

The book of Job inside out

Limmud, Sunday 23rd December 2018, 18:40

Ian Gamse

Many readings of the Book of Job assume that it's a poetic work with prose prologue and epilogue tacked on. But what happens if we read the narrative and then try to understand how the poetry fits in? Some surprising insights into the nature of the religious life will emerge.

Who was Job? What was his religious life?

Job Chapter 1

איוב פרק א

א איש הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ עוּז אִיּוֹב שְׁמוֹ וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא תָם וְיָשָׁר וִירָא אֶ"ס וְסָר מֵרָע.
ב וַיּוֹלְדוּ לוֹ שִׁבְעָה בָנִים וְשְׁלוֹשׁ בָּנוֹת.
ג וַיְהִי מִקְנֵהוּ שִׁבְעַת אֲלָפֵי צֹאן וּשְׁלֹשָׁת אֲלָפֵי גְמָלִים וְחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת צֶמֶד בָּקָר וְחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת אֲתוֹנוֹת וְעֶבְדָּה רַבָּה מְאֹד וַיְהִי הָאִישׁ הַהוּא גָדוֹל מִכָּל בְּנֵי קָדֶם.
ד וְהָלְכוּ בָנָיו וְעָשׂוּ מִשְׁתָּה בֵּית אִישׁ יוֹמוֹ וְשָׁלְחוּ וְקָרְאוּ לְשִׁלְשֵׁת אַחֵיתֵיהֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת עִמָּהֶם.
ה וַיְהִי כִּי הִקִּיפוּ יָמֵי הַמִּשְׁתָּה וַיִּשְׁלַח אִיּוֹב וַיְקַדְּשֵׁם וְהִשְׁכִּים בַּבֹּקֶר וְהִעֲלָה עֹלוֹת מִסֶּפֶר כָּל־יְמֵי אִיּוֹב אוֹלֵי חֲטָאוֹ בְּנֵי וּבָרָכוּ אֶ"ס בְּלִבָּבָם כִּכָּה יַעֲשֶׂה אִיּוֹב כָּל הַיָּמִים.

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was whole-hearted and upright, and one that feared God, and shunned evil.

2 And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

3 His possessions also were seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the children of the east.

4 And his sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one upon his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said: 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and blasphemed God in their hearts.' Thus did Job continually.

What is the challenge?

ו וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֶ"ס לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל י' וַיָּבֹאוּ גַם הַשָּׁטָן בְּתוֹכָם.
ז וַיֹּאמֶר י' אֶל הַשָּׁטָן מֵאֵין תָּבֹא וַיַּעַן הַשָּׁטָן אֶת י' וַיֹּאמֶר מִשׁוּט בְּאֶרֶץ וּמִהֶתְהַלֵּךְ בָּהּ.
ח וַיֹּאמֶר י' אֶל הַשָּׁטָן הֲשִׁמְתָּ לְבָדָּעַל עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמֹהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ אִישׁ תָּם וְיָשָׁר יִירָא אֶ"ס וְסָר מֵרָע.
ט וַיַּעַן הַשָּׁטָן אֶת י' וַיֹּאמֶר הַחֲנֹם יִירָא אִיּוֹב אֶ"ס.
י הֲלֹא אֵת (אֲתָה) שָׁכַתְּ בַּעֲדוֹ וּבַעֲדָה בֵּיתוֹ וּבַעֲדָה כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ מִסָּבִיב מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו בִּרְכָתָהּ וּמִקְנֵהוּ פָּרָץ בְּאֶרֶץ.
יא וְאוֹלָם שָׁלַח נָא יָדְךָ וְגַע בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ אִם לֹא עַל פְּגִידָה יִבְרָכְךָ.
יב וַיֹּאמֶר י' אֶל הַשָּׁטָן הִנֵּה כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ בְּיָדְךָ רַק אֱלֹהִים אֵל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ וַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׁטָן מֵעַם פְּגִי י'.

6 Now it fell upon a day, that the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

7 And the LORD said unto Satan: 'Whence comest thou?' Then Satan answered the LORD, and said: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.'

8 And the LORD said unto Satan: 'Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a whole-hearted and an upright man, one that feareth God, and shunneth evil?'

9 Then Satan answered the LORD, and said: 'Doth Job fear God for nought?

10 Hast not Thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are increased in the land.

11 But put forth Thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, surely he will blaspheme Thee to Thy face.'

12 And the LORD said unto Satan: 'Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand.' So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

What happens?

יג וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וּבָנָיו וּבָנֹתָיו אֹכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים יַיִן בְּבֵית אַחִיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר.
יד וּמִלֶּאֶדָּה בָּא אֶל אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַבָּקָר הֵיוּ חֹרְשׁוֹת וְהָאֲתָנּוֹת רְעוֹת עַל יְדֵיהֶם.
טו וַתִּפֹּל שֶׁבַע וַתִּקְחֶם וְאֵת הַנְּעָרִים הָכּוּ לְפִי חֶרֶב וְאִמְלָטָה רַק אֲנִי לְבָדִי לְהִגִּיד לָךְ.
טז עוֹד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵשׁ א" נָפְלָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וַתִּבְעַר בְּצֹאן וּבְנְעָרִים וַתֹּאכְלֶם וְאִמְלָטָה רַק אֲנִי לְבָדִי, לְהִגִּיד לָךְ.
יז עוֹד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר כְּשָׂדִים שָׁמוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה רָאשִׁים וַיִּפְּשְׁטוּ עַל הַגְּמֵלִים וַיִּקְחוּם וְאֵת הַנְּעָרִים הָכּוּ לְפִי חֶרֶב וְאִמְלָטָה רַק אֲנִי לְבָדִי לְהִגִּיד לָךְ.
יח עַד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִיד וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ אֹכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים יַיִן בְּבֵית אַחִיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר.
יט וְהִנֵּה רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה בָּאָה מֵעֵבֶר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּגַע בְּאַרְבַּע פְּנוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיִּפֹּל עַל הַנְּעָרִים וַיָּמוּתוּ וְאִמְלָטָה רַק אֲנִי לְבָדִי לְהִגִּיד לָךְ.

13 And it fell on a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house,

14 that there came a messenger unto Job, and said: 'The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them;

15 and the Sabeans made a raid, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

16 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said: 'A fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

17 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said: 'The Chaldeans set themselves in three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have taken them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.'

18 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said: 'Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house;

19 And, behold, there came a great wind from across the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

How does Job react?

כ וַיָּקָם אִיּוֹב וַיִּקְרַע אֶת מְעָלוֹ וַיִּגְזֹז אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּפֹּל אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה.
כא וַיֹּאמֶר עָרִם נָצַתִּי מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי וְעָרִם אָשׁוּב שָׁמָּה י" נָתַן וַי" לָקַח יְהִי שֵׁם י" מְבָרָךְ.
כב בְּכָל זֹאת לֹא חָטָא אִיּוֹב וְלֹא נָתַן תַּפְלָה לָּא."

20 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped;

21 And he said; naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

22 For all this Job sinned not, nor ascribed aught unseemly to God.

More of the same?

Job Chapter 2

איוב פרק ב

א וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל יְיָ. וַיָּבֹאוּ גַם הַשָּׁטָן בְּתוֹכָם לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל יְיָ.
 ב וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל הַשָּׁטָן אֵי מִזֶּה תָּבֹא וַיַּעַן הַשָּׁטָן אֶת יְיָ וַיֹּאמֶר מַשֵּׁט בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּמְהַלֵּךְ בָּהּ.
 ג וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל הַשָּׁטָן הֲשִׁמְתָּ לְבָדָּךְ אֶל עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמֹהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אִישׁ תָּם וְיָשָׁר יֵרָא
 א "וְסָר מִרַע וְעָדְנוּ מִחֲזִיק בְּתַמָּתוֹ וְתִסִּיתֵנִי בּוֹ לְבָלְעוֹ חֲנָם.
 ד וַיַּעַן הַשָּׁטָן אֶת יְיָ וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹר בְּעֵד עוֹר וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְאִישׁ יִתֵּן בְּעֵד נַפְשׁוֹ.
 ה אוֹלָם שָׁלַח נָא יָדְךָ וְגַע אֶל עֲצָמוֹ וְאֶל בְּשָׁרוֹ אִם לֹא אֶל פָּנֶיךָ יִבְרָכְךָ.
 ו וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל הַשָּׁטָן הִנֵּה בְיָדְךָ אִךְ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ שְׁמֹר.
 ז וַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׁטָן מֵאֶת פְּנֵי יְיָ וַיִּךְ אֶת אִיּוֹב בְּשַׁחֲיוֹן רָע מִכָּף רִגְלוֹ עַד (וְעַד) קֶדְקֶדָּו.
 ח וַיִּקַּח לוֹ חֲרָשׁ לְהִתְגַּרְדּוֹ בּוֹ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ הָאֵפֶר.

- 1 Again it fell upon a day, that the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD.
- 2 And the LORD said unto Satan: 'From whence comest thou?' And Satan answered the LORD, and said: 'From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.'
- 3 And the LORD said unto Satan: 'Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a whole-hearted and an upright man, one that feareth God, and shunneth evil? and he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou didst move Me against him, to destroy him without cause.'
- 4 And Satan answered the LORD, and said: 'Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.'
- 5 But put forth Thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, surely he will blaspheme Thee to Thy face.'
- 6 And the LORD said unto Satan: 'Behold, he is in thy hand; only spare his life.'
- 7 So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot even unto his crown.
- 8 And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself therewith; and he sat among the ashes.

A way out?

ט וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ עֲדָךְ מִחֲזִיק בְּתַמָּתְךָ בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת.
 י וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כְּדֹבֵר אַחַת הַנְּבִלּוֹת תִּדְבְּרִי גַם אֶת הַטּוֹב נִקְבֵּל מֵאֵת הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶת הָרָע לֹא
 נִקְבֵּל בְּכָל זֹאת לֹא חָטָא אִיּוֹב בְּשִׁפְתָיו.

- 9 Then said his wife unto him: 'Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? blaspheme God, and die.'
- 10 But he said unto her: 'Thou speakest as one of the impious women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' For all this did not Job sin with his lips.

What are friends for?

יֵא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת רֵעֵי אִיּוֹב אֶת כָּל הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה עָלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ אֶלְיָפוֹ הַתִּימָנִי וּבִלְדָּד הַשּׁוּחִי וְצוֹפָר הַנַּעֲמָתִי וַיִּזְעְדוּ יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לָנוּד לוֹ וּלְנַחֲמוֹ.
יב וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם מִרְחוֹק וְלֹא הִכִּירוּהוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ וַיִּקְרְעוּ אִישׁ מְעֵלוֹ וַיִּזְרְקוּ עָפָר עַל רִאשֵׁיהֶם הַשָּׁמַיְמָה.
יג וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אֹתוֹ לְאֶרֶץ שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְשִׁבְעַת לַיְלוֹת וַאֲיֵן דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו דָּבָר כִּי רָאוּ כִּי גָדֹל הַכָּאֵב מְאֹד.

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to bemoan him and to comfort him.
12 And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and threw dust upon their heads toward heaven.
13 So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word unto him; for they saw that his grief was very great.

Job's response

Job Chapter 3

איוב פרק ג

א אַחֲרֵי כֵן פָּתַח אִיּוֹב אֶת פִּיהוּ וַיִּקְלָל אֶת יוֹמוֹ.

1 After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.

Followed by 38 chapters of incomprehensible poetry...

...and then

Job Chapter 42

איוב פרק מב

ז וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי דִבְרֵי י' אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר י' אֶל אֶלְיָפוֹ הַתִּימָנִי חָרָה אַפִּי בָךְ וּבִשְׁנֵי רֵעֶיךָ כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב.
ח וַעֲתָה קָחוּ לָכֶם שְׁבַעַת פָּרִים וְשִׁבְעָה אֵילִים וּלְכוּ אֶל עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב, וְהַעֲלִיתֶם עוֹלָה בְּעֵדְכֶם וְאִיּוֹב עַבְדִּי יִתְפַּלֵּל עֲלֵיכֶם: כִּי אִם פָּנִיו אֲשֹׁא לְבִלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם נְבִלָה כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב.
ט וַיִּלְכוּ אֶלְיָפוֹ הַתִּימָנִי וּבִלְדָּד הַשּׁוּחִי וְצוֹפָר הַנַּעֲמָתִי וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶם י' וַיִּשְׂא י' אֶת פָּנָיו אֵלֵי אִיּוֹב.

7 And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath.

8 Now therefore, take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept, that I do not unto you aught unseemly; for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.'

9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them; and the LORD accepted Job.

The Happy Ending

י וי" שב את שביט (שבבות) איוב בהתפללו בעד רעהו ויסף י" את כל אשר לאיוב למשנה.
 יא ויבאו אליו כל אחיו וכל אחיותיו וכל ידיעיו לפנים ויאכלו עמו לחם בביתו ויגדו לו וינחמו אתו על כל הרעה אשר הביא י" עליו ויתנו לו איש קשיטה אחת ואיש נזם זהב אחד.
 יב וי" ברך את אחרית איוב מראשיתו ויהי לו ארבעה עשר אלף צאן וששת אלפים גמלים ואלף צמד בקר ואלף אתונות.
 יג ויהי לו שבעה בנים ושלוש בנות.
 יד ויקרא שם האחת ימימה ושם השנית קציעה ושם השלישית קרו הפוך.
 טו ולא נמצא נשים יפות, כבנות איוב בכל הארץ ויתן להם אביהם נחלה בתוך אחיהם.
 טז ויחי איוב אחרי זאת מאה וארבעים שנה וירא (ויראה) את בָּנָיו ואת בְּנֵי בָנָיו ארבעה דורות.
 יז וימת איוב זקן ושבע ימים.

10 And the LORD changed the fortune of Job, when he prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house; and they bemoaned him, and comforted him concerning all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one a ring of gold. 12 So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. 13 He had also seven sons and three daughters. 14 And he called the name of the first, Jemimah; and the name of the second, Keziah; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. 15 And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. 16 And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. 17 So Job died, being old and full of days.

Has Job changed?

What has he learned?