹב וַיְקַדְּשֵׁם וְהִשְׁכִּים בְּבִקְרָה וְהִעֲלָה
עֹלוֹת מִסִּפֵּר בְּלֶמֶס כִּי אָמַר אֱיֹב אוֹלֵי חֲטָאוֹ בְּנֵי וּבְרָכוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּלִבָּבָם כָּכָה
יַעֲשֶׂה אֱיֹב כָּל־הַיָּמִים:

And it was so, when the days of feasting/drinking ended, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and blessed/cursed God in their hearts". Thus did Job all the days.

3. What type of personality is Job (his psychological state, etc.)?
4. What kinds of things does Job seem to worry about before the episode with God and Ha-Satan?
5. In your opinion, who is Ha-Satan?
6. Why might HaSatan be a character in this story?

A QUICK JOURNEY THROUGH MY THESIS:

4. Translation mine

JOB'S WIFE INVITES THEOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY:

Job 2:9
בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת
Bless/Curse God and/but die.

JOB IS INCITED BY HIS FRIENDS
INTO DIALOGUE ABOUT HIS FATE:

Job 3:26
וַיָּבֹא רָגֶז
And anger will come.

JOB CRIES OUT IN PAIN, WOUNDEDNESS/BETRAYAL:

Job 27:2
חַי־אֵל הִסִּיר מִשְׁפָּטִי וְשׂוּדֵי הַמָּוֶר נִפְשֵׁי:
Living-God deprived me of justice
And Shaddai embittered my self.

ENDING AT THE BEGINNING:

Job 42:7 and 8
My thesis is a re-translation of this important
verse, with special attention to one particular word:
Job 42:7 and 8
כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדֵי אֱיֹב:
My Translation of Job 42:7:
“For you have not spoken **to** me rightly, as has
my servant Job”

5. How does this change shift the message we can glean from the Book of Job?

6. What implications does it have for Jewish educators? Chaplains? Might you use this insight about Job in a pastoral/clinical setting? Why or why not?

“Talk to Me: Or, When More Bad Things Happen to Good People”

Job 42:7 and Job 42:8 are God’s final spoken words in the entire Tanakh⁵. The words contain God’s twice-spoken chastisement of Job’s friends and affirmation that, unlike his friends, Job has done right in God’s eyes.

WHAT DID JOB DO RIGHT AND THE FRIENDS DO WRONG?

Many commentators claim that Job’s “apology” in Job 42:6 (translated as “recant” or “relent” in many cases) is Job’s correct behavior which the friends ought to emulate. This interpretation, and all other such possibilities, are wrought with problems; it remains unclear precisely *what* Job’s friends did wrong and Job did right in God’s eyes.⁶ The possibilities previously suggested by scholars include both the suggestion that Job was “right” in speaking his “recant” at the end of the book (if it is, in fact, a “recant”) and also its opposite. The suggestion that the “recant” was Job’s “right” behavior is problematic, however, because an “apology” *follows* the friends’ advice and therefore does not indicate a break with the friends as would be suggested by God’s rebuke of the friends in favor of Job. The alternative explanation is also problematic, as Job’s frequent questioning of God’s divine justice is explicitly chastised by God. How could *this* sentiment, then, be what Job did “right” and the friends did wrong?

⁵ This was noted by Jack Miles in God: A Biography

⁶ “When the Lord says that Job has spoken rightly of him, does he refer to the repentance or the speeches?” (Miles, 313)

Scholars have argued for centuries about the precise meaning of these words spoken by God out of the whirlwind. A recent Pulitzer prize-winning author, Jack Miles, writes that,

When the Lord praises Job at the end of the book, he is praising both Job's earlier stubbornness with his human interlocutors and his final, utterly consistent, stiff-necked recalcitrance before the Lord himself. Job has won. The Lord has lost. But the loss, paradoxically, has preserved the Lord from demonization or irrelevance (Miles, 326).

אֵלַי

This word, articulated twice in a sequence of two subsequent verses, is a crucial sentence not only in the Book of Job, but also for the entirety of the Tanakh, and has deep implications for the whole of Biblical theology.

When God says these words of admonition to Job's friends, God is *literally* saying: "because you have not spoken right *to me*, as has my servant Job". We ultimately learn here that God, like Job, craves relationship with human beings.

Job's friends, unlike Job, speak **about** God, rather than **to God**. God wants us to speak to God: even when we are angry, even when we are tired of being alive, even when we are in pain, even when it is equally likely that we will spew curses or blessings in God's direction. God wants us to talk to God, not about God – God wants truth as we experience it, in all of its complicated forms, in all of its confusion and ambiguity. God does not want platitudes, or "wisdom" from the tradition: rather, God wants our words; God wants our hearts; God wants our relationship.