

Three Lectures on the Book of Job

## A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK:

1. LITERARY. one of the rare legacies of the human race, Job aims at the heart of the reader. The elements of tragedy, pain and sorrow move through the melancholy lines with rhythmic ease. George Foote Moore calls it "one of the greatest poetical works of the world's literature". Tennyson: "Great as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars. There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal merit". Despite the difficult syntax and rare words in the Book, few can resist the combined emotional and esthetic onslaught of its literary attack.
2. PHILOSOPHICAL. The Book is primarily the study of Man's encounter with Evil. Even more than the emotional consequences are the philosophical or theological ones. It therefore aims at the mind of the reader. How shall Job reconcile G-d's Justice with His seeming Injustice? Why is the pious man the one to suffer, while the wicked prosper? The discussions between Job and his friends lead us to one of the most profound researches into the nature of Evil. Its results have been the source material for all great thinkers since.
3. RELIGIOUS. The Book of Job aims at the soul too. Whereas the philosophical material is concentrated in the center of the Book, with its debates and rebuttals, the religious interest is in the prologue and epilogue, where the matters of Faith, the Greatness of G-d and the Smallness of Man are discussed. The Book records the vindication of the unorthodox against the accepted beliefs. Job was not always popular with our Rabbis, but nevertheless the High Priest used to read it in the Temple on Kol Nidre night, and the Prophet Ezekiel, himself a Priest, mentions Job, with Noah, as prototypes of great Zaddikim.

## B.B. THE STORY OF JOB AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK:

1. THE PROLOGUE. The Book of Job has a Faustian touch to it. As in Faust, the Devil, or Satan, is a protagonist in the play - for that is what Job seems to be, a play or drama which centers about long discussions rather than action-plots - although there is no "selling of the soul". As in Faust, too, the theme and story are introduced directly by a "chorus", in the case of Job the "chorus" being the Heavenly Court. The angels, or "sons of G-d" are visualized as lining up before G-d the King. The evil Satan, who



had been promenading up and down the earth, arrives among them. G-d boasts that there is no one on earth who is as good and faithful and pious as His servant Job. Satan accepts the challenge and proceeds to prove Job unfaithful. Job is informed, one day, that his entire fortune has been stolen by raiding tribes and that whatever remained has been irretrievably lost. Job is shocked - for he had been the "richest man in all the East", the Rockefeller of Biblical Days, and now he was a pauper. But he does not complain. His family of seven sons and three daughters, whom he loved though they were of the play-boy variety whose major occupation was hang-overs, is completely wiped out in a freak accident. Job mourns bitterly, but he does not protest the Divine decree. "G-d has given", he cries, "and G-d has taken. May the name of the Lord be blessed". At the next meeting of the Heavenly Court, Satan again appears and is taunted by G-d for his failure and Job's endurance. The Evil One, however, is not at a loss for ideas. He asserts that if he be permitted to strike Job bodily, he will crumble. G-d permits Satan to do whatever he will with Job, provided that he does not deprive him of his life.

2. THE STORY. From that point on, the action slows down, but the dramatic tempo is stepped up. Job suffers horribly. He gives vent to his woes in one of the most eloquent passages in world literature, as three of his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zofar, come to console him. Job questions Divine Justice. He is alternately rebuked and consoled by his friends who repeat to him the accepted theories of Reward and Punishment and Evil, etc. Job counters all these arguments. Suddenly, towards the end, a younger friend, Elihu by name, appears as out of nowhere, hints that his friends are senile and chastises Job, delivers himself of a long oration, and disappears. G-d then appears to Job out of a whirlwind, also chastises both sides and finally reaccepts Job as he, Job, submits to the superiority of G-d. Finally, Job is awarded with a new fortune in double amounts, and ten children are again born to him. This, in essence, is the Tragedy of Job.

3. ORGANIZATION. The debates are arranged in three cycles. Job begins with his tirade against Fate. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar respond, in that order. In the third cycle, at the end, Elihu appears and disappears. The grand finale, the epilogue, then follows.



### C. AUTHORSHIP:

1. There are as many opinions as there are commentators. The foremost Talmudic opinion, and the one most widely accepted, is that Job never existed, that the entire book is no more than a "mashall", a poetic allegory. Some say that Job existed, but that the events described in the book never happened to him. This calls to mind the weighty dissertations of a German scholar on Homer, who, after three hefty volumes, comes to the amazing conclusion that Homer was not the author of the Iliad, but that the book was written by another man whose name, incidentally, was also Homer.

2. Then there is considerable difference of opinion as to when he lived. (if he ever existed). Some say that he lived at the time of Abraham. Others place him in the days of Jacob, and say that he married Jacob's daughter Dinah. (This is understandable. Job had so many "tsoross", that this was just one more). The Targum Yerushalmi believes that he was one of the G-d-fearing slaves of Pharoah - a non-Jew. This list is extended down through the days of the Babylonian Exile.

3. In the last analysis, there is not one bit of difference to us wheteher he lived or not, and if yes, when he lived. The very fact that he was supposedly a gentile, and that his friends certainly were painted as such, and the very considerable difference of opinion as to when he lived, proves that the Book of Job is universal in character. There were **always** Jobs, there are Jobs all about us today, and there is apiece of Job in every one of us. The struggle with Evil, suffering and misery and despair have existed and do occur at all times and in all places..What happened to Job can happen to any one of us. In our own day we have witnessed six million such Jobs, and we have experienced the same the same protest, confusion, anguish and torment that Job gave vent to so eloquently. We too do not understand why we must have 3 wars in one generation, why people must be cremated, why young men must be plucked from their studies or newly won carrers to go off to foreign battle-grounds, why young women must remain widows and young children orphans. The problems of Job are universal, and this is what gives the Book so much meaning and importance.



4. This, then, is the outstanding quality of the Book - its broad universality. I read a book a while back which, I must say, tickled my funnybone. It was a book about Job - one of those ridiculous attempts at psychoanalyzing people long dead, based on scattered information and inconsequential statements. This author attempted to psychoanalyze Job, who, as we know, probably didn't exist in the first place. The author sums up his conclusion very tersely. He says that as a result of his studies, Job must have been either, One: brought up by a very strict and domineering father who curbed the boy's initiative and drowned him in inhibitions & complexes; or, Two: raised by a father who was overly lenient and allowed to run wild without any parental control. While a conclusion of that sort puts the author in a very ridiculous light, and does not redound to the credit of psychoanalysis, it does point up to one unexpected result: namely, that no matter what the background or the psychic state of an individual, he can inherit Job's fate and be expected to react in the same desperate manner as did Job. Again - the universality of Job's experiences and his reactions. No one is immune to his fate and his struggle.

*B. first*  
D. SELECTIONS FOR READING:

1. From the Prologue: Chapter 1, verses 1 to 13.
2. Job "cursing his day". All chapter 3.
3. Job questioning Divine Justice. Chap. 9, v. 21-25
4. Job protests his woes. Chap. 10, v. 1-9
5. Eliphaz replies: Chap. 4, v. 7-9 and v. 17-20.
- ? 6. Bildad replies: Chap. 8, v. 1-7.
- ? 7. Zophar replies: Chap. 11, v. 1-11.
8. Elihu replies to the three friends: Chap. 32, v. 6-15.
9. Elihu replies to Job: Chap. 33, v. 8-14.
10. G-d answers Job. Chap. 38, v. 1-7; v. 16-21; v. 33-37.
11. Job repents. Chap. 42, v. 1-6.
12. The End. Chap. 42, v. 12-17.

*1st lecture*



E. THE VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BOOK: THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOB.

1. THE PROBLEMS:

a) PIETY:

1. Should one be pious because of love or fear of G-d?
2. What is the development of this theme in the Book of Job?

b) THE JUSTICE OF G-D:

1. Did Job deny the Justice of G-d?
2. Does the fact that G-d chastises the friends of Job indicate a repudiation of the belief in a Moral Order in the Universe, thus making Job a heretic, as so many modernists assert?
3. What is the author's solution to Job's problem of the seeming lack of Divine Justice?

c) TRIALS:

1. Does the Book of Job support the Theory of Trials? (i.e. G-d tests one's piety with purpose of great reward if he passes).
2. If not, how is ~~the~~ it to be reconciled with the many "trials" in the Torah?

2. THE SOLUTIONS:

a) PIETY:

1. Assume existence of Trial, initiated by duel between G-d and Satan.
2. There is no problem here of the basic belief in G-d. That is assumed and constant. The belief in G-d is not subject to reasoning and argumentation.
3. The crux of the Trial: Is Job pious because he loves G-d, or because he fears Him?
4. Satan's challenge: Job is pious only because he is prosperous, i.e. Fear.
5. Job's wife tells him it isn't worth being pious ("Curse G-d and die"), i.e. it is a fear-centered piety.
6. Job, at first, answers "What? Shall we receive good at the hand of G-d, and shall we not receive evil?" This is love-piety.
7. The fact that the G-d-Heaven-Satan scene is not repeated in the Epilogue can have one of two explanations:
  - a) Job remains constant in his love-piety, but diverts to protest G-d's decrees; thus there is no need to repeat the Heaven scene.
  - b) There never was any "trial" in the conceptual sense. The problem never was as to Type of Piety, but rather as to Meaning of Suffering. This supports Maimonides' on Trials, as will be seen later.

b) THE JUSTICE OF G-D:

1. The Usual Untraditional Interpretation:

- a) Job is the valiant liberal who challenges his friends' orthodox ideas. Proof: Chap.9, v.22.
- b) The 3 friends all have one argument, merely repetitious for literary and stylistic purposes. They believe in strict mathematical justice. Elihu has nothing at all to say. It must be a later entry.
- c) The 3 friends counter Job's argument that he hasn't sinned by saying that he probably sinned in secret (accepted by all interpretations).
- d) The epilogue, where G-d chastises the friends, proves that the writer disbelieves in Moral Law and Providence (Hashgacha Pratiss).

*2nd letter  
fill here*



e) Criticism:

- 1- They completely overlook the more severe and lengthy chastisement of Job.
- 2- Chap. 9, v.22 can be interpreted as a temporary hypothesis; i.e. Job argues that if they are right in their strict and mathematical conception of Divine Justice, and argue that he sinned in secret, then, knowing that he did not so sin, he must thereby conclude that G-d is not just. (Hence the "therefore I say"). Actually, however, he does not subscribe to this thesis.
- 3- Elihu's speech and the lack of reactions to it can be explained according to Maimonides, as will be seen later.

2. The Usual Traditional Interpretation:

- a) Job did express heretical ideas, for which Rabbis rebuked him, but when repudiated by G-d towards end of Book, he repents in two lengthy speeches.
- b) The conclusion is two-fold:
  - 1- Man cannot understand G-d's ways and must accept His Justice on Faith (for further elaboration, see 3-b-5) Maimonides on Elihu, 3-f).
  - 2- Man is often tried by G-d, and it is this trial, rather than any sins, which is responsible for his suffering. Reason for suffering: *quarta mundi latet.*

3. The Interpretation of Maimonides:

- a) Each of the 5 protagonists (incl. Elihu) enunciated a different philosophical opinion about Providence and the Moral Law. Elihu, who is last to speak, though he is very verbose, articulates the true opinion which is further elaborated upon by G-d.
- b) First Opinion - Job. This corresponds to opinion of Aristotle (Shem Tob: to Aristotle according to Maimonides. Actually Aristotle believes with Maimonides that Good is inherent, Evil accidental). G-d created the world and then withdrew from it, & hence is unconcerned with Man & his fate. PROOF: Chap. 9, v.22; and Chap. 21, v. 23-26. (Later Job repents).
- c) Second Opinion - Eliphaz. This corresponds to the opinion usually ascribed to Scripture. He maintains the Theory of strict, mathematical Justice. (PROOF: Chap. 22, v. 5-10). He answers Job's protestations of innocence by saying that he probably sinned in secret, or even so that he himself did not realize it.
- d) Third Opinion - Bildad. This corresponds to the opinions of the Mu'tazilah. Defends Theory of Reward and Punishment. Answers Job, by saying that if he is a Tsaddik, then his reward will be that much greater in the World To Come (this is essentially the Theory of Trials). (PROOF: Chap. 8, v. 6-7).
- e) Fourth Opinion - Zophar. This corresponds to opinion of Asha'riyah. G-d's actions can be explained neither by His Justice nor by His Wisdom, but by His Will. Everything results from His unfathomable Will, which may not and cannot be questioned, and does not operate according to any Laws, human or Divine. (PROOF: Chap. 11, v. 5-8).
- f) Fifth Opinion, - Elihu. This is the true answer to the Problem of Job. It is essentially the Principle of Faith. Man, circumscribed by his material origins (Satam) cannot hope to understand the Ways of G-d. G-d rules in Wisdom and Justice, but we cannot apply our mathematics to the Justice of G-d. Elihu shows this by deriving instruction from the nature of the various kinds of animals - showing that we do not know their origins, or even the origins of their properties. Therefore, our knowledge is different from that of G-d. Similarly, He rules in a different way from which we "rule" (nothing in common but the name - the semantic aspect).



Elihu's answer, therefore, is the fact of Man's inferiority and the natural limits of his knowledge; his solution is - faith in G-d's ultimate Justice, which Man cannot understand.

(Talk about the limits of knowledge in modern science). *Prof. Covant - "Mod. Science" - "Mod. Man"*

- g) Job repents after G-d chastises him (following Elihu's speech). The very fact that Elihu was not answered by Job or his friends, or chastised by G-d, seems to prove Maimonides' contention, that Elihu provided the final and true answer upon which G-d elaborates in His speech from the whirlwind.

#### 4. The Existential Element in Job:

"I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Chap. 42, v. 5). This dictum by Job is the turning point in his career and the crux of the whole book. The idea implicit is that until then his religion was of the conventional type - "ear" and "hearing" symbolizing the theoretical and essentialist approaches to religion. Now he has been converted to the existentialist type of religion, the living and dynamic Faith, symbolized by "eye" and "seeing", i.e. more personal experience and Elihu's contact. Though Maimonides certainly was no existentialist, yet this interpretation is consistent with his analysis of Elihu, and hence G-d's judgement and Job's final attitude.

6. Maimonides on Trials - Guide, <sup>Part</sup> Book 3, chap. 24

#### Suggested Assignments

1. The Wife of Job - as delineated in the text & elaborated by commentaries -
  - a) her character & Job's estimation of it
  - b) her opinions
  - c) exegesis of her remarks
  - d) her importance in the Book
2. The Prologue - its symbolic value according to Maimonides
  - a) the Land of Uz ( *Uz* )
  - b) "walking up & down therein [earth]" ( *Uz Ummi* )
  - c) the character of Job
  - d) the role of Satan

Ref: Guide, Part 3, chap. 22

3. Cosmology & Natural Science in Job - a compendium of Theories & Myths of Nature & creation in chaps. 38 & 39 of Job.

Ref. English translation. And: Sources