

**"HAVE YOU NOTICED MY SERVANT JOB?" (JOB 1:8)
ON THE GENTILE, THE PATIENT, THE RIGHTEOUS AND
THE PROTESTER JOB IN PREMODERN JEWISH TRADITION**

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Good afternoon. I am pleased to be part of the Bible Week and thank the organising committee for inviting me to share ideas about Job in the Jewish tradition.

1. The Gentile and the Patient: Medieval Assumptions

In Sir John Mandeville's medieval bestseller *The book of marvels and travels*, the voice of a western traveler describes a journey to the holy land and a mythical east beyond. Sir John is fond of describing the religions of the countries he purportedly visited between 1332 and 1366. On several occasions discussing these other religions of the peoples of the east, Sir John comes to mention Job, to whom a temple is dedicated in a plain into which the river Jordan runs. But maybe the most interesting passage on Job we find in the context of Sir John's description of India (**Text 0**):

Text 0: Even though these peoples do not have the articles of our faith, I do nevertheless believe that God indeed loves them because of their good intentions and He regards their service as of the same order as that of Job, a pagan whom God accepted, along with many others, as His faithful servant. I believe that God truly loves all those who meekly and piously love Him and despise worldly vanities as do these men, and as Job did. (Sir John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, Ch. 23: The arrangement of the Court of Prester John)

For Mandeville's audience Job is an exemplary pious pagan. In spite of his "other" eastern religious identity, those like Job were accepted by God. Such an understanding of Job hints at a long Jewish exegetical tradition dealing with the religious identity of the man of Uz. I will turn to this after a brief biographical note.

I first heard of Job at university in a lecture on the first chivalric novel in the history of Castilian literature, the fourteenth century *Libro del caballero Cifar*. The first chapters of this book appear to follow the life of Saint Eustace and this runs as follows: While hunting, the Roman general Placidus encounters a stag which not only has the sign of the cross between its horns but also speaks and tells the Roman it is Christ. Once in Rome Placidus reports the miracle to his wife who has had an apparition herself. That very night the bishop baptises the couple and their two sons. The next day, again in the forest, Eustachius, as he is now called, meets the same stag which now lets him know that he will be tried like Job, that he is not to lose courage and that he will be rewarded. Eustachius loses slaves, cattle, wealth, friends, and temporarily (though he is not aware of this) his family (who all go through trials). Once restored to his prior social standing and reunited with his family and before he is martyred to death with them, the saint-to-be Eustachius is told to see in Job a role-model for endurance.

Neither the idea that Job was a gentile nor the proverbial patience of Job we tend to associate with the famous verse of the letter of James in the New Testament (James 5:11) are exclusively Christian readings. These have precedents in the Jewish reception of Job in the literature of the Second Temple and the rabbinic periods to which I now turn.

2. Job's Patience: Beginnings in Jewish-Hellenistic Literature

The *Septuagint* is no literal translation into Greek of a Hebrew original. In the case of Job the literary translation resulted in a text which was originally a sixth shorter than the Masoretic Text (MT). However, this Greek translation also has two major additions to verses in the novella or didactic tale. The six words Job's wife speaks in the Hebrew Bible are expanded to a speech in which she laments the death of her children and her loss of social standing (**Text 1**).

Text 1: Then after a long time had passed, his wife said to him, "How long will you persist and say, 9a 'Look, I will hang on a little longer, while I wait for the hope of my deliverance?' 9b For look, your legacy has vanished from the earth – sons and daughters, my womb's birth pangs and labors, for whom I wearied myself with hardships in vain. 9c And you? You sit in the refuse of worms as you spend the night in the open air. 9d As for me, I am one that wanders about and a hired servant – from place to place and house to house, waiting for when the sun will set, so I can rest from the distresses and griefs that now beset me. 9e Now say some word to the Lord and die!" (Job^{LXX} 2:9a–d)

While such a speech cannot be said to represent any balanced distribution of the words – also in the Greek version Job is about men's thoughts and words – having more textual space somehow upgrades the wife.

The second major addition in the Septuagint (Job 42:17a–e) locates Job in the "land of Ausitis, on the borders of Idumea and Arabia." A more concrete geography than in the MT, this is the region where the Christian pilgrim Egeria will head to in the fourth century to see the tomb of holy Job. In line with a general emphasis on Job's piety, a softening of his rebelliousness and troublesome statements, the Septuagint lets Job live to see his descendants in the fourth generation, grants him Abrahamic lineage (descent from Esau) and, even more importantly, resurrection.

The main elaboration on the canonical book of Job in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period is that of the *Testament of Job*, composed in the first century CE. Here Job is a wealthy king of Abrahamic lineage who rules in Ausitis and whose second wife is Jacob's daughter Dina.

It is a fundamental feature of this version that it is spoken in the first person. It is Job who before he dies addresses his children by Dina, telling them: "Gather round me so that I may show you the things which the Lord did with me and all the things which have happened to me. I am your father Job, fully engaged in endurance" (TestHi 1:4–5). To these "Jewish" children he tells his story, divides his estate among them, expects them to learn from his example and take his advice. In the first part of Job's story in the Testament of Job we learn of a nightly vision in which an angel lets Job know that in fighting idolatry Job will provoke Satan's anger. The angel's prophetic speech to Job on the trials and the restoration that await him you will find on your handouts (**Text 2**). If he is patient, the angel explains, Job's name will never be forgotten.

Text 2: If you attempt to purge the place of Satan, he will rise up against you with wrath for battle. But he will be unable to bring death upon you. He will bring on you many plagues, he will take away for himself your goods, he will carry off your children. But if you are patient, I will make your name renowned in all generations of the earth till the consummation of the age. And I will return you again to your goods. You will be repaid doubly, so that you may know that the Lord is impartial – rendering good things to each one who obeys. And you shall be raised up in the resurrection. (TestHi 4:4–9)

Job is not a challenger of the Deity, but a sufferer whose patience eventually defeats Satan. Rather than about theodicy, the Testament of Job is a story about the conflict between Job and a Satan, who is not part of a heavenly court but rather a defender of idolatry.

Job is also depicted as priding himself on his generosity and hospitality in a lengthy segment loosely based on the canonical text (**Text 3**). Before he turns to the division of his estate, Job again insists on the importance of social justice and two further concerns, one of them specifically Jewish: “Do not forget the Lord ... Do not take to yourselves wives from strangers” (TestHi 45:1, 3).

Text 3: The four doors of my house stood open. And I established in my house thirty tables spread at all hours, for strangers only. I also used to maintain twelve other tables set for the widows. When any stranger approached to ask alms, he was required to be fed at my table before he would receive his need. (TestHi 9:7; 10:1–3)

In the Testament the dialogue between Job and his companions is but an episode, not the core of the text. What the friends are primarily interested in is not finding out whether Job deserves what he goes through, but, in the first place, finding out if they are actually in front of Job and then if he is of sound mind. Unlike the MT the Testament of Job insists on how disfigured Job must have appeared for his friends not to be able to recognize him. Outward looks in this world, Job argues, may deceive: his real throne, he claims in a response, “is in the upper world” (TestHi 33:3) and his sanity he proves in acknowledging that he is aware of how little human beings know about God. Job’s responses reflect confidence in God.

For the last part of the Testament of Job there is no counterpart in the Hebrew or Greek Bibles. This is a requirement of the testamental genre. Apart from his wisdom Job is now to divide his inheritance among his children. The estate proper goes to the seven sons. The daughters receive a symbolic inheritance: multicolored cords of ineffable appearance. One of the daughters dares to ask: “Father, is this the inheritance which you said was better than that of our brothers? Who has any use for these unusual cords? We cannot gain a living from them, can we?” (TestHi 47:1). These cords, Job explains, are a protective amulet given to him by the Lord. Once they have donned the cords as sashes, the three daughters are no longer concerned with worldly things.

3. Rabbiniſing Job

The Septuagint and the Testament of Job are versions of the entire narrative of Job. A third such text is preserved in an early medieval Aramaic translation, but I would like now to turn to the reflection on Job in the literature we refer to as Midrash and Talmud, the two building blocks of rabbinic literature or the literature of the sages. What questions are asked in relation to Job?

The use of this canonical **book** is limited in the context of Jewish law, prayer, and liturgical poetry. Job did not become associated with the festivals of the Jewish liturgical year the way the Torah and the Five Scrolls did, as public readings. However, according to certain passages in rabbinic literature the sages did delve into the place of the book in the canon, its authorship and its use.

The biblical text is not especially informative as to when and where Job lived and what his lineage was. For this reason, not only the authors of the Septuagint and the Testament of Job, but also late ancient and early medieval Jewish interpreters, the sages associated with study houses in Palestine and Babylonia, posed questions about **the figure of Job**: when did he live? where did he live? was he a Jew? what was he like? These interpreters were also concerned with the problem of innocent suffering treated in detail in the wisdom dialogue between Job and his friends.

The sages also frequently quoted **verses from the book of Job dissociated from their original context**. This was not in order to deal with the story and the major questions the book of Job raises, but rather to make other points. Many rabbinic so-called homiletic traditions take a verse from Job as the point of departure and illuminate a reading from the Torah by elaborating on an expression in Job.

It is not characteristic for rabbinic literature to treat a certain subject matter, let us say, a character of the Bible, in a systematic manner, and Job is no exception here. No late ancient or early medieval Jewish commentary comparable to the Christian commentaries of the period is preserved. Considerations on the book, the figure of Job, and interpretations of isolated or clusters of verses are scattered in the rabbinic corpora.

In the rest of my talk I shall address two of three areas in which the reception history of Job in rabbinic Judaism takes place: I will first discuss the way the sages reflected on the book as a whole. I will then turn to their thoughts about the figure and the story of Job. For time reasons I will not speak about the decontextualized use of the wording of Job. It must be noted that in their treatment of Job the sages read one of the most difficult books of the Hebrew Bible without explicitly addressing its linguistic and compositional challenges.

3.1 The book's place in the canon and authorship

What are the main questions that the sages associate with the book as part of the canon of the Hebrew Bible? They do not question the canonicity of Job, as they do for example in the case of Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. They mention the book of Job in a passage noted for its treatment of the authorship of scriptural writings. For the third part of the Hebrew Bible the Talmud suggests an order of books, which, as Rashi would argue centuries later, appears to be chronological (**Text 4**).

Text 4: The order of the Writings: Ruth and the book of Psalms, and Job and Proverbs; Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther; Ezra and Chronicles. (bBB 14b)

But then precisely about Job's chronology the sages do not agree. And even if some claim that the book was composed by Moses, the Talmud argues, Job cannot be placed first in the list of the writings, because "we do not begin with suffering." Compared with Ruth – which is also about suffering – Job is said to be a suffering person without a future, whereas Ruth is the beginning of the story of the Davidic dynasty!

That Job was thought to be primarily about suffering brings me to the use of the book in Jewish practice: While it is customary to claim that Job does not feature in Jewish liturgy, a number of Talmudic passages do suggest that Job was associated with mourning. The book is mentioned in another passage of the Babylonian Talmud which deals with commandments to be observed on the Ninth of Av, a major day of fasting and mourning that commemorates the destruction of the Temple(s). In this context we are told twice that while reading is prohibited in general, Job, the negative parts of Jeremiah and Lamentations are the exception, these are suitable readings for the Ninth of Av (**Text 5**).

Text 5: The Sages taught: All mitzvot practiced by a mourner are [likewise] practiced on the Ninth of Av: It is prohibited [to engage] in eating, and in drinking, and in smearing [oil on one's body], and in wearing shoes, and in conjugal relations. [It is] prohibited [to read] from the Torah, from the Prophets, and from the Writings, or to study from the Mishna, from the Gemara, and from midrash, and from [collections of] halakhot, and from [collections of] aggadot. However, one may read from a place [in the Bible] that he is unaccustomed to reading, [as it will be difficult for him and he will not derive pleasure from it], and he [may likewise] study from a place [of the Talmud] that he is unaccustomed to studying. And one may read from the Book of Lamentations, from the Book of Job, and from the evil matters in Jeremiah, [i.e., his prophecies of doom]. And schoolchildren interrupt [their studies] for the day because it is stated: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps 19:9). Rabbi Yehuda says: One may not even read from a place [in the Bible] that he is unaccustomed to reading, nor may one study from a place [of the Talmud] that he is unaccustomed to studying. However, one may read from Job, and from Lamentations, and from the evil matters of Jeremiah. And schoolchildren interrupt [their studies] on that day because it is stated: "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps 19:9). (bTaan 30a)

As to the question why Job remained on the margin of Jewish liturgy and it is only a few of its verses which are used in prayers, one possible explanation is that given by a contemporary scholar: The authors of liturgical texts refrained from using Job because of the difficulty of the language

(Mack 2005:30–32). As I mentioned before, in the ancient sources the difficulty of Job is not explicitly addressed.

Last but not least, considering that Aramaic translations of the Bible, the Targumim, have their main Sitz im Leben in synagogue worship, it is noteworthy that the earliest Targumic text witnesses, found at Qumran, are precisely fragments of Job. Furthermore, in the Talmudic commentary on a mishnah about the need to save sacred writings from fire on Shabbat, whether these writings are read publicly or not, and even if they are a translation into Aramaic, we read about a Targum Job being in circulation in the first century and being twice buried under bricks because a rabbi requested this (bShab 115a).

3.2 *The man Job*

The question of when Job lived is addressed in three main rabbinic passages transmitted in texts (corpora) that were redacted between the fifth and the seventh centuries. In the Midrashic commentary on Genesis, *Bereshit Rabbah*, several opinions are quoted in answer to the question when Job lived. Let me quote the first of these opinions to illustrate how midrash works. After claiming that Abraham was afraid of suffering, the midrash states (**Text 6**):

Text 6: The Holy One, blessed be He, told him, You [Abraham] do not need to be afraid. The one whom suffering shall befall, has already been born, *Uz, his first born* (Gen 22:21). When did Job live? Rabbi Simeon ben Laqish said: In the days of Abraham – *Uz, his first born* (Gen 22:21) and [elsewhere it] is written, *There was a man in the land of Uz named Job* (Job 1:1). (BerR 57:4)

The expression “Uz” (the name of Abraham’s nephew and the name of Job’s country) in two verses from different parts of Scripture is interpreted as meaning that Abraham and Job lived at the same time. In a similar fashion, several other rabbis are quoted who posit, following the chronology of the Bible, that Job lived in Jacob’s time, in the time of Jacob’s sons, during Israel’s enslavement in Egypt, during the time of the judges, during the rule of the Chaldeans, in the time of the Queen of Sheba, or in the time of Ahasuerus.

And then a radical alternative is quoted, and on top of that in the name of the same Rabbi who said Job had lived in the time of Abraham: This time the sage says: “Job did not live and was not created.” To solve the contradiction the midrash explains that it is rather Job’s sufferings that are fictional. Had they been real, the midrash goes on to argue, he would have been capable of enduring them. The last opinion as to when Job lived is attributed to Rabbi Jochanan, who claims that Job was one of the returnees from the Babylonian Exile. Job is perceived thus as Judean, and the Bavli adds in the name of Jochanan that Job had his own study house in Tiberias – where Jochanan himself had one in the third century CE. The commentary brings the reflection on Job’s floruit to a close stating: He was a non-Jew. A pious goy.

The passage on Job in the Babylonian Talmud elaborates on this notion counting him and his friends together with Balaam as the “seven Gentile prophets who prophesied to the nations of the world” (bBB 15b). In another context he is said to have been one of three counsellors whom Pharaoh asked as to what to do with the Israelites and the three were Balaam, Job, and Jethro (bSotah 11a). This type of statements on Job being a Gentile prophet, a pious Gentile, or even a Canaanite (bSota 35a) may be responses to traditions that suggest an Israelite identity, such as one according to which Job was born circumcised (**Text 7**).

Text 7: *A wholehearted and an upright man* (Job 1:8)? This teaches that Job was born circumcised. (ARN A 2)

Now apart from reflecting on whether he was a prophet, a Gentile or Jew, what characterises the rabbinic Job? The earliest rabbinic texts which deal with Job’s piety discuss the question of whether it was out of fear or also out of love that Job served God. Some compare him with Abraham (**Text 8**).

Text 8: Rabbi says: *A fearer of God* (Gen 22:12) is said in relation to Abraham and a *fearer of God* (Job 1:1) is said in relation to Job. Just as the fear of God said in connection with Abraham stems from love, so too, the fear of God said in connection with Job stems from love. And all the rest of the complaints found in the section [i.e. the book of Job] were only due to the circumstances [i.e. Job's sufferings] (tSot 6:1).

Later texts emphasise Job's **hospitality and generosity**, themes that we find already in the canonical text and in the Testament of Job. Thus, the motif of Job's open doors in Job 31:32 is expanded upon in a text that praises Job for his philanthropy (**Text 9**).

Text 9: "Let your house be opened wide": This teaches that a man's house should have a spacious entrance on the north, south, east, and west, like Job's, who made four doors to his house. And why did Job make four doors to his house? So that the poor would not be troubled to go all around the house: The one coming from the north could enter in his stride, one coming from the south could enter in his stride, and so in all directions. For that reason Job made four doors to his house. (ARN A 7)

His charity is even compared to a blessing for those who received it (bPes 112a), and among them were orphans from whom Job would steal fields, improve them and return them. A variation of Robin Hood stealing from the poor to return to the poor.

Some other traditions only superficially speak highly of Job's generosity and may even be viewed as downgrading Job when compared with the Job of the canonical text and the Testament of Job.

A further positive quality of the rabbinic Job is his **chastity**. The midrash draws an inference from Job's words in the canonical text, "I have covenanted with my eyes not to gaze on a maiden" (31:1), claiming that not just a maiden, but any married woman he would not look at (**Text 10**).

Text 10: If even in regard to a maiden – whom if he so desired he might marry, or give to his son to marry, or to his brother, or to a relation – Job was particularly strict with himself and would not look upon her; all the more in regard to another man's wife! (ARN A 2)

Was Job's righteousness such that he did not deserve the sufferings that befell him? Here the opinions of the sages differ. While some sources claim that he was tried for no reason, others – such as the tradition which depicts him as a cowardly counsellor of Pharaoh – suggest he deserved to suffer. In relation to this, a last, but very important point: Was he **patient or impatient**? As to how he reacted to his afflictions, the sages on the one hand praise Job's patient words, but are generally impatient with the impatient Job who confronts God. Job is criticised for his ingratitude towards God, for denying the resurrection of the dead, for blaspheming God. In a late midrash we are told that he would have made it into the Tefillah, if he had not complained the way he did. The midrash argues that because of his protest Job himself ruined his own chances of being commemorated daily in prayer (**Text 11**).

Text 11: Had he not complained so loudly, it would be similar to what is now said in the Tefillah: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob. We would also be saying: "and God of Job." (PesR 47)

4. Concluding remarks

Job might have excluded himself from prayer; the sages might have denied him the resurrection with which he had been upgraded in the Septuagint; they might have tempered the praise of patience and of letting go of earthly things in the Testament of Job, themes which would impact especially Christian hagiography as the texts with which I began my talk demonstrate; the sages might have claimed that the double reward he received in the canonical text is valid only for this world, but they also compared him with Abraham and regard his story as a Mosaic oeuvre, and single him out as a prophet or pious Gentile. The ancient Jewish ways of viewing Job may be ambivalent, but the fact that there is interfaith occupation with the book of Job is evidence of its vivid afterlife.

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Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium
des Innern, für Bau
und Heimat

EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHE
LANDESKIRCHE HANNOVERS



Bistum
Osnabrück

aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages