

Job (Iyyov)

Why do bad things happen to good people?

- Tish'a B'Av: Saddest day on Jewish calendar
- History full of catastrophic events that befell Jews on Tish'a B'Av:

Mishnah (Ta'anit 4:6):

- The spies Moses sent to scout the Promised Land brought back a largely negative report which demoralized the Israelites
- Both Temples destroyed (586 BCE and 70 CE)
- Bar Kochba's revolt against Rome failed in 135 CE when he was killed and the city of Betar was destroyed, and
- Jerusalem was razed a year later

Also:

- In 1095, Crusades announced by Pope Urban II to wrest Holy Land from Muslims -- but they killed tens of thousands of Jews on the way.
- In 1242, 24 cartloads of handwritten Talmuds burned in Paris
- In 1290, decree expelling all Jews from England signed
- In 1492, decree expelling all Jews from Spain, including my own ancestors, signed
- In 1626, Shabtai Tzvi, the false messiah, born. He dashed hopes of millions of Jews and severely disrupted their lives.
- In 1914, World War I began, with Germany declaring war on Russia. Led to World War II and Holocaust, facilitated Communist Revolution and ushered in 70 years of darkness for Soviet Jews.
- In 1941, Goering the Nazi ordered implementation of Final Solution -- the Holocaust.

- To console us, Talmud says Messiah will be born on Tisha B'Av.
(Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 2:4)

-Why did these things happen to us? Why do bad things happen to good people?

-Line of inquiry carries fancy name: Theodicy (lit. God's justice)

- Sephardic tradition: Read *Job* after *Lamentations* on Tish'a b'Av.

Story of Job

- God boasts to Satan about Job
- Satan bets Job would not be so righteous if he hadn't been blessed with everything
- God tries experiment: Job loses wealth, children, then health
- Job's wife: "Curse God and die!" But Job still praises God: "Yea, though he slay me, still will I trust in Him".
- 3+1 friends: You were punished because you sinned
- God: You can't understand my ways and purposes
- End: Job gets everything back, and more

Events (Job 1-2)

Job 1

1. There was a man in the land of 'Utz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God, and turned away from evil.
2. And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters.
3. His possessions were seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred female asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.
4. And his sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day; and they used to send and call for their three sisters to eat and drink with them.
5. And when the days of the feast would come to their end, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning, and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.
6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.
7. And the Lord said to Satan, Where are you coming from? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.
8. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil?
9. Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Does Job fear God for nothing?
10. Have not you made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are increased in the land.
11. But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.
12. And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.
13. And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house;
14. And there came a messenger to Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them;

15. And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.

16. While he was still speaking, another also came, and said, The fire of God has fallen from the sky, and has burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you.

17. While he was still speaking, another also came, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.

18. While he was still speaking, another also came, and said, Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house;

19. And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you.

20. Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and prostrated himself,

21. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there;
The Lord gives, the Lord takes away, Blessed be the name of the Lord.

22. In all this Job did not sin, nor did he lay a reproach on God.

Job 2

1. Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.

2. And the Lord said to Satan, Where are you coming from? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

3. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause.

4. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin! All that a man has will he give for his life.

5. But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.

6. And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand; but spare his life.

7. (K) So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8. And he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself; and he sat down among the ashes.

9. Then said his wife to him, Do you still retain your integrity? **Curse God, and die.**

10. But he said to her, You speak like one of the foolish women speak. **Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?** In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

-HaSatan ("the Adversary") is creature of God, doing God's will, not independent "evil" entity

-God is One and responsible for everything:

That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the Lord, and there is no one else.
I form the light, and create darkness; (Yotzer or uvorech choshech)
I make peace, and create evil; ('Oseh shalom uvoreh ra')
I am the Lord who does all these things. (Ani HaShem 'oseh chol elleh)
(Isaiah 45:6-7)

Job's "Friends"

-Claimed that Job *and* his children must have been guilty of something

-Eliphaz:

"Man is born into trouble, as the sparks fly upwards" (Job 5:7)

-Job:

"Yea, though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him, but I will argue my ways before Him. (Job 13:15)

Very Jewish statement: "But I will argue my ways before Him" (no unquestioning faith, no fatalism, no "floormat" relationship with God)

-Friends wait 7 days before beginning dialogues with Job: Origin of our 7 days of shiva after a death

God's answer (Job 38-40)

God answers questions with questions, in extraordinary passage taking up 103 verses. God exposes Job's ignorance of God's plans, but provides no answers.

God answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: Job 38:1
Who is that, who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 38:2
Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? 38:4
Tell me, if you know, who determined its boundaries? 38:5
What were those foundations attached to? 38:6
Do you know what happens after death? 38:17
Did you go inside the earth? Tell me, if you know it all. 38:18
Come on, you are old enough to know. 38:21
Where does the rain come from? 38:28
And the ice? 38:29
Can you shoot lightning bolts? 38:35
Do you think you can just nullify My judgments, condemn Me, and justify yourself? 40:8

Restoration (Job 42)

Job 42

1. Then Job answered the Lord, and said,
2. I know that you can do every thing, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
3. Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered what I did not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
4. Hear, I beseech you, and I will speak; I will demand of you, and declare you to me.
5. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you.
6. Therefore I loathe myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

7. And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My anger burns against you, and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

8. Therefore take now seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you; for to him I will show favor in not dealing with you according to your folly, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

9. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according to what the Lord commanded them; the Lord also accepted Job.

10. And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he prayed for his friends; also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

11. Then all his brothers came to him, and all his sisters, and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house; and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; every man also gave him a kesitah, and everyone an earring of gold.

12. So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand female asses.

13. He also had seven sons and three daughters.

14. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-Happuch.

15. And in all the land no women were found so pretty as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers.

16. And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his grandsons, four generations.

17. And Job died, old and full of days.

-God rebukes “friends”, gives Job “twice as much”

-Job lives 140 years more, so he must have been 70 when story begins

-Ramban: Job’s new children are same ones as before. Ha-Satan hid them right before he destroyed house (messenger only saw house being destroyed).

Conclusion

God can do things we cannot do, understand things we cannot understand, and has purposes He won't reveal to us.

Job wants same answers as Moses

And Moses said to God: I beg you, if I have found favor in your sight, show me now your way, that I may know you...Show me your glory...

And God said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, I will proclaim My name before you; and I will be gracious and show mercy to whom I please...

But You may not see my face; for no man shall see me and live...

You shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen. (Exodus 13-23)

Why not? What are we talking about here? First, does God have a face? That's not a Jewish concept. Even if so, is this face so terrifying that people die just from looking at it? Does it radiate so much light that people go blind and die when they see it? Surely not. There must be a figurative meaning here. Is the resulting "death" a punishment? Or an automatic consequence? Or a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Moses is puzzled by this deity he cannot comprehend. He wants answers to ultimate questions. What is God's plan? What are God's motives? Why does evil exist? Moses wants knowledge. But God does not want to reveal this knowledge. God said he would drop hints -- his "presence", his "goodness", his "back" -- but God will not give straight answers.

Who was Job?

-Talmud, Sotah 11a: Balaam, Job and Jethro advised Pharaoh on how to deal with the Jews:

- Balaam advised to drown all baby boys and enslave all adults

- Job remained silent

- Jethro objected to Balaam's plan

Pharaoh accepted Balaam's plan and Jethro fled from Egypt to Midian, where he lived for the rest of his life

- Balaam was killed in battle with Jews (Numbers 31:8)

- Job was afflicted by disease and tragedy (Job 1-2)

- Jethro merited Moses as son-in-law and descendants on the Sanhedrin

- Talmud, Baba Batra 15a: 'Job never was and never existed, but is only a typical figure' [to teach the virtue of resignation]; draws sharp rebuke from Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachmani
- Talmud, Baba Batra 14b: Moses wrote Book of Job
- Talmud, Baba Batra 15b: Job's wife was Dinah, Jacob's daughter

Other materials

-*Twilight Zone* episode (*A Nice Place to Visit*): Criminal, killed by police while trying to escape, finds himself in a place where his every wish is granted. He is soon bored to tears and wants out, only to find that he is in hell.

-Lesson: If we had no problems to solve and no challenges, if our every wish were granted immediately, we would find life empty and unbearably boring. Hard as it may seem to accept, evil, problems, and unpleasantness may be necessary so we may find life worth living -- truly a paradox. The joy is in the seeking, not in the getting.

-*"Is God a Taoist?"* by logician Raymond Smullyan: Dialogue between God and a mortal.

-Mortal asks God to remove his free will, because he can't bear the responsibility that comes with it, and is afraid of hurting others by misusing it. In a humorous and witty exchange, God leads him to accept the fact that free will is an indispensable component of his plan, and that freedom of choice ultimately results in a better world. God rails against "moralists", asserting: "I am wholly a utilitarian".

-Movie *Oh God You Devil*, with George Burns.

Themes: HaSatan does God's will and is not independent (same message as in Book of Job); God and the Devil "are the same" (see Isaiah quote); God may withdraw and give up on us if we don't bear witness to him; God cares, but cannot solve every problem; it takes time to build a relationship with God -- can't do it on a crash basis when disaster strikes.

-Scenario: A little boy is about to die; God must choose between three "most likely" paths:

- (1) Letting the boy die. This would spur the father to write a best-selling book about pain and suffering that will help people, make money, and boost research on curing the boy's disease
- (2) Letting the boy live. But he will become a criminal and kill dozens of people

(3) Letting the boy live. But he will become an airline pilot, make a mistake, and crash a plane with 350 people in it.

Themes: God does not have unlimited choices because of free will (built-in unpredictability, quantum mechanics); something good can come out of something bad, and vice-versa; the good of the individual must be balanced against the good of society.

Discussion: Possible answers

Why do bad things happen to good people?

13 possible answers. Which do you accept or reject and why?

1. They do not. The wicked get punished and the righteous rewarded. If something bad happens to you, God is punishing you for something wrong you did. (If you are a baby, you did something wrong in a previous life).
2. God is always working for the greater good of humanity as a whole. This goal sometimes requires that a few suffer more.
3. Life would be unbearably boring if there were no evil, no problems, no pain, no questions. We need challenges.
4. Pure bad luck. If God exists, He does not control individual lives or events. There is a lot of randomness in the world.
5. There is no universal definition of "bad" and "good". The question is meaningless.
6. God is simply having fun and doing experiments with us out of curiosity. Remember the story of Job? It started with God accepting a bet from Satan that Job would no longer be faithful to God if bad things started happening to him.
7. God is doing the best he can, but He is simply not all-powerful -- nothing is. There is only so much He can do to keep bad things away.

8. We don't know, because nobody can understand God's reasons and means. Our minds couldn't grasp them. Can a monkey understand relativity? But we do trust that God loves us and protects us.

9. To teach us lessons. You always become a better person as a result of "bad" experiences. (If you should die, your next incarnation will have learned the lesson).

10. God can't be everywhere at the same time, even if He is all-powerful when dealing with a specific problem. While he's helping some people over here, others get hurt over there.

11. Free will means the freedom to risk, to make wrong choices. If God were to "guide" us each step of the way, we'd be robots. Neither we nor God would find it satisfying.

12. We are all still paying for Adam and Eve's original sin, and the sins of all our fellow human beings. God will punish an innocent person for the mistakes of others, because He considers all humanity as a one unit.

13. There is no reality: It's all in the state of mind. Tell yourself that all is well, and you will see all well, no matter what happens.