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The Resilience of Job

Professor Ed Greenstein, a foremost authority on the Book of Job and recent winner of the EMET Prize in the Humanities for his Biblical research, just completed his book called *Job: A New Translation*. He begins the book with the following introduction:

The book of Job opens with a narrative in partly metered prose in which the deity, with the assistance of one of his angelic servants, the Satan, afflicts the pious Job over and over in order to see if he will maintain his piety or abandon it and "bless" (a euphemism for "curse") God. The figure of a pious sufferer is known in the ancient Near East, but there is no parallel there to the sort of test Job undergoes. The motif of testing a man by seeing how much pain he can endure is associated in folktales (from elsewhere) with measuring his devotion to a woman. And the Job narrative displays several features of a folktale, from the exposition (Once there was a man…) to the use of typological numbers (three, seven, ten). Taken together, these features suggest that God is testing Job in order to gauge the depth of his devotion, the bond of his love. Job withstands the assaults to his faith, but when three friends come to console him they have nothing to say, and it may be surmised that during the course of a week of silent sitting Job begins to reassess his belief.

In Hevruta, please read Job Chapter 1 and discuss the questions that follow. Then continue reading chapter 2 and discuss the next set of questions. When we return from Hevruta, we will share our thoughts regarding Job and his plight.

Job 1

1.There was a man in the land of Uz named Job. That man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2. Seven sons and three daughters were born to him; 3. his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred she-asses, and a very large household. That man was wealthier than anyone in the East. 4. It was the custom of his sons to hold feasts, each on his set day in his own home. They would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5. When a round of feast days was over, Job would send word to them to sanctify themselves, and, rising early in the morning,	א. אִישׁ הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ־עוּץ אִיּוֹב שְׁמוֹ וְהָיָה ׀ הָאִישׁ הַהוּא תָּם וְיָשָׁר וִירֵא אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מֵרָע׃ ב. וַיִּוָּלְדוּ לוֹ שִׁבְעָה בָנִים וְשָׁלוֹשׁ בָּנוֹת׃ ג. וַיְהִי מִקְנֵהוּ שִׁבְעַת אַלְפֵי־צֹאן וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת אַלְפֵי גְמַלִּים וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת צֶמֶד־בָּקָר וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת אֲתוֹנוֹת וַעֲבֻדָּה רַבָּה מְאֹד וַיְהִי הָאִישׁ הַהוּא גָּדוֹל מִכֹּל־בְּנֵי־קֶדֶם׃ ד. וְהָלְכוּ בָנָיו וְעָשׂוּ מִשְׁתֵּה בֵּית אִישׁ יוֹמוֹ וְשָׁלְחוּ וְקָרְאוּ לִשְׁלֹשֶׁת אחיתיהם [אַחְיוֹתֵיהֶם] לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת עִמָּהֶם׃

he would make burnt offerings, one for each of them; for Job thought, “Perhaps my children have sinned and blasphemed God in their thoughts.” This is what Job always used to do. 6. One day the divine beings presented themselves before the LORD, and the Adversary came along with them. 7. The LORD said to the Adversary, “Where have you been?” The Adversary answered the LORD, “I have been roaming all over the earth.” 8. The LORD said to the Adversary, “Have you noticed My servant Job? There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil!” 9. The Adversary answered the LORD, “Does Job not have good reason to fear God? 10. Why, it is You who have fenced him round, him and his household and all that he has. You have blessed his efforts so that his possessions spread out in the land. 11. But lay Your hand upon all that he has and he will surely blaspheme You to Your face.” 12. The LORD replied to the Adversary, “See, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on him.” The Adversary departed from the presence of the LORD. 13. One day, as his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother, 14. a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the she-asses were grazing alongside them 15. when Sabeans attacked them and carried them off, and put the boys to the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 16. This one was still speaking when another came and said, “God’s fire fell from heaven, took hold of the sheep and the boys, and burned them up; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 17. This one was still speaking when another came and said, “A Chaldean formation of three	ה. וַיְהִי֙ כִּֽי־הִקִּ֣יפוּ יְמֵ֣י הַמִּשְׁתֶּ֔ה וַיִּשְׁלַ֥ח אִיּ֖וֹב וַיְקַדְּשֵׁ֑ם וְהִשְׁכִּ֤ים בַּבֹּקֶר֙ וְהֶעֱלָ֣ה עֹלוֹת֔ מִסְפַּ֖ר כֻּלָּ֑ם כִּ֣י אָמַ֔ר אִיּ֖וֹב אוּלַ֣י חָטְא֣וּ בָנַ֔י וּבֵרְכ֥וּ אֱלֹהִ֖ים בִּלְבָבָ֑ם כֹּ֚ה יַעֲשֶׂ֣ה אִיּ֔וֹב כָּל־הַיָּמִֽים׃ ו. וַיְהִ֣י הַיּ֔וֹם וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ בְּנֵ֣י הָאֱלֹהִ֑ים לְהִתְיַצֵּ֖ב עַל־יְהוָ֔ה וַיָּבֹ֥וא גַם־הַשָּׂטָ֖ן בְּתוֹכָֽם׃ ז. וַיֹּ֥אמֶר יְהוָ֖ה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָ֑ן מֵאַ֣יִן תָּבֹ֔א וַיַּ֥עַן הַשָּׂטָ֖ן אֶת־יְהוָ֑ה וַיֹּ֗אמֶר מִשּׁ֥וֹט בָּאָ֛רֶץ וּמֵהִתְהַלֵּ֥ךְ בָּֽהּ׃ ח. וַיֹּ֥אמֶר יְהוָ֖ה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָ֑ן הֲשַׂמְתָּ֣ לִבְּךָ֔ עַל־עַבְדִּ֖י אִיּ֑וֹב כִּ֣י אֵ֤ין כָּמֹ֙הוּ֙ בָּאָ֔רֶץ אִ֥ישׁ תָּ֛ם וְיָשָׁ֖ר יְרֵ֣א אֱלֹהִ֑ים וְסָ֥ר מֵרָֽע׃ ט. וַיַּ֥עַן הַשָּׂטָ֖ן אֶת־יְהוָ֑ה וַיֹּ֗אמֶר הֲחִנָּ֥ם יָרֵ֛א אִיּ֖וֹב אֱלֹהִֽים׃ י. הֲלֹא־אַ֣תָּה [אַתָּה] שַׂ֠כְתָּ בַּעֲדוֹ֙ וּבְעַד־בֵּיתוֹ֙ וּבְעַ֣ד כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ֔ מִסָּבִ֖יב מַעֲשֵׂ֣ה יָדָ֑יו וּבִרְכָתָ֣ מִקְנֵ֔הוּ פָּרַ֖ץ בָּאָֽרֶץ׃ יא. וְאוּלָ֗ם שְׁלַח־נָ֤א יָדְךָ֙ וְגַ֣ע בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ֔ אִם־לֹ֖א עַל־פָּנֶ֥יךָ יְבָרֲכֶֽךָּ׃ יב. וַיֹּ֥אמֶר יְהוָ֖ה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָ֑ן הִנֵּ֤ה כָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ֙ בְּיָדֶ֔ךָ רַ֥ק אֵלָ֖יו אַל־תִּשְׁלַ֣ח יָדֶ֑ךָ וַיֵּצֵ֥א הַשָּׂטָ֖ן מֵעִ֥ם פְּנֵי־יְהוָֽה׃ יג. וַיְהִ֣י הַיּ֔וֹם וּבָנָ֥יו וּבְנֹתָ֖יו אֹכְלִ֣ים וְשֹׁתִ֑ים יַ֣יִן בְּבֵ֖ית אֲחִיהֶֽם הַבְּכֽוֹר׃ יד. וּמַלְאָ֥ךְ בָּ֛א אֶל־אִיּ֥וֹב וַיֹּאמַ֖ר הַבָּקָ֣ר הָי֑וּ וְהָאֲתֹנ֥וֹת רֹעֹ֖ות עַל־יְדֵיהֶֽם׃ טו. וַתִּפֹּ֤ל שְׁבָא֙ וַתִּקָּחֵ֔ם וְאֶת־הַנְּעָרִ֖ים הִכּ֣וּ לְפִי־חָ֑רֶב וָאִמָּלְטָ֥ה רַק־אֲנִ֖י לְבַדִּ֥י לְהַגִּ֖יד לָֽךְ׃ טז. עֹ֚ודֶ	זֶ֣ה מְדַבֵּ֔ר וְזֶ֥ה בָּ֖א וַיֹּאמַ֑ר אֵ֣שׁ אֱלֹהִ֗ים נָפְלָ֤ה מִן־הַשָּׁמַ֙יִם֙ וַתִּבְעַ֣ר בַּצֹּ֔אן וּבַנְּעָרִ֖ים וַתֹּאכְלֵ֑ם וָאִמָּלְטָ֥ה רַק־אֲנִ֖י לְבַדִּ֥י לְהַגִּ֖יד לָֽךְ׃ יז. עֹ֚ודֶ	זֶ֣ה מְדַבֵּ֔ר וְזֶ֥ה בָּ֖א וַיֹּאמַ֑ר כַּשְׂדִּ֞ים שָׂ֣מוּ	

columns made a raid on the camels and carried them off and put the boys to the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." 18. This one was still speaking when another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother 19. when suddenly a mighty wind came from the wilderness. It struck the four corners of the house so that it collapsed upon the young people and they died; I alone have escaped to tell you." 20. Then Job arose, tore his robe, cut off his hair, and threw himself on the ground and worshiped. 21. He said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD has given, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." 22. For all that, Job did not sin nor did he cast reproach on God.	שְׁלֹשָׁה רָאשִׁים וַיִּפְשְׁטוּ עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים וַיִּקָּחוּם וְאֶת־הַנְּעָרִים הִכּוּ לְפִי־חָרֶב וָאֲמַלְּטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ׃ יח. עַד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמַר בָּנֶיךָ וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ אֹכְלִים וְשֹׁתִים יַיִן בְּבֵית אֲחִיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר׃ יט. וְהִנֵּה רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה בָּאָה	מֵעֵבֶר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיִּגַּע בְּאַרְבַּע פִּנּוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיִּפֹּל עַל־הַנְּעָרִים וַיָּמֻתוּ וָאֲמַלְּטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ׃ כ. וַיָּקָם אִיּוֹב וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־מְעִלּוֹ וַיָּגָז אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּפֹּל אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ׃ כא. וַיֹּאמֶר עָרֹם יצתי [יָצָאתִי] מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי וְעָרֹם אָשׁוּב שָׁמָּה יְהוָה נָתַן וַיהוָה לָקָח יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ׃ כב. בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־חָטָא אִיּוֹב וְלֹא־נָתַן תִּפְלָה לֵאלֹהִים׃

Questions for discussion regarding Chapter 1:

1. It is suggested that the author of this tale had a knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, owing to the phrases and vocabulary that were chosen to begin telling this tale of the "blameless and upright" Job. Who do you think his intended audience was?
2. The Satan played 'devil's advocate' in verses 9 to 11 when he said that Job was righteous because he had it so good. Make life difficult for him, claims Satan, he won't be so righteous. In fact, he would go so far as to curse the divine! Do you agree with this assessment about Job? About people in general? Does the opposite hold true, that if a person who has suffered could just 'catch a break', they would be less likely to be soured on their plight?
3. What do you think about the Divine choosing to take Satan up on his challenge? How does that make you feel about how the Divine is depicted in this opening chapter?
4. Finally, please analyze Job's response (verses 20 to 22) to his terrible situation, both in terms of his actions and his words. What is your reaction to Job's behavior?

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Job 2

1. One day the divine beings presented themselves before the LORD. The Adversary came along with them to present himself before the LORD. 2. The LORD said to the Adversary, “Where have you been?” The Adversary answered the LORD, “I have been roaming all over the earth.” 3. The LORD said to the Adversary, “Have you noticed My servant Job? There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil. He still keeps his integrity; so you have incited Me against him to destroy him for no good reason.” 4. The Adversary answered the LORD, “Skin for skin—all that a man has he will give up for his life.	א. וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה וַיָּבֹוא גַּם־הַשָּׂטָן בְּתוֹכָם לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה׃ ב. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן אַי מִזֶּה תָּבֹא וַיַּעַן הַשָּׂטָן אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמַר מִשֹּׁט בָּאָרֶץ וּמֵהִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּהּ׃ ג. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן הֲשַׂמְתָּ לִבְּךָ אֶל־עַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב כִּי אֵין כָּמֹהוּ בָּאָרֶץ אִישׁ תָּם וְיָשָׁר יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים וְסָר מֵרָע וְעֹדֶנּוּ מַחֲזִיק בְּתֻמָּתוֹ וַתְּסִיתֵנִי בּוֹ לְבַלְּעוֹ חִנָּם׃ ד. וַיַּעַן הַשָּׂטָן אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמַר עוֹר בְּעַד־עוֹר וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לָאִישׁ יִתֵּן בְּעַד נַפְשׁוֹ׃ ה. אוּלָם שְׁלַח־נָא יָדְךָ וְגַע אֶל־עַצְמוֹ וְאֶל־בְּשָׂרוֹ אִם־לֹא אֶל־פָּנֶיךָ יְבָרֲכֶךָּ׃ ו. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הַשָּׂטָן הִנּוֹ בְיָדֶךָ אַךְ אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ שְׁמֹר׃ ז. וַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂטָן מֵאֵת פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיַּךְ אֶת־אִיּוֹב בִּשְׁחִין רָע מִכַּף רַגְלוֹ עַד [וְעַד] קָדְקֳדוֹ׃ ח. וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ חֶרֶשׂ לְהִתְגָּרֵד בּוֹ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ־הָאֵפֶר׃ ט. וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ עֹדְךָ מַחֲזִיק בְּתֻמָּתֶךָ בָּרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים וָמֻת׃ י. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כְּדַבֵּר אַחַת הַנְּבָלוֹת תְּדַבֵּרִי גַּם אֶת־הַטּוֹב נְקַבֵּל מֵאֵת הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶת־הָרָע לֹא נְקַבֵּל בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־חָטָא אִיּוֹב בִּשְׂפָתָיו׃ (פ) יא. וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת	רֵעֵי אִיּוֹב אֵת כָּל־הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה עָלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אִישׁ מִמְּקֹמוֹ אֱלִיפַז הַתֵּימָנִי וּבִלְדַּד הַשּׁוּחִי וְצוֹפַר הַנַּעֲמָתִי וַיִּוָּעֲדוּ יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לָנוּד־לוֹ וְלִנַחֲמוֹ׃ יב. וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם מֵרָחוֹק וְלֹא הִכִּירֻהוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ וַיִּקְרְעוּ אִישׁ מְעִלֹּו וַיִּזְרְקוּ עָפָר עַל־רָאשֵׁיהֶם הַשָּׁמָיְמָה׃

recognize him, and they broke into loud weeping; each one tore his robe and threw dust into the air onto his head. 13. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. None spoke a word to him for they saw how very great was his suffering.	יג. וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אִתּוֹ לָאָרֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְשִׁבְעַת לֵילוֹת וְאֵין־דֹּבֵר אֵלָיו דָּבָר כִּי רָאוּ כִּי־גָדַל הַכְּאֵב מְאֹד׃

Questions for discussion regarding Chapter 2:

1. Why do you think that the intensity was increased by the author? What was the point of chapter 2?
2. In verse 9, Job's wife makes her first appearance and addresses Job's suffering. How do you interpret her comments?
3. Please analyze Job's response to his wife. How do you think Job interpreted his wife's statement?

The next 35 chapters finds Job's friends working through the conundrum regarding the question of why the evil prosper and the righteous suffer. I will urge you to read the remaining portion of the book on your own. Our question is: Is Job a hero for displaying the kind of resilience that he showed?