

## READING JOB (IYYOV) AS A STAND-IN FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

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This article addresses a paradox in the ‘reception history’ of the Book of Job—that is, in how this book came to be understood by its readers over the course of time, as opposed to how the author(s) of the book may have intended it to be understood.<sup>1</sup>

In short: on the one hand, while other Biblical authors apparently spoke of individual figures as *stand-ins*<sup>2</sup> for the people of Israel as a whole—see, for example “my servant” (*‘avdi*) in the so-called Servant Songs in the portion of the Book of Isaiah often referred

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent methodological discussion of this distinction, see Robert A. Harris, “Sexual Orientation in the Presentation of Joseph’s Character in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature,” in *AJS Review* 43:1 (April 2019), pp. 67–104, *e.g.*, at pp. 70–71.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of the so-called Servant Songs in Second Isaiah (esp. Isaiah 52:13–53:12), arguing that the “servant [is a] representative of the Israelite nation,” see Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), at p. 18; see also pp. 397–414.

to as 'Second Isaiah,'<sup>3</sup> or the "man" (*gever*) in Lamentations ch. 3<sup>4</sup>—it seems clear the author of the Book of Job, while drawing upon earlier prophetic discussions concerning the fate of Israel generally, was seeking to answer a *different* question, that had come to the fore

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<sup>3</sup> We use the term 'stand-in' here to avoid a potential confusion. In, for example, Maimonides' *The Guide for the Perplexed* (written in around 1190 C.E.), Book III, ch. 22, Maimonides argues that the Book of Job should be read as an allegory—but as a *different* allegory than that which we investigate here. For Maimonides, the different speakers in the Book of Job represent different philosophic answers to the question of why good people suffer—such as “when Maimonides' beloved brother, a successful merchant who had been subsidizing Maimonides' life [to that point] of study and writing, died in an accident at sea.” See Harold S. Kushner, *The Book of Job: When Bad Things Happened to a Good Person* (NY: Schocken Books, 2012) at p. 167. Cf. Warren Z. Harvey, “On Maimonides' Allegorical Reading of Scripture”, in *Interpretation and Allegory*, ed. Jon Whitman (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 181–188. See also S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah: The Political Intent of the Bible's Writers* (NY: NYU Press, 1998), at pp. 28 and 33–36, reviewing the concept of 'allegory' and how certain medieval Jewish philosophers accordingly read the Book of Job as a philosophical allegory.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) at pp. 84–85, reviewing various understandings of “the male”, and concluding: “I see the speaker as the personified voice of the exile” and as “Th[e] voice of the nation.”

beginning as of around 500 B.C.E.,<sup>5</sup> *i.e.*, concerning “the operation of the divine law of justice *in the life of the individual.*”<sup>6</sup>

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- <sup>5</sup> See Ronald Hendel and Jan Joosten, *How Old is the Hebrew Bible?: A Linguistic, Textual and Historical Study* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2018) at pp. 75-76, arguing that both the prose framework and the poetry sections of the Book of Job are written in “Transitional Bible Hebrew,” pointing to a date in the Persian Period. See also Edward L. Greenstein, *Job: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2019) at p. xxvii. In both the Jerusalem Talmud (*i.e.*, the ‘*Yerushalmi*’) and the Babylonian Talmud, the Rabbis expressed a broad range of opinions as to when Job lived – ranging from the time of Abraham, to the time of Esther, and even admitting the possibility that Job was not a real person. See in the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b-15b. [To locate the *Yerushalmi* discussion, it should be recalled that there is no standard pagination of the *Yerushalmi* (though there is for the Babylonian Talmud). In ‘traditional’ printings, each two-sided page (*daf*) contains 4 columns. Here, our discussion is at p. 20, cols. c-d. In editions that follow Ms. Leiden, such as that published by the Academy of the Hebrew Language (Jerusalem, 2005; Yaacov Sussman, intro.), the discussion is at ch. 5, sec. 5, *halakhah* [‘law’] 8.] The underlying Mishnah is Mishnah, Sotah 5:5. Accordingly, while some of the Rabbis opined that the Book of Job was written by Moses, others agreed that it was written after the Babylonian exile.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1965) at p. 149 (*italics added*). Gordis argues (at p. 149):

This shift in emphasis from the destiny of the group to the welfare of the individual became dominant after the return from the Babylonian exile. The tiny Jewish commonwealth, subservient to a succession of foreign masters, beset by hostile neighbors, and torn by dissent within, offered a limited theatre of activity for the operation of God’s law of righteous retribution applied to the nation. It could not satisfy the deeply human desire to see justice established in the world. But when the law of consequence was transferred to the laws of individual men and women, it was crystal clear that experience contradicted it at every turn [–hence, the problem addressed by the author of Job].

Gordis’ position was attacked by David Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1995). (Wolfers was a medical doctor who left his practice in Australia to move, for the last twenty years of his life, to Jerusalem, to study the Book of Job). Wolfers

But, on the other hand, the Book of Job has come to be associated, liturgically, with the Fast Day of Tisha B'Av—which commemorates various *collective* tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people;<sup>7</sup> and, as will be reviewed herein, a number of modern

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argued that “The Book of Job is a political-historical allegory” (at p. 69), written at the time of Assyria’s near-destruction of the Kingdom of Judea during the reign of King Hezekiah (in 701 B.C.E.), to address questions about the covenantal relationship between God and Israel—in which, for example, the Leviathan, in Job ch. 40, is “a symbol for Assyria” (at p. 183; see also, *e.g.*, at pp. 15, 53, and 95).

A review of Wolfers by Scott B. Noegel, in *Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies* 22/2 (1997), pp. 243–248, notes, however, how Wolfers rests on a variety of problematic methodological assumptions. Noegel also notes (at pp. 244–245) that reading Job as a stand-in for Israel “never dawned on any of the sages before” the kabbalist Solomon Molcho (1500–1532 C.E.).

Compare also the ‘psychological’ reading of Job in Tiffany Houck-Loomis, “Reimagining in Order to Reimagine God: A Depth Psychological Look at the Book of Job in Relation to the Deuteronomist History and its Application for Today,” in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (2016) at pp. 23–41 (relying on Wolfers, but proposing to relocate the book’s setting to the period of the Babylonian exile).

This article will generally follow Noegel, Gordis, Kushner, and Greenstein, *supra*.

- <sup>7</sup> In the Ashkenazic communities, the Book of Job is considered one of the few sections of the Bible that one is allowed to study on Tisha B'Av—for study of Torah is generally considered an inherently joyous experience, inconsistent with the nature of Tisha B'Av. This custom derives from the statement in the Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 30a:

Our Rabbis taught: All obligations that are observed by a mourner are observed on Tisha B'av: one is forbidden in eating and drinking, in anointing and the wearing of shoes, and in sexual relations, and it is forbidden to read from the Torah [*i.e.*, the Pentateuch], Nevi'im [*i.e.*, the Hebrew Bible’s middle ‘third,’ labeled “Prophets’], or Ketuvim [*i.e.*, the Hebrew Bible’s final ‘third,’ labeled “Writings”], or to learn Mishnah [*i.e.*, canonized teachings of rabbinic sages ending with the compilation of ‘the Mishnah’—literally, the “teaching”—edited circa 225 C.E.], Talmud [*i.e.*, ‘exposition’ related to Mishnaic teachings], Midrash [*i.e.*, interpretations related to the Hebrew Bible], Halachot [*i.e.*, Jewish “laws”], or Aggadot [*i.e.*, rabbinic “narratives”]. But ...

thinkers, in addressing the Shoah—and in particular, Martin Buber—have used the Book of Job as starting-points for their discussions.

Accordingly, the first part of this essay will review some recent readings of the Book of Job as a stand-in for the people of Israel. This essay will then point to certain features of the Book of Job that facilitate such readings.

## Some Modern Readings

Many modern Jewish authors and scholars have certainly seen an exilic theme within the Joban text. Writing about various 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish exiles displaced after the Second World War, Guy

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one may read the books of Lamentations, Job, and the sad parts of Jeremiah.

Translation from David Fried, “The Relationship between Tisha B’ Av and the Book of Job,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 44:3 (2016) at pp. 157-165. See, likewise, Rabbi Joshua Flug, “Torah Study on Tisha B’ Av,” as accessed at [www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/783235/rabbi-josh-flug/torah-study-on-tisha-b-av/](http://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/783235/rabbi-josh-flug/torah-study-on-tisha-b-av/) on October 1, 2019.

In various ‘Sephardic’ traditions, moreover, the Book of Job is chanted publicly in the synagogue on Tisha B’ Av. Thus, A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston; 1929) (reprint by Schocken Books, 1967) at p. 57, observed:

Among the Oriental and Sephardic Jews, Job is read on the ninth of Ab, immediately after Lamentations. Therefore, among these groups its [musical] mode has been preserved, while the Ashkenazim—not having this custom—have forgotten the tradition of this mode as the “Job Mode”. Instead, they employ it for the reading of the Pentateuch on the High Holiday...

Herbert C. Dobrinsky—in his survey of customs and practices of the various ‘Sephardic’ communities that have relocated to the U.S. and/or Canada, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (3rd ed.; NY: Yeshiva U. Press, 2001; originally published 1986)—at pp. 295-307, notes that the Book of Job is chanted publicly in the Moroccan and Judeo-Spanish (*i.e.*, Balkan and Levant) communities, and is read privately/silently in the Syrian community; however, it is not read in the ‘Spanish and Portuguese’ (Amsterdam) community.

Stern states: "As a rule the exiled writers worked with more limited themes from the Hebrew bible. For understandable reasons, none claimed as wide a hold on the refugee writers as did the Book of Job."<sup>8</sup> Stern then goes on to identify various Jewish writers who have referenced Job from the midst of exile and have seen similarities between the ancient text and their present exilic situation. These authors include Nobel Laureate Nelly Sachs, Karl Wolfskehl, Fritz Rosenthal, Otto Klepetr, Freidrich Torberg, and others.<sup>9</sup>

A few similarities stand out amongst these modern Jewish interpretations. First, for the most part, they dismiss the figure referred to in Job ch. 1 as "the Satan" (*'ha-satan'*) [*i.e.*, the adversary, or the challenger/provocateur] in the 'prologue,'<sup>10</sup> who is conspicuously absent in the 'epilogue.' This figure to them is either unimportant, or (they contend) was written separately from the poetic dialogues in chs. 3-41. Second, Israel's suffering is generally perceived by these writers to be a mysterious matter of divine sovereignty, originating in the court of heaven as a decree of YHWH. Thirdly, very few of these modern Jewish writers address the positive aspects of the epilogue (*i.e.*, where God grants Job *new* children, and a lengthy life; see below), perhaps due to the distressing circumstances of their own present exilic situation.

Perhaps the most important Jewish commentator who saw Job as a stand-in for a collective exilic Israel was Martin Buber. In an essay first published (in Hebrew) in 1941, translated into English in 1948 as part of the volume titled *Prophetic Faith*, Buber writes, "Behind this 'I' [of Job's] there stands the 'I' of Israel."<sup>11</sup> Buber argued that the Book of Job was written during or near the beginning of the Babylonian Exile, so that its author was confronting the question of why that generation was suffering. In his recent biography of Buber, Paul Mendes-Flohr accordingly quotes the following passage from a lecture that Buber gave in New York in 1951:<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Guy Stern, "Job as Alter Ego", *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 199-210, esp. p. 203.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> On the general distinction between the prose prologue and epilogue, in contrast to the intermediate poetic dialogues, see Kushner, *supra*, fn. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (NY: MacMillan, 1949), trans. Carlyle Winton-Davies, p. 183.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (New Haven:

How is a Jewish life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Oswiecim [Auschwitz]? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness [of God] too deep. One can still “believe” in Him who allowed these things to happen, but can one speak to Him? Dare we recommend to the survivors of Oswiecim, the Job of the gas chambers: “Call to Him, for He is kind, for His mercy endureth forever?”

Noah Zvi Farkas critically examines Buber’s insightful interpretation of Job and writes:

Buber’s notion of God’s eclipse, along with his patient faith in God’s return, is framed both prior to and after the Shoah as a historical working out of his commentary on the book of Job. The sufferings of Job, for Buber, are more than the writings of a single man; they are the representation of a nation faced with an unprecedented communal disaster whose myriad theological responses to the experience of suffering stand as the cornerstone of religious belief.<sup>13</sup>

Plainly, Buber and others have sought to draw from the Book of Job insights in regard to questions that are broader than the questions

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Yale University Press, 2019) at p. 294, quoting from Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays*, ed. Maurice Friedman (NY: Harper Torchbook, 1965) p. 61. Mendes-Flohr speculates (*id.*) that the aforementioned passage “may have been the first [philosophical attempt] to broach the question of faith after Auschwitz.”

It has been argued, however, that there is a *discontinuity* between Buber’s earlier and later readings of the Book of Job. See Tamra Wright, “Self, Other, Text, God: The Dialogical Thought of Martin Buber,” pp. 102-121 in Michael Morgan and Peter Gordon (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. at pp. 115-116.

<sup>13</sup> Noah Zvi Farkas. “Martin Buber, the Book of Job, and the Shoah,” in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Summer 2010), pp. 43-53, esp. p. 44. Farkas noted that Buber did not use the term ‘Holocaust’ or ‘Shoah’, but rather used “Auschwitz” as a metonym. (*Id.* at p. 51, fn. 1.)

that, according to scholars such as Gordis, *supra*, were the original contextual concerns of that Book's author. In the next section, we note features of the Book of Job that facilitate such broader readings.

### Three Features of the Book of Job Facilitating A 'Collective' Interpretation

A first puzzling feature of the Book of Job, lending itself to reading Job as a stand-in for Israel in distress, is its connection to Esau/Edom. Thus, Job is said to live in the land of  $\text{Uz}$  ('Uz'). Where 'Uz' exactly is has been the subject of considerable discussion and debate. Two prevailing theories suggest that Uz is either in Edom or Syria. Support for an Edomite locale is provided by the genealogical history of Esau in Genesis 36:28, which states, "And the sons of Dishan [Esau's great-grandson] were these: Uz and Aran."<sup>14</sup> Lamentations 4:21 specifically states that Uz is in the land of Edom: "Rejoice and exult, Fair Edom, who dwell in the land of Uz."

The names of Job's three friends also suggest an Edomite provenance: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. Eliphaz is the name of Esau's firstborn son (Genesis 36:4) and is found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible except in Job. 'Temanite' is derived from 'Teman,' an area that is situated in Edom by some of the prophetic authors, including Jeremiah (49:20) and Amos (1:12). A king from the land of Teman is said to have ruled the nation of Edom in Genesis 36:34.

Bildad is found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible except in the Book of Job, and 'Shuhite' most likely refers to the area of Shuah. Again, the ancestral genealogical lists of Genesis tell us that Shuah is also of Edomite origin (Gen. 25:2). The origin of Zophar the Naamathite, the third friend, is even more enigmatic than the other two. 'Naamathite' perhaps refers to the modern city of Naamah in north-western Lebanon; but it is also the name of a city in the Shephelah near Lachish or in the Sorek Valley.<sup>15</sup> If it is the Sorek Valley, this could be considered Edom in the immediate aftermath of the exile, as the

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<sup>14</sup> All translations are taken or adapted from the NJPS, except as otherwise noted.

<sup>15</sup> William F. Albright, "Topographical Researches in Judæa," in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 18 (1925): pp. 6-11, esp. p. 7.

Edomites appropriated some of the Shephelah and southern Judean countryside after the Babylonian invasion.

Given this narrative setting (mainly) in Edom, a reader might well infer that the Book of Job reflects conditions following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. – for Edom has a strong association to the Babylonian exile, primarily because of Edom’s cooperation with Babylon in destroying the kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C.E.. Thus, the ‘Apocryphal’ book of 1 Esdras 4:45 states, “You also vowed to rebuild the temple which the Edomites set on fire when Judah was devastated by the Chaldeans.”<sup>16</sup>

Edom is also a source of provocation for the exilic and post-exilic Hebrew prophetic writers. Obadiah recounts Edom’s enmity against Israel, stating:

Thus said my Lord God concerning Edom... “For the outrage to your brother Jacob, disgrace shall engulf you, and you shall perish forever. On that day when you stood aloof, when aliens carried off his goods, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were as one of them.”<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, “concerning Edom” (as per Jeremiah 49:7), Jeremiah 49:16 describes the impending destruction of Edom due to the violence that they have caused Israel:

Your horrible nature, your arrogant heart has seduced you, has deceived you, and the pride of your heart, you who dwell in clefts of the rock, who occupy the height of the hill. Should you nest as high as the eagle, from there I will pull you down.

It should be noted, however, that even if Job is pictured as living in Uz/Edom, the text appears to indicate that Job is not himself in Edomite. The first sentence of ch. 1 states that “there was a man *in* the land of Uz named Job” (emphasis added to the prefixal preposition

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<sup>16</sup> Translation from Jacob M. Myers, *I & II Esdras: A New Translation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday [Anchor Bible], 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Obadiah (– which consists of just one chapter), vv. 3 and 10–11.

that begins “בארץ עוץ” — *i.e.*, “in the land of Uz”). But we are told neither for how long Job was there nor how he arrived there.

Indeed, Job is called (in v. 3 of that first chapter) “גדול מכל בני קדם” (*gadol mikkol beney kedem* — *i.e.*, “that man was wealthier than anyone in the East”). This reference to קדם (*kedem*, ‘east’) could be in reference to Edom — although, geographically, Edom is primarily viewed as a southern neighbor to Judah, as evidenced by territorial boundary descriptions in Numbers. (See, *e.g.*, Numbers 34:3 for Edom as a southern neighbor). Instead of seeing Edom in the Joban text, one can see an allusion to a Babylonian nation often referred to in the Hebrew Bible as “from the East.” For example, Ezekiel ch. 25, in verses 4 and 10, states that Israel’s neighbors — Ammon, Moab and Seir — will likewise be handed over to “בני קדם” (*b’nei kedem*).<sup>18</sup> Taken this way, one might read the text as strongly suggesting that Job was an exilic Israelite who had at one time lived in the land of the ‘east’ — that is, the land of Babylon — sometime in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, it is a character with a Hebrew name, Elihu, the true Hebrew (at least based on his name and place of origin — ‘Buzite’ being most likely a Gadite)<sup>19</sup> who suggests to Job the prospect of returning to the land.<sup>20</sup>

Second, Job’s own name also can be seen as supporting a metaphorical reading.

The person of Job is obviously central to the Joban narrative; he is the focus of the prose “prologue” and “epilogue;” and the longest of the poetic dialogues are attributed to him. He also stands as both the protagonist and the antagonist of the narrative, the former because he is an innocent man who is suffering and is in the ‘right’ compared to his three friends, and the latter because he confronts none other than YHWH himself.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> NJPS translates: “Kedemites”.

<sup>19</sup> See 1 Chronicles 5:14.

<sup>20</sup> Elihu tells Job in 36:11, “If they listen and serve Him, they complete their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasantness”.

<sup>21</sup> The nature of Job’s confrontation with God is notoriously the subject of multiple and conflicting interpretations. For a recent summary, see Troy W. Martin, “Concluding the Book of Job and YHWH: Reading Job from the End to the Beginning,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137:2 (2018) at pp. 299–318.

The story begins in a familiar way with introducing the main character, but ch. 1, v. 1, switches the normal Hebrew word order of verb-noun and starts with ‘a man,’ indicative of the emphasis placed on the person of Job, rather than emphasis on his place of residence. Yet, it is unclear whether the name Job is of a Judean (*i.e.*, a Jew) or not.<sup>22</sup> Etymologically, the name ‘Job’ is inconclusive. Scholars disagree over whether אִיּוֹב (*Iyov*, “Job”) is connected to the root of the Hebrew word אוֹיֵב (*oyev*), meaning ‘enemy.’ This is one interpretation of Job’s name given in the Babylonian Talmud,<sup>23</sup> and the intention might have been to create a pun: God is treating Job as an enemy, the very indictment Job levies against YHWH.<sup>24</sup> Being an enemy, or at enmity, is also how various prophets portrayed God relative to Israel.<sup>25</sup> As God’s enemy, both Job *and* Israel are facing God as their adversary, and, even though there is another אֲדֻשָׁן ([*i.e.*, “the Adversary”]) figure in the narrative (*e.g.*, Job 1:6), it is God who is indirectly inflicting the suffering upon Job. The ambiguity of agency here is familiar to readers of the Hebrew Bible, for both אֲדֻשָׁן and YHWH elsewhere are said to incite David to take a census of the nation of Israel. (Contrast 2 Sam. 24 with 1 Chronicles 21:1.) This suffering causes Job to react with cursing, not upon YHWH, but upon himself. In this way, Job mirrors another exilic author, Jeremiah, who also condemns the day of his death in light of the suffering of exile, and the points of contact between these two, particularly at Jer. 20:14-18, are clearly evident and show a commonality in their respective themes.

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<sup>22</sup> See discussion in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (NY: JPS, 2003 [reissue of original publication, 1909-1938]), at pp. 452-453, fn. 3, reviewing the history of this debate in the midrashic texts. Contrast the Septuagint version of the Book of Job, which includes a postscript, see ch. 42:17, opining that Job was a grandson of Esau.

<sup>23</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra*, 16a.

<sup>24</sup> Job 13:24 states, “Why do You hide Your face and treat me like an enemy?”

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Isaiah 63:10, explaining that even after God delivered Israel,

they [Israel] rebelled, and grieved his holy spirit; *vayyehafekh lahem le'oyev* (“then he became their enemy”) and Himself made war against them.

Similarly, it is noteworthy that Job's wife is nameless in the text.<sup>26</sup> Job's wife calls for Job to curse God and die (ch. 2, v. 9). Some have seen in this sequence a harkening back to Genesis 1-3, and Eve's involvement in bringing a curse upon Adam,<sup>27</sup> but one can more generally see how the figure of Job's wife might represent faithless Israel, while Job, as shown above, represents the faithful remnant. The imagery of the faithless wife abounds in the Hebrew Bible, most notably in Ezekiel 16. The conspicuous absence of any reference to Job's wife in the 'prose epilogue' (ch. 42) might accordingly be read to imply that faithless Israel is no more, and all that remains are those who adhere to Torah.

Lastly, a third point that facilitates reading Job as a stand-in for all Israel is presented at the end of the Book of Job, in the prose Epilogue. Job 42:10 states: "And the Lord gave Job *mishneh* [i.e., "twice"] what he had before."

What is the significance of this double portion? A double portion is nowhere expressly promised as a resolution of suffering, no matter the source or cause of that suffering, yet that is exactly what Job receives: doubling of all of his pre-suffering possessions, and a doubled number of sons. How is one to interpret this extremely gracious provision from the hand of YHWH? A literal reading of the text makes it difficult to do so.

Rather than seeing Job's *personal* possessions doubling, if one were to read the text metaphorically as representing the nation of Israel in exile, one might then *expect* a doubling of the portion for the nation after their return from Babylon, for this is exactly what we see expressly communicated in the prophetic material of the Hebrew Bible.

Isaiah 61:7 is case in point. Isaiah, writing to a nation in the throes of catastrophic upheaval and in the middle of regaining (or recreating) a national identity, asserts, "Because your shame was *mishneh* [i.e., "double"] ... assuredly, they shall have a double share in their land, joy shall be theirs for all time."

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<sup>26</sup> In Ginzberg's retelling of the story of Job, in *Legends of the Jews*, *supra*, Job's first wife was named Zitidos (at pp. 458 and 460), and, after her death (towards the end of Job's period of suffering), Job married Jacob's daughter Dinah (see pp. 308-309 and fn. 288 and p. 461 and fn. 35.)

<sup>27</sup> Sam Meier, "Job I-II: A Reflection of Genesis I-III," in *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 39, Fasc. 2 (April 1989), pp. 183-93.

Again, in Zechariah 9:12, which is a post-exilic text describing the return of the *golah*, that prophet states, "Return to [your fortress], You prisoners of hope; In return I announce this day: I will repay you *mishneh*."

Accordingly, in respect of Job as well, one can understand that the promise from YHWH to Israel concerning a double portion was never intended to be taken at a personal, experiential level, but at the corporate level of Israel, as YHWH remembers his ברית (*berit*, "covenant") with his people and extends to them a gracious doubling of their pre-exilic status, including possessions.

Moreover, even the longevity of Job's post-suffering life might be read as an enigmatic clue. The text states that Job lived 140 more years after the blessing the Lord bestowed upon him. This can sound like a doubling of the exilic '70' years predicted by Jeremiah (25:11 and 29:10); the Lord doubled Job's possessions, and the days of that blessing are twice greater than the days of exile.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

The Book of Job is famously enigmatic and challenging, in multiple respects, and on multiple levels. As already recognized by some of the Rabbis in both Talmuds, its core ambiguities lend themselves to, and invite, readings that go beyond the specific circumstances attributed to the character known as Job. Whether or not intended by the original author(s), the possible readings explored in our own time by Martin Buber and others encourage us to return and re-read, and re-think, this text.

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<sup>28</sup> For those who are prepared to read the Book of Job in a way where, at the end, God admits that he has wronged Job, then it may be that the doubling corresponds to the principle enunciated in Ex. 22:3, that a thief is required to pay *double compensation* for the theft. See, e.g., Greenstein, *supra*, commenting on Job 42: 9-10.

*Reading Job (Iyyov) as a 'Stand-In' for the People of Israel*

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*evaluation of the Deuteronomistic History, as well as the status and influence of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the late Iron Age periods.*

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