HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION



איוב לח · מב

Job in the Whirlwind

Job 38:1–11; 42:1–6 · Iyyov mi-toch ha-se'arah

Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)

PROVISIONAL EDITION · MACHINE-ASSISTED · NOT YET REVIEWED BY A CREDENTIALED EDITOR

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About this edition

King James Version of 1611, public domain. The Hebrew text follows the Masoretic textus receptus. The book of Job is among the most linguistically difficult in the Hebrew Bible; the KJV preserves the early modern English idiom in which the whirlwind speech entered the Anglophone Christian imagination, and the Hebrew column is provided so the reader can track the storm vocabulary, the oath formulae, and the closing recantation in their original.

TRADITION	christian-mysticism
LANGUAGE	Hebrew
PERIOD	compiled c. 6th–4th c. BCE; wisdom literature, post-exilic redaction
ATTRIBUTION	Anonymous; received in both Jewish and Christian canons. The Bavli (Bava Batra 14b–15a) records a debate over authorship; one tradition assigns it to Moses.
TRANSLATION	Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)
LICENCE	Public domain
ONLINE	https://hekhal.org/texts/job-whirlwind/

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> What this is: a machine-assisted, provisional translation. Every rendering choice and every unresolved reading is recorded in the apparatus beside the text. If you read the original and something looks wrong, write to community@hekhal.org; corrections are credited.

For thirty-seven chapters Job has demanded an answer. He has been stripped of his children, his herds, his health, and the comfort of his friends, whose theology cannot account for what has happened to him. He has charged God with injustice and asked, repeatedly, for an audience. In chapter 38 the audience is granted. God answers him out of the whirlwind. The answer contains no explanation. It is a catalogue of created things Job did not make and does not understand, asked back at him as a series of unanswerable questions. At the end of it Job recants in dust and ashes, and what he recants is not his innocence but his demand to be told why.

The patristic tradition reads Job as one of the central figures of the Christian Corpus. Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, thirty-five books composed during his Constantinople embassy around 580 CE, is the canonical Latin commentary and the source from which the medieval West read Job in all four senses of the Quadriga. Maximus the Confessor reads Job in the *Ambigua* as a figure of the soul's unknowing. John of the Cross threads the whirlwind through the *Noche oscura*: the dark night in which God speaks and explains nothing.

Where Jacob is renamed and Christ is killed, Job is silenced. The mystic completion of his demand is not knowledge but seeing. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes* (42:5–6). The encounter is the answer that is not an answer. God's presence is itself the response, and Job, having received it, lays down the question.

CROSS-REFERENCES

- Jacob at Peniel, the throughline pole. The encounter that withholds the name and gives the blessing.
- Apophasis (ἀπόφασις), the negative-theological frame for the unanswered answer.
- Quadriga, the four senses, applied here in lighter touch.
- Typos (τύπος), Job as type of the suffering just one, read patristically toward Christ.

Job in the Whirlwind

JOB 38:1–11; 42:1–6

CANONICAL

HEBREW · HEBREW BIBLE · WISDOM LITERATURE

JOB 38:1–4 · THE VOICE FROM THE STORM

איוב לח · א-ד

1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

וַיַּעַן־יְהוָה אֶת־אִיּוֹב מִן הַסְּעָרָה וַיֹּאמַר׃

מִי זֶה מַחְשִׁיךְ עֵצָה בְמִלִּין בְּלִי־דָעַת׃

3 Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

1

אֱזָר־נָא כְגֶבֶר חָלָצֶיךָ וְאֶשְׁאָלְךָ
וְהוֹדִיעֵנִי׃

אֵיפֹה הָיִיתָ בְּיָסְדִי־אָרֶץ הַגֶּד
אִם־יָדַעְתָּ בִינָה׃

2

JOB 38:5-11 · THE MEASURE AND THE SEA

איוב לח · ה-יא

5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

8 Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it

מִי־שָׂם מְמַדֶּיהָ כִּי תֵדָע אוֹ מִי־
נָטָה עָלֶיהָ קָּו׃

עַל־מָה אֲדָנֶיהָ הָטְבָּעוּ אוֹ מִי־
יָרָה אֶבֶן פִּנָּתָהּ׃

בְּרָן־יַחַד כּוֹכְבֵי בֹקֶר וַיָּרִיעוּ
כָּל־בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים׃

had issued out of the womb?

9 When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it,

10 And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors,

11 And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

3

וַיָּסֶךְ בִּדְלָתַיִם יָם בְּגִיחוֹ מֵרָחֶם
נֹא׃

בְּשׂוּמִי עָנָן לְבֻשׁוֹ וַעֲרָפֶל
תֻּלָּתוֹ׃

וָאֶשְׁבֹּר עָלָיו חֻקִּי וָאָשִׂים בְּרִיחַ
וְלָתָיִם׃

וָאֹמַר עַד־פֹּה תָּבוֹא וְלֹא תֹסִיף
אֹא־יָשִׁית בִּגְאוֹן גַּלֶּיךָ׃

4

1 Then Job answered the LORD, and said,

2 I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

וַיַּעַן אִיּוֹב אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמַר׃

יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־כֹל תּוּכָל וְלֹא־יִבָּצֵר
מִמְּךָ מְזִמָּה׃

3 Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

4 Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

מִי זֶה מַעְלִים עֵצָה בְּלִי דָעַת
כֵּן הִגַּדְתִּי וְלֹא אָבִין נִפְלָאוֹת
מֶּנִּי וְלֹא אֵדָע׃

שְׁמַע־נָא וְאָנֹכִי אֲדַבֵּר אֶשְׁאָלְךָ
וְהוֹדִיעֵנִי׃

לְשֵׁמַע־אֹזֶן שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְעַתָּה
יִנִי רָאָתְךָ׃

עַל־כֵּן אֶמְאַס וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל־עָפָר
וָאֵפֶר׃

▽

A reading

The encounter is the answer that is not an answer. God speaks from the storm, God explains nothing, and the giving of God's presence is itself the response.

For thirty-seven chapters Job has built a case. He has refused the consolation of his friends, who insist that suffering must be the wage of sin and that his suffering therefore proves a hidden guilt. He has held his integrity. He has demanded an audience: *Oh that I knew where I might find him!* (23:3). And he has not been answered. Then, at the opening of chapter 38, the answer comes. It comes *min ha-se'arah* (מִן הַסְּעָרָה), out of the whirlwind, the storm-wind, the same vocabulary the prophets use when the divine voice tears the sky open. The voice does not address the case Job has built. It asks, instead, a question of its own.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? The literal sense holds at this register, and it is brutal. Job has demanded to be answered as a peer in a courtroom. The voice from the storm refuses the courtroom and asks Job to remember that he is not a peer. The questions that follow are a long inventory of created things, the sea shut up with doors, the morning stars singing, the proud waves stayed at their decreed place. None of these are explanations of Job's suffering. They are the substitution of one frame for another. Job had framed his life as a problem of justice. The voice reframes the world as a problem of scale.

Gregory the Great, reading the passage in the *Moralia*, lets the literal register stand and then reads through it. For Gregory the foundations of the earth are also the foundations of the moral order, the courses of the stars are also the movements of the saints, the sea is also the restless will. The allegory does not cancel the literal; it reads in the same direction the literal already turns. The questions God asks Job are the questions God asks the soul that has insisted on a courtroom and has been given a creation instead.

The Hebrew of the storm vocabulary repays attention. *Se'arah* (סְעָרָה) is the same word the second book of Kings

uses when Elijah is taken up by a whirlwind into heaven, the same word Ezekiel uses for the storm-wind out of the north that carries the chariot. The storm is a recurring topos for theophany; it is the medium in which the voice can come without being domesticated. Job receives the voice in the medium that prevents the voice from being mistaken for one of the voices in his disputation. His friends spoke from chairs. God speaks from weather.

The questions are not rhetorical in the modern sense. They are interrogatives that do not seek information; they seek the reorientation of the one questioned. The classical patristic reading hears in them the trope the Greek tradition will later name *apophasis*. God does not give Job a positive account of why he has suffered. God gives Job an account of what God has done that Job cannot account for. The unanswered *why* is left in place; what shifts is the one asking. **This is the allegorical pivot of the passage**: the voice refuses to be the answer to the question Job posed and is, instead, the answer to the question Job did not know he was asking.

Maximus the Confessor reads this pivot in the *Ambigua* as the soul's movement from *logos* to *tropos*, from the demand for a reasoned account to the willing reception of the way the

divine actually shows itself. Maximus does not soften the demand. The demand was not wrong. Job was right to refuse his friends. Job was right to insist on an audience. What Maximus reads in the whirlwind speech is the further movement past the demand, the surrender of the courtroom not as defeat but as the soul's discovery that the courtroom was too small for what was actually happening.

Then comes Job's recantation. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* The verbs are exact. *Shamati* (שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ), I have heard you, opposes *raatkha* (רָאָתְךָ), my eye has seen you. The hearing was not false. Job had heard truly, the way the catechized child has heard truly, the way the disputant has heard truly. The seeing is something else. The Hebrew construction places the eye, *ayin*, as the subject of the verb: the eye sees. It is the body's organ of recognition that has now been engaged. **The tropological lesson** is that the contemplative life is not the accumulation of more correct hearings; it is the passage from hearing to seeing, and the passage runs through the storm.

The recantation itself, *al ken emas ve-nichamti al afar va-efer*, has been translated and contested. The KJV's *I abhor*

myself reads the verb *emas* (אָמְאַס) reflexively; the Hebrew leaves the object unstated and can be read as Job rejecting his earlier speech, his earlier case, his earlier posture. The repenting in dust and ashes is the conventional gesture of a plaintiff withdrawing a charge. Job is not confessing hidden sin. His friends had insisted he confess hidden sin and he had refused, and the closing frame of the book vindicates him: *ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath* (42:7). What Job withdraws is the case. What Job recognizes is that the case was the wrong genre.

This is where the throughline cuts. Jacob holds on through the night and is given the new name. Job holds on through thirty-seven chapters and is given the presence. Christ in Gethsemane holds on through the cup and is given, in the form of the resurrection, the renaming of the human relation to God. The figure is the same and the registers are different. **Anagogically**, the whirlwind speech prefigures the *visio Dei* in its negative mode: the saints will see God, and the seeing will not consist of explanations received but of presence given. John of the Cross's *noche oscura* is the late Christian articulation of this same shape. The dark night is dark because the light it carries is not the light by which the soul

has been used to seeing; the speech from the storm is unsatisfying as an answer because the speech is not an answer in the genre the soul came expecting.

The mystic completion is not knowledge but seeing. The encounter is the answer that is not an answer. The throughline holds, and the figure of Job sits beside the figure of Jacob as its second pole: where Jacob is silenced about the name and Christ is silenced into the cross, Job is silenced about the why. In each case the silence is not the failure of the encounter. It is the form of its success.

The book turns on a small handful of charged terms. *Iyyov* (אִיּוֹב), the protagonist's name, is sometimes glossed from a root meaning "to be at enmity" or "the persecuted one"; the etymology is uncertain. *Tzaddik* (צַדִּיק), the righteous one, is the term the prologue assigns Job and the friends contest. *Se'arah* (סְעָרָה), the storm-wind, is the prophetic medium of theophany and recurs in 2 Kings 2:11 (Elijah's ascent) and Ezekiel 1:4 (the chariot vision). The pivot verbs of 42:5 are *shamati* (שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ), I have heard, and *raatkha* (רָאָתְךָ), my eye has seen, the central opposition of the recantation. The closing phrase *al*

afar va-efer, on dust and ashes, echoes Genesis 18:27 where Abraham bargains for Sodom. Job withdraws his case in the same posture in which Abraham first opened his.

Colophon

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