

The Book of Job (Yuov)
Temple Beth Shalom Torah Study – March 2, 2019
Mike Rubin

- 1) Book of Job.
- 2) Theodicy – Divine Justice; Why do the righteous suffer, why do the wicked prosper?
- 3) The relationship of Monotheism to the Theodicy Question.
 - a) When there is a single power controlling the universe, it is appropriate to hold that power responsible for what happens. Polytheism did not present the same quandary.
 - b) Assumption was that God was omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), and just (and merciful).
- 4) The Deuteronomic answer to Theodicy Question. Choose Life – follow God’s commandments and you will prosper. Choose death – do not follow God’s commandments and you will suffer horrible consequences.
 - a) The Deuteronomic assumption was that if you suffer, it is because of your own wickedness.
 - b) If God is all powerful, all knowing, and just, God would not let the innocent suffer or the wicked prosper. If the choice is that you have sinned or that God is not just, the assumption had to be that you have sinned and deserve the suffering.
- 5) Afterlife: (Heaven and Hell): The notion of an afterlife where one is rewarded and punished for their deeds in this life came much later, well after the Book of Job. At the time the Book of Job was written, Jews believed everyone died and went to Sheol (a place of darkness).
- 6) Time of the Book of Job
 - a) Date of authorship uncertain but most scholars agree it was composed sometime between the mid-6th Century to the mid-4th Century BCE (539-332 BCE) per JPS (p. 1502). This is after the destruction of the first Temple and during or after the Babylon Exile.
- 7) Authorship & Location of the Book of Job and the Religion of Job
 - a) Author unknown but presumably Jewish. Robert Oden calls Job the least Jewish book of Hebrew Bible. It does not use the Y name for God, but uses Shaddai, Elyon and other names for Mesopotamian Gods.
 - b) Job is generally understood to be not Jewish, though a believer in the one God. He is from the land of Uz, a name of Edom, or Kedem. Kedem is viewed as a legendary home of wisdom. (JPS, p. 1503). [Does this foreshadow the land of Oz where the famous wizard resided?]
- 8) The Book of Job is a monumental part of our “Wisdom Literature”. Wisdom literature includes Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom literature is an Egyptian-Mesopotamian genre including many works outside the Hebrew Bible and is aimed at teaching lessons or wisdom premised on the belief that the world is a rational place and if we learn history/wisdom, we can better make our way in the world. Wisdom literature was often a means of training princes and future rulers.
- 9) Ludlul Bel Nemeqi (“Let me Praise the Lord of Wisdom”) was a 2d Millennium BCE Mesopotamian work on suffering of the righteous, but it did not present the quandary posed by Monotheism.
- 10) Background before reading
 - a) Considered extremely difficult to understand.

- b) Jewish educator David Solomon indicates it has at least 100 words that don't appear anywhere else so there is no context for what they mean. These are "hapax legomenon"
- c) Contains short Prose introduction and ending but most of the Book of Job consists of verses of powerful and memorable poetry in the middle.
- d) Short summary. Job is an extremely righteous man blessed with a large family and great wealth. God brags to his heavenly court about how great Job is. Ha Satan (not the a fallen Angel figure who is a free agent, but more like a roving spy or prosecutor for God) suggests Job's righteousness is because of Job's good fortune and offers God a wager that Job would curse God if Job's fortunes fell. God takes on the wager and allows Satan to do anything to Job short of harming him physically. Job loses all his children and fortune, and still refuses to curse God, saying "**the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.**" Satan then persuades God to let him physically harm Job, and God consents, so long as Satan does not kill Job. Satan inflicts upon Job a horrendously painful skin disease and leaves Job on an ash heap to suffer. Job's resists his wife's urging to curse God and tells her: "You talk as any shameless woman might talk! **Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?**" Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar visit him and weep, and sit with Job in silence for 7 days and nights. Finally Job speaks and curses the day he was born. In dialogue with Job, the friends try to persuade Job that God is good, that God is teaching Job a lesson, and that Job must have done something for which he should repent and seek God's forgiveness. Job rejects this, insists that his suffering is unjust, and demands that God give him an audience and account for Job's treatment. God finally makes an appearance in a powerful Whirlwind and speaks of His awesome power (but not His Justice), instructing Job that it is impossible for someone so comparatively miniscule as Job to understand God's ways and purposes. In the face of this awesome display, Job recants and relents, acknowledging that **he is "but dust and ashes."** God then provides some exoneration to Job by telling Job's 3 "friends" "you have not spoken the truth about Me as did My servant Job." God insists that they sacrifice a burnt offering and let Job pray for them, which Job did. Then God gave Job twice what Job had before the test.

11) Source readings from the Book of Job:

- a) 1:1-3, Prose frame story
- b) 1:6-2:13 Prose frame story
- Poetry begins
- c) 3:1-3 Job speaks
- d) 5:17-22 Eliphaz speaks
- e) 8:3-6, & 8:20-22 Bildad speaks
- f) 9:15-24 Job speaks
- g) 15:17-29 Eliphaz speaks
- h) 19:2-7 Job replies
- i) 21:7-11 Job replies
- j) 22:21-23 Eliphaz speaks
- k) 27:2-6 Job speaks
- l) 29:12-18 Job speaks
- m) 30:25-26 Job speaks
- n) 34:5-13 Elihu speaks
- o) 38:1-18 God speaks out of the whirlwind

- p) 42:1-6 Job recants and relents
Prose resumes
- q) 42:7-17 Prose framework ends the book happily ever after.

12) Questions:

- a) Do you think the Rabbinic tradition treated Job as a hero or as someone who deserved to suffer? Why? [Note Midrash of three prophets consulted by Pharaoh re whether to kill the Jewish male offspring (Balaam, Yithro and Job).
- b) Why do you think that the Book of Job was chosen to be part of the Jewish biblical canon if it might shake one's faith?
- c) Does God provide an answer for why righteous people suffer and wicked people prosper? If so, what answer does God provide?
- d) Does the Book of Job provide an answer for why righteous people suffer and wicked people prosper? If so, what answer does the Book of Job provide?
- e) Do you like the ending of the Book of Job where Job is rewarded with even greater wealth and prosperity than he had when the book began?
- f) Does the Book of Job provide any comfort to righteous people who suffer?
- g) What does the Book of Job tell us about questioning God?
- h) What does the Book of Job tell us about the role of personal experience in the face of traditional wisdom (or dogma)?
- i) What lessons does the Book of Job provide on how to comfort the bereaved or others who are suffering? What did Job's friends do right? What did they do wrong?
- j) What do you think about a God that would allow Ha-Satan to test Job with unspeakable suffering in order to win a bet with Ha-Satan?
 - i) Does God treat Job as a means to an end?
 - ii) Immanuel Kant said that rational human beings should be treated as an end in themselves and not as a means to something else. But is God subject to the same metaphysics of morals as humans are subject?
- k) If some righteous people suffer and some wicked people prosper, what explanation could there be if God is omniscient, omnipotent and just?
- l) What possible justification could there be for righteous suffering?
- m) Does God suffer?
- n) What would the world be like without suffering? Would you want to live in such a world?
- o) Did God withdraw God's all-powerfulness when God allowed Ha-Satan to "test" Job? Is there any possible virtue to God withdrawing God's all-powerful control over events and fortune?
- p) Are answers better than questions or vice versa?
 - i) Elie Wiesel – see "Witness" by Wiesel's teaching assistant, Ariel Burger, p. 123.
- q) Who or what could Job be a metaphor for?
- r) What similarities are there between the Book of Job and the Wizard of Oz story?