

Midrashic Readings of Job

Babylonian Talmud – Baba Batra 15a-16b

A. When Did Job Live?

“You say that Moses wrote his book and the section of Balaam and Job.”

1. This supports the opinion of R. Joshua b. Levi b. Lahma who said that Job was contemporary with Moses.

[The proof is that] it is written here [in connection with Job], “O that my words were now [*efo*] written,” (Job 19:23) and it is written elsewhere [in connection with Moses], “For wherein now [*efo*] shall it be known” (Ex 33:16). But on that ground I might say that he was contemporary with Isaac, in connection with whom it is written, “Who now [*efo*] is he that took venison?” (Gen 27:33). Or I might say that he was contemporary with Jacob, in connection with whom it is written, “If so now [*efo*] do this?” (Gen 43:2) or with Joseph, in connection with whom it is written, “Where [*efo*] they are pasturing?” (Gen 37:16) — This cannot be maintained.

[The proof that Job was contemporary with Moses is that] it is written [in continuation of the above words of Job], “Would that they were inscribed in a book, and it is Moses who is called ‘inscriber’, as it is written, “And he chose the first part for himself, for there was the lawgiver’s [*mehokek*, lit. ‘inscriber’s’] portion reserved” (Deut 33:21).

2. Raba said that Job was in the time of the spies. [The proof is that] it is written here [in connection with Job], “There was a man in the land of Uz, Job was his name, (Job 1:1) and it is written elsewhere [in connection with the spies], “Whether there be wood [*ez*] therein” (Num 13:20). Where is the parallel? In one place it is *Uz*, in the other *Ez*? What Moses said to Israel was this: “[See] if that man is there whose years are as the years of a tree and who shelters his generation like a tree.”

3. A certain Rabbi was sitting before R. Samuel b. Nahmani and in the course of his expositions remarked, “Job never was and never existed, but is only a parable.” He replied: “To confute such as you the text says, ‘There was a man in the land of Uz, Job was his name’ (Job 1:1).” “But,” he retorted, “if that is so, what of the verse, ‘The poor man had nothing save one poor ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up etc.’ (2 Sam 12:3). Is that anything but a parable? So this too is a parable.” “If so,” said the other, “why are his name and the name of his town mentioned?”

4. R. Johanan and R. Eleazar both stated that Job was among those who returned from the [Babylonian] Exile, and that his house of study was in Tiberias. An objection [to this view] was raised from the following: “The span of Job’s life was from the time that Israel entered Egypt till they left it.”—Say, As long as from the time they entered Egypt till they left it (210 years)....

B. Role of Satan

5. [Satan] said: Sovereign of the Universe, I have traversed the whole earth, and have not found one like thy servant Abraham. For thou didst say to him, Arise, walk (התהלך) through the land in the length of it and the breadth of it, for to thee I will give it, and when he wanted to bury Sarah he could not find a place in which to bury her, and yet he did not complain against thy ways.”

6. *“Then the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, for there is none like him in the earth . . . and he still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him to destroy him without cause”* (Job 2:3).

Said R. Johanan: Were it not expressly stated in the Scripture, we would not dare to say it. [God is made to appear] like a man who allows himself to be persuaded against his better judgment.

A Tanna taught: [Satan] comes down to earth and seduces, then ascends to heaven and awakens wrath; permission is granted to him and he takes away the soul.

7. *“And Satan answered the Lord and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold he is in thine hand: only spare his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord and smote Job etc.”* (Job 2:4-7).

R. Isaac said: Satan's torment was worse than that of Job; he was like a servant who is told by his master, ‘Break the cask but do not let any of the wine spill.’

Resh Lakish said: Satan, the evil prompter, and the Angel of Death are all one. He is called Satan, as it is written, “And Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord” (Job 2:7). He is called the evil prompter: [we know this because] it is written in another place, “[Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart] was only evil continually,” (Gen 6:5), and it is written here [in connection with Satan] “Only upon himself put not forth thine hand” (Job 1:13). The same is also the Angel of Death, since it says, “Only spare his life, (Job 2:6), which shows that Job's life belonged to him.

8. R. Levi said: Both Satan and Peninah had a pious purpose [in acting as adversaries]. Satan, when he saw God inclined to favour Job said, Far be it that God should forget the love of Abraham. Of Peninah it is written, “And her rival provoked her sore for to make her fret” (1 Sam 1:6). When R. Aha b. Jacob gave this exposition in Papunia, Satan came and kissed his feet.

C. Job's Claims

9. *“In all this did not Job sin with his lips”* (Job 2:10).

Raba said: With his lips he did not sin, but he did sin within his heart. What did he say? “The earth is given into the hand of the wicked, he covers the faces of the judges thereof; if it be not so, where and who is he?” (Job 9:24).

Raba said: Job sought to turn the dish upside down.

Abaye said: Job was referring only to the Satan....

10. “You know that I am not wicked, and there is none that can deliver out of Your hand” (Job 10:7).

Raba said: Job sought to exempt the whole world from justice. He said: Sovereign of the Universe, Thou hast created the ox with cloven hoofs and thou hast created the ass with whole hoofs; thou hast created Paradise and thou hast created Gehinnom: thou hast created righteous men and thou hast created wicked men, and who can prevent thee?

His companions answered him: “You subvert piety and restrain devotion before God” (Job 15:4). If God created the evil inclination, He also created the Torah as its antidote.

11. Raba expounded: What is meant by the verse, “The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy” (Job 29:13). “The blessing of him that lost came upon me:” this shows that Job used to rob orphans of a field and improve it and then restore it to them. “And I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy:” if ever there was a widow who could not find a husband, he used to associate his name with her, and then someone would soon come and marry her.

12. “Oh that my vexation were but weighed, and my calamity laid ill the balances together” (Job 6:2).

Rab said: Dust should be put in the mouth of Job, because he makes himself the colleague of heaven.

13. “Would there were an umpire between us, that he might lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:33).

Rab said: Dust should be placed in the mouth of Job: is there a servant who argues with his master?

14. “I made a covenant with thine eyes; how then should I look upon a maid?” (Job 31:1).

Rab said: Dust should be placed in the mouth of Job; he refrained from looking at other men's wives. Abraham did not even look at his own, as it is written, “Behold now I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon,” (Gen 12:11) which shows that up to then he did not know.

15. “As the cloud is consumed and vanishes away, so he that goes down to Sheol shall come up no more” (Job 7:9).

Raba said: This shows that Job denied the resurrection of the dead.¹

¹ איוב פרק יד

(יב) ואיש שכב ולא יקום עד בלתי שמים לא יקיצו ולא יערו משנתם:
(יג) מי יתן בשאול תצפנני תסתירני עד שוב אפך תשית לי חק ותזכרני:
(יד) אם ימות נָכַר הִיָּחֵה כָּל יְמֵי צָבָאֵי אֲנִחַל עַד בּוֹא תְּלִיפְתֵי:

Septuagint – For, if a person died, then would live again, when he has completed the days of his life, I would endure until I would be born again.

Jerome, Letter to Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem:

Listen to those words of thunder which fall from Job, the vanquisher of torments, who, as he scrapes away the filth of his decaying flesh with a potsherd, solaces his miseries with the hope and the reality of the resurrection: "Oh, that," he says, "my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book with an iron pen, and on a sheet of lead, that they were graven in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that in the last day I shall rise from the earth, and again be clothed with my skin, and in my

16. *“For he breaks me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause (Job 9:17). Rabbah said: Job blasphemed with [mention of] a tempest, and with a tempest he was answered. He blasphemed with [mention of] a tempest, as it is written, “For he breaketh me as with a tempest.” Job said to God: Perhaps a tempest has passed before thee, and caused thee to confuse Iyob [Job] and Oyeb [enemy]. He was answered through a tempest, as it is written, Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind [seara is the same word for hair] and said, ... Gird tip now thy loins like a man, for I will demand of thee and declare thou unto me” (Job 38:1,3). ‘I have created many hairs in man, and for every hair I have created a separate groove, so that two should not suck from the same groove, for if two were to suck from the same groove they would impair the sight of a man. I do not confuse one groove with another; and shall I then confuse Iyob with Oyeb?*

17. *“Who hath cleft a channel for the waterflood?” (Job 38:25). Many drops have I created in the clouds, and for every drop a separate mould, so that two drops should not issue from the same mould, since if two drops issued from the same mould they would wash away the soil, and it would not produce fruit. I do not confuse one drop with another, and shall I confuse Iyob and Oyeb?’ How do we know that the word te'alah [channel] here means a mould? Rabbah b. Shila replied: Because it is written, And he made a trench [te'alah] as great as would contain two measures of seed. (I Kings 18:32).*

18. *“Or a way for the lightning of the thunder” (Job 38:25). Many thunderclaps have I created in the clouds, and for each clap a separate path, so that two claps should not travel by the same path, since if two claps traveled by the same path they would devastate the world. I do not confuse one thunderclap with another, and shall I confuse Iyob with Oyeb?*

19. *“Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth, or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?” (Job 39:1) This wild goat is heartless towards her young. When she crouches for delivery, she goes up to the top of a mountain so that the young shall fall down and be killed, and I prepare an eagle to catch it in his wings and set it before her, and if he were one second too soon or too late it would be killed. I do not confuse one moment with another, and shall I confuse Iyob with Oyeb?*

...

20. *“Job speaketh without knowledge, and his words are without wisdom” (Job 34:35). Raba said: This teaches that a man is not held responsible for what he says when in distress.*

flesh shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. This my hope is laid up in my bosom." What can he clearer than this prophecy? No one since the days of Christ speaks so openly concerning the resurrection as he did before Christ. He wishes his words to last forever; and that they might never be obliterated by age, he would have them inscribed on a sheet of lead, and graven on the rock. He hopes for a resurrection; nay, rather he knew and saw that Christ, his Redeemer, was alive, and at the last day would rise again from the earth. The Lord had not yet died, and the athlete of the Church saw his Redeemer rising from the grave. When he says, "And I shall again be clothed with my skin, and in my flesh see God," I suppose he does not speak as if he loved his flesh, for it was decaying and putrefying before his eyes; but in the confidence of rising again, and through the consolation of the future, he makes light of his present misery.

D. Fear and Love

משנה מסכת סוטה פרק ה:ה

בו ביום דרש ר' יהושע בן הורקנוס לא עבד איוב את הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא מאהבה שנאמר (איוב יג:טו) הן יקטלני לו איחל² ועדיין הדבר שקול לו אני מצפה או איני מצפה תלמוד לומר (שם כ"ו/כז) עד אגוע לא אסיר תומתי ממני מלמד שמאהבה עשה אמר רבי יהושע מי יגלה עפר מעיניך רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שהיית דורש כל ימיך שלא עבד איוב את המקום אלא מיראה שנאמר (שם א') איש תם וישר ירא אלהים וסר מרע והלא יהושע תלמיד תלמידך למד שמאהבה עשה:

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת ברכות פרק ט דף יד טור ב/ה"ג
פרוש יראה כאיוב פרוש אהבה כאברהם

Bavli Baba Batra 15b

There was a certain pious man among the heathen named Job, but he [thought that he had] come into this world only to receive [here] his reward, and when the Holy One, blessed be He, brought chastisements upon him, he began to curse and blaspheme, so the Holy One, blessed be He, doubled his reward in this world so as to expel him from the world to come.

Allegory of Jerusalem

פסיקתא רבתי פסקא כו - ויהי בעת שסרחה

אמר ירמיהו כשהייתי עולה לירושלים נטלתי עיני וראיתי אשה יושבת בראש ההר, (לבנשה) [לבושיה] שחורים ושערה סתור צועקת מבקשת מי ינחמנה, ואני צועק ומבקש מי ינחמני, קרבתי אצלה ודברתי עמה, ואמרתי לה אם אשה את דברי עמי ואם רוח את הסתלקי מלפני, ענתה ואמרה לי, אינך מכירני, אני היא שהיו לי שבעה בנים, יצא אביהם למדינת הים, עד שאני עולה ובוכה עליו הרי שניבא ואמר לי נפל הבית על שבעה בנייך והרגם, איני יודע על מי אבכה ועל מי אסתור שעריי,

עניתי ואמרתי אין אתה טובה מן (עמך) [אמי] ציון והיא עשויה מרעית לחיות השדה, ענתה ואמרה לי, אני אמך ציון, אני היא אם השבעה, שכן כתב אומללה יולדת השבעה (ירמיה ט"ו ט'), אמר לה ירמיה דומה מכתך (למכת) [למכתו] של איוב, מאיוב נטלו בניו ובנותיו, וממך נטלו בנייך ובנותייך, מאיוב נטלתי כספו וזהבו, וממך נטלתי כספך וזהבך, לאיוב השלכתי לתוך האשפה, וליך עשיתי אשפה של זבל, וכשם שחזרתי ונחמתי את איוב כך אני עתיד לחזור ולנחמך, לאיוב כפלתי בניו ובנותיו וליך אני עתיד לכפול בנייך ובנותייך, לאיוב כפלתי כספו וזהבו וליך אני עתיד לעשות כן, לאיוב נערת מן אשפה ועליך הוא אומר התנערי מעפר קומי שבי ירושלים (ישעיה נ"ב ב'),

בשר ודם בנה אותך, בשר ודם החריבך, אבל לעתיד לבא אני בונה אותך, שכן כתוב בונה ירושלים ה' נדחי ישראל יכנס (תהלים קמ"ז ב'), אמן במהרה בימינו הקדוש ברוך הוא יקיים את המקרא שכתב עלינו ופדויי ה' ישוּבוּן ובאו לציון ברינה וגו' (ישעיה ל"ה י').

² King James: Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him. But I will maintain my own ways before Him. NJPS (kethib): He may well slay me; I may have no hope; Yet I will argue my case before Him.