

Job 1-3

1. Which of the following best describes Job's suffering, and why?
 - a) A (legal) trial
 - b) A test of faith
 - c) A punishment
 - d) Training for spiritual growth
 - e) A meaningless horror
2. Job's friends sit with Job after his breathtaking series of tragedies—they "sit *shiva*" with him. This Jewish tradition appears to derive from the book of Job, including the rending of clothes, sitting on the ground (or, in modern practice, on low seat or seats without cushions) and Job's friends staying with him for seven days (*shiva* means "seven"; see also Gen 50:10) and—if one is guided by the Talmud—not speaking until Job speaks. Job's words in 1:21, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," are often repeated at funerals. Tradition has added many other practices to these as well.

What, in the chapter "Sitting *Shiva*" from *Miriam's Kitchen*, are the central features of this practice, and what is their purpose? By contrast, what in *your* bereavement tradition helps the mourner survive the loss? Is there any element of Jewish tradition you wish we would imitate?

3. Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad are universally regarded as poor friends for Job. But not everything they do is wrong. What do the friends do right?
4. Satan asks whether there truly is such a thing as disinterested righteousness. Mary Hammond writes of God's dispute with Satan,

"Would Job worship you if he got nothing out of it?" the Satan questions God. It is framed as the ultimate *test*, but I think it is the ultimate *question*. When the props are removed, when surrender is squeezed out of the soul piece by piece, bit by bit, when God is silent when we need God the most—what then becomes of this relationship on which we have counted for blessing after blessing? That is the question of the Satan.

And it is a question for the ages, for everyone. It is the deep question Job's life must answer in the maelstrom. And he answers it like Jesus answered it, who cried in agony from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹

What does Job have to do for Satan to be vindicated? What if Job follows his wife's advice?

5. In 1:10 Satan says that God has put a "fence" around Job. After disaster strikes, Job describes himself as one "whom God has fenced in" (3:23)². What does Job mean?
6. C. S. Lewis wrote about mourning in *A Grief Observed*,

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.

¹ Co-pastor of Peace Community Church in Oberlin, Ohio; from her blog, <http://ajobcontemplative.wordpress.com/>.

² The *Jewish Study Bible* says the Hebrew root for "fenced in" is the same as for "fence" in 1:10.

The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me.

Describe Job's reaction in chapter 3 to the loss of his health, possessions and family.

7. Job's suffering has various causes: Sabeans, Chaldeans, a rogue, killing wind, and even fire from heaven. Satan sits behind these, is presumably the cause of Job's sores and the fire from heaven. But behind all of these is Job's God, who allows them. Job responds to this breath-taking tragedy, "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away." In her reflections on this passage, Mary Hammond writes,

Day after day, Job's story is played out again and again. Anguished parents dig through collapsed buildings after earthquakes, searching for their children. Families gather up their loved ones and flee from the shelling of senseless bombing. Youth fight to survive the culture of violence which is their neighborhood.

I have lost my oldest daughter to suicide. I do not know what it is like to survive a landslide in Latin America, and be the only family member left to tell about it. I do not know what it is like to lose one's parents and grandparents, one's children and spouse, all in one terrible, irreversible moment of time. There are so many things I do not know. Yet people face such tragedies more often than any of us want to believe. How many times do we have to replay the story of Job and his wife?

...As I sit with Job's pain, I sit with the pain of the world. It is not an abstract thing. Real people are facing incalculable losses every day. One of the fatalities of a recent snowstorm in the Eastern United States was a woman who was eight months pregnant. She was putting her groceries in her car around 11:30 a.m. in a public parking lot. A snow plow operator didn't see her. His plow hit and killed her.

...I cannot believe in a God who "takes away" a woman eight months pregnant [by] a snow plow while she is loading her groceries into her car. It did happen, yet it shouldn't happen. I cannot believe in a God who embraces the oppression of millions of people, the destruction of entire nations through war, the deaths of thousands through natural disaster. What God protects the rich and ruins the poor? What God sanctifies the privileged and crushes the most vulnerable? These are the questions Job begins to ask over time as he sits in sackcloth and ashes and ponders his fate. (Ibid.)

Is God the *cause* of Job's suffering? Does this matter?

Ω

Fun fact: "Satan suggests that true righteousness should be disinterested... Plato made the same point in his discussion of justice in his *Republic, Book 2*: the just man can only be recognized as such if he perseveres when his justice brings him no reward, but rather ignominy and even death." (John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*.)

Dark Quote: "God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't. In this trial He makes us occupy the dock, the witness box, and the bench all at once. He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down." (C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*)