

Providence and Theodicy in Hazal  
First Class – Interpretations of the Book of Job

Midrash Breishit Raba 57:4

R. Simeon b. Lakish said: Job never existed at all. This view of Resh Lakish is self-contradictory, for elsewhere he said in the name of Bar Kappara: He flourished in the days of Abraham,<sup>4</sup> while here he maintains thus? He means, however, that he was never exposed to the sufferings ascribed to him.<sup>5</sup> Why then were they ascribed to him? Because had they come upon him, he would have been able to withstand them.

(4) V. beginning of this section.

(5) Y.T.: for it is inconceivable that God would have permitted Satan to inflict so much suffering on an innocent person.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sota, page 11a

Come, let us deal wisely with him<sup>20</sup> ... R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of R. Simai: There were three in that plan,<sup>28</sup> viz. Balaam, Job<sup>29</sup> and Jethro. Balaam who devised it was slain; Job who silently acquiesced was afflicted with sufferings; Jethro, who fled, merited that his descendants should sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone,<sup>30</sup> as it is said: And the families of scribes which dwelt at Jabez; the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, the Sucathites. These are the Kenites that came of Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab;<sup>31</sup> and it is written: And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law etc.<sup>32</sup>

(20) Ibid. I, 10. The Hebrew is literally with him.

(28) To destroy Israel through the decree: Every son that is born ye shall cast in the river, Ex. I, 22.

(29) Various opinions are expressed in the Talmud regarding the age in which he lived. According to one view he was born in the year that Jacob settled in Egypt and died at the time of the Exodus, v. B.B. 15a-b.

(30) In the Temple where the Sanhedrin met.

(31) I Chron. II, 55. The various names are understood in the sense that they were eminent scholars.

(32) Judg. I, 16; v. Sanh. (Sonc. ed.) p. 722.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kidushin, page 40b

R. Eleazar son of R. Zadok said: To what are the righteous compared in this world? To a tree standing wholly in a place of cleanness, but its bough overhangs to a place

of uncleanness; when the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of cleanness. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, brings suffering upon the righteous in this world,<sup>13</sup> in order that they may inherit the future world, as it is said, and though thy beginning is small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase.<sup>14</sup> And to what are the wicked compared in this world? To a tree standing wholly in a place of uncleanness, but a branch thereof overhangs a place of cleanness: when the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of uncleanness. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, makes them prosper<sup>15</sup> in this world,<sup>16</sup> in order to destroy and consign them to the nethermost rung, for it is said: There is a way which seemeth right unto man, But at the end thereof are the ways of death.<sup>17</sup>

(13) Thus purging them of the little sin they do commit lopping off the branch inclining to an unclean place.

(14) Job VIII, 7.

(15) Lit., 'furnishes them with goodness'.

(16) Thus rewarding them for the little good they perform—lopping off the branch inclining to the place, that it may be disregarded in the next world.

(17) Prov. XIV, 12. — An attempt to answer the eternal question, why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Batra, page 15b

An objection was brought from a breita: There was a certain pious man among the heathen named Job, who came 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.

Midrash Breishit Raba 57:4

R. Jose b. Halafta said: He [Job] was born when they went down into Egypt, and died when they went up out of Egypt. You will find that in essence his life's span was two hundred and ten years,<sup>4</sup> while Israel spent two hundred and ten years in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Now when Satan came to denounce [Israel],<sup>6</sup> He [God] incited him against Job [instead].<sup>7</sup> R. Hanina, the son of Aha, and R. Hama, the son of R. Hanina, discussed this. R. Hanina, the son of Aha, said: It may be compared to a shepherd who stood watching his flocks, when a wolf came to attack him, whereupon he ordered: 'Throw him a he-goat on which to vent his rage.' R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: It may be compared to a king sitting at his meal when a dog came and attacked him, whereupon he ordered, 'Give him a bone to preoccupy him.' Thus it is written, God delivereth me to the ungodly, and casteth me into the hands of the wicked (Job XVI, 11); would that the people have been righteous, but they are indeed wicked.

(4) In Job XLII, 12. it says, So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. The Rabbis take this to mean that he was now given twice as much of everything which he had enjoyed before his sufferings, including his years of life. Since it states further in v. 16, And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, it follows then that he had lived seventy before, making two hundred and ten in all.- The words 'in essence' are difficult, implying as they do that he lived more, but that the other years are disregarded. Th. suggests that the original reading may have been, Job's lifetime in essence was seventy years: i.e. this was his originally allotted span, but that God gave him an additional hundred and forty years.

(5) V. B.B. 15a.

(6) That they were not worthy of being redeemed, for they too were guilty of immorality and idolatry. 'E.J.: Satan denounced Israel immediately after Joseph's death, when they took the first step toward degeneration by ceasing to practise circumcision.

(7) Th.: this does not refer to his sufferings as recounted in the Book of Job, but assumes additional sufferings at the end of his life, to distract Satan's attention, as it were. Mah. and 'E.J. explain differently.

#### Midrash Rabbah - Exodus XXI:7

7. Another explanation of WHEREFORE CRIEST THOU UNTO ME? It is written, Hast thou prepared thy prayer before thy trouble came? (Job XXXVI, 19).<sup>2</sup> Why is this so? R. Eleazar b. Pedath said<sup>3</sup>: The proverb has it: ' Honour thy physician even before thou hast need of him.' R. Simeon b. Lakish says: Prepare thy prayer before thy Creator, so that no troubles may befall thee from above. R. Hama b. Hanina said: When Israel departed from Egypt, the angel Samael arose to accuse them. R. Hama added the following explanation in the name of his father: It can be compared to a shepherd who was leading his sheep across a river when a wolf came to attack the sheep. What did the shepherd, who knew well how to deal with such emergencies, do? He took a large he-goat and threw it to the wolf, saying to himself, 'Let him struggle with this till we cross the river, and then I will return to bring it back.' So, when Israel departed from Egypt, the Angel Samael arose to accuse them, pleading before God: ' Lord of the Universe! Till now they have been worshipping idols, and now Thou dividest the sea for them?' What did God do? He

(1) So that the whole world might know of the great miracle God had performed for His people.

(2) E.V. ' Will thy riches avail, that are without stint?'

(3) Cf. Sanh. 44b. One must also pray to God before trouble comes.

delivered into his hands Job, one of the counselors of Pharaoh,<sup>1</sup> of whom it is written, And that man was wholehearted and upright (Job I, 1), and said: 'Behold, he is in thy hands (ib. II, 6).<sup>2</sup> God reckoned: While he is busily occupied with Job, Israel will go through the sea! Afterwards, I will deliver Job; this is why Job said, I was at ease, and He broke me asunder (XVI, 12). 'I was at ease in the world,' said Job, 'but He broke me asunder, He hath taken me by the neck, and dashed me to pieces (ib.),

in order to make me the target for His people,' for it says, He hath also set me up for His mark (ib.), God delivereth me to the ungodly (ib. 11), He hath delivered me into the hands of Satan; and in order that Israel may not emerge guilty from the trial, He hath delivered me into his hand'; hence, And casteth me into the hands of the wicked (ib.). It was then that God said to Moses: 'Moses, behold I have given Job over to Satan. It is for you to Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.'<sup>3</sup>

(1) Supra,I, 9. This is mentioned as a justification of God's action, for otherwise it would have been unjust to make Job suffer in order to save Israel ('EJ.).

(2) As he was an upright man, Samael would have a hard task to triumph over him, just as the wolf would have with the he-goat in the parable; cf. Gen. R. LVII, 4.

(3) There is no time to lose, for Satan may soon triumph over Job and turn his attention again to Israel; let them, therefore, cross over quickly.

#### Midrash Rabbah - Genesis XXX:8

WAS. R. Johanan said: Every man of whom it is said that he 'was' (hayah) remained unchanged from beginning to end.<sup>2</sup> An objection was raised: But it is written, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land (Ezek. XXXIII, 24): was he then unchanged from beginning to end! That too does not refute me, he replied: R. Johanan and R. Hanina both said: Abraham was forty-eight years old when he recognised his Creator. Then how is 'was' to be understood in his case?<sup>3</sup> He was predestined to lead the whole world to repentance.<sup>4</sup> [Similarly], Behold, the man was (Gen. III, 22)<sup>5</sup> means: predestined to die. The serpent was (ib. 1): predestined to punishment. Cain was (ib.IV, 2): predestined to exile; Job was (Job I, 1): predestined to suffering; NOAH WAS: predestined for a miracle<sup>6</sup>; Moses was (Ex. III, 1): predestined to be a redeemer; Mordecai was (Est. II, 5): predestined for redemption.<sup>7</sup>

(2) Lit. that was his beginning, that was his end '.

(3) Since there was a change in his life.

(4) From birth. Thus in that respect he remained unchanged,

(5) Lit. translation of hayah. E.V. 'is become'.

(6) Or possibly: destined to be a sign to his contemporaries.

(7) Ex.R.II,4; Est.R.VI, 3.

#### Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LVII:4

4. Another interpretation: [Abraham entertained misgivings,] being afraid of suffering.<sup>6</sup> Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: "Thou needst have no fear, for already he has been born who is to receive them, viz. UZ HIS FIRSTBORN, AND BUZ HIS BROTHER (XXII, 21).<sup>7</sup> When did Job flourish? R. Simeon b. Lakish said in Bar

Kappara's name: In the days of Abraham, for here it says, UZ HIS FIRSTBORN. while it is written, There was a man in the land of Uz (Job I, 1).

(6) Viz. of being involved in further trials; cf. supra, LVI, 11.

(7) The reference is to Job, this agreeing with the view that Job was identical with Uz or a contemporary of his.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Batra page 16a

Then the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, for there is none like him in the earth . . . and he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him to destroy him without cause. Said R. Yohanan: Were it not expressly stated in the Scripture, we would not dare to say it. [God is made to appear] like a man who others try to incite him against his better judgment and he yields.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hagiga page 5a

R. Yohanan, when he came to the [following] verse, wept: And thou didst incite Me against him, to destroy him without cause. (Job 2:3) A slave whose Master, when they try to incite him against his better judgment, yields; is there any hope for him?