

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Winter 1997

Volume 24 Number 2

- 135 Robert D. Sacks The Book of Job: Translation and
Commentary
- 171 Marc D. Guerra Aristotle on Pleasure and Political
Philosophy: A Study in Book VII of the
Nicomachean Ethics
- 183 Mark S. Cladis Lessons from the Garden: Rousseau's
Solitaires and the Limits of Liberalism
- 201 Thomas Heilke Nietzsche's Impatience: The Spiritual
Necessities of Nietzsche's Politics
- Book Reviews*
- 233 Eduardo A. Velásquez *Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith's
Emancipation of Economics from Politics
and Religion*, by Peter Minowitz
- 239 Charles E. Butterworth *Something To Hide*, by Peter Levine
- 243 Will Morrisey *Jerusalem and Athens: Reason and
Revelation in the Works of Leo Strauss*,
by Susan Orr

Interpretation

- Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin, Dept. of Philosophy, Queens College
Executive Editor Leonard Grey
General Editors Seth G. Benardete • Charles E. Butterworth •
Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987) •
Howard B. White (d. 1974)
- Consulting Editors Christopher Bruell • Joseph Cropsey • Ernest L. Fortin •
John Hallowell (d. 1992) • Harry V. Jaffa •
David Lowenthal • Muhsin Mahdi • Harvey C. Mansfield
• Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) • Michael Oakeshott
(d. 1990) • Ellis Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d. 1973) •
Kenneth W. Thompson
- International Editors Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier
Editors Wayne Ambler • Maurice Auerbach • Fred Baumann
• Michael Blaustein • Amy Bonnette • Patrick Coby •
Thomas S. Engeman • Edward J. Erler •
Maureen Feder-Marcus • Pamela K. Jensen •
Ken Masugi • Will Morrissey • Susan Orr •
Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G. Rubin • Susan Shell •
Richard Velkley • Bradford P. Wilson •
Michael Zuckert • Catherine Zuckert
- Manuscript Editor Lucia B. Prochnow
Subscriptions Subscription rates per volume (3 issues):
individuals \$29
libraries and all other institutions \$48
students (four-year limit) \$18
Single copies available.
Postage outside U.S.: Canada \$4.50 extra;
elsewhere \$5.40 extra by surface mail (8 weeks
or longer) or \$11.00 by air.
Payments: in U.S. dollars AND payable by
a financial institution located within the U.S.A.
(or the U.S. Postal Service).

THE JOURNAL WELCOMES MANUSCRIPTS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AS WELL AS THOSE
IN THEOLOGY, LITERATURE, AND JURISPRUDENCE.

CONTRIBUTORS should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 13th ed. or manuals
based on it; double-space their manuscripts, including notes; place references in the
text, in endnotes or follow current journal style in printing references. Words from
languages not rooted in Latin should be transliterated to English. To ensure
impartial judgment of their manuscripts, contributors should omit mention of their
other work; put, on the title page only, their name, any affiliation desired, address
with postal/zip code in full, and telephone. Contributors using computers should, if
possible, provide a character count of the entire manuscript. Please send THREE
clear copies, which will not be returned.

Composition by Eastern Composition, Inc.,
Binghamton, N.Y. 13904 U.S.A.
Printed and bound by Wickersham Printing Co.,
Lancaster, PA 17603 U.S.A.

Inquiries: (Ms.) Susan Chiong, Assistant to the Editor
INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y.
11367-1597, U.S.A. (718)997-5542 Fax (718) 997-5565

E Mail: interpretation_journal@qc.edu

The Book of Job

Translation and Commentary

ROBERT D. SACKS

St. John's College, Santa Fe

INTRODUCTION

We of the Western tradition have the blessing and the curse of finding ourselves heir to two quite different ways of life and hence to two quite different ways of thought. Although they sit uneasily together, the struggle between them has formed much of the life behind the growth of both our daily language and of our highest contemplations. They are, then, the foundation of both our deepest insights and our deepest prejudices. As such they have given rise to that particular horizon within which we live, and beyond which we constantly strive to peer. The problem to which I refer is often spoken of as the problem of *Science versus Religion*, or of *Reason versus Faith*. More fundamentally, and perhaps less prejudicially, we may call it the question of *Athens and Jerusalem*, or *Greek Philosophy and the Hebrew Bible*.

Any attempt to understand the relation between these two roots of our civilization as they were before they met is doubly complicated by virtue of the fact that rarely can they be caught addressing the same question in ways that can be compared with true clarity of thought.

Such considerations as these eventually led me to the Book of Job since, of the books of Bible, it seemed to me to be most in contact with those problems which gave rise to Greek philosophy.

The language of the text is strange and difficult, and translators often disagree. In the notes, I have picked what seem to me the three most reliable translations that I have read, and wherever I have felt it necessary to differ greatly from my predecessors, I have tried to give the arguments in favor of each translation, insofar as I was able to reconstruct them, in order that the reader might have some basis for forming his own conclusions, and at times I have made reference to certain other translations to bring out points of interest. The translations I have made most use of are: King James (KJ), Revised Standard Version (RSV), and Moshe Greenberg's, issued by The Jewish Publication Society (JPS).¹ I have also tried to make the notes intelligible even to those readers who cannot follow the Hebrew they contain.

The balance of this translation and commentary will appear in *Interpretation*.

I should also like to thank both Mr. Hillail Fradkin of The Bradley Foundation and Mr. Antony Sullavan of The Earhart Foundation for having put beans and more than beans on my table while I was scratching out this volume. Thanks as well to Eve Adler and those in Vermont who put up with me while I was eating those beans.

Note

1. The references are: *The Book of Job*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980); *The Book of Job*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987); Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Study* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978); and *Saadia on Job*, trans. L. E. Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

CHAPTER ONE

1 A man¹ there was from the land of Uz and his name was Job.² He was a simple³ and straightforward man (*ish*), a GOD-FEARING⁴ man who turned away from evil. **2** He had seven sons and three daughters.⁵ **3** He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, ten thousand head of cattle, five hundred she asses and was the head of a very large estate. He was the richest man (*ish*) in the East. **4** His sons used to make feasts in their homes, each one on a different day, and send word to their three sisters to come and eat and drink with them.⁶ **5** Now when the days of feasting had gone full circle,⁷ Job sent word to them to sanctify themselves. He himself would get up early in the morning to make burnt offerings for each of his children; for “Perhaps,” Job said “my children have sinned, and cursed⁸ GOD in their hearts.” Thus did Job all of his days.⁹ **6** One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves¹⁰ before THE LORD,¹¹ and the Satan¹² came along with them.

7 “Well,” said THE LORD to the Satan “where have you been?” “Oh,” said the Satan to THE LORD, “wandering around Earth, just went down there to go for a walk.”¹³ **8** Then THE LORD said to the Satan “Did you happen to notice my man¹⁴ Job. There is no one like him on Earth. He is a simple and straightforward man (*ish*), a GOD-FEARING man and one who turns away from evil.”

9 Then the Satan answered THE LORD and said: “What, do you think that Job FEARS GOD for nothing? **10** Haven’t you been protecting him and his house, and everything that he has. You have blessed all his labors, and everything he owns is spreading out all over the land. **11** But just reach out your hand to take it away and he will curse you to your face for sure.”

12 “Well all right,” said THE LORD, “all that he has is in your hands now; just don’t hurt him.” Then the Satan went out from the presence of THE LORD.

13 One day, when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their oldest brother, 14 a messenger came to Job and said; “The oxen were plowing and the asses were grazing alongside them, 15 when the Sabeans attacked, taking them all and putting the boys to the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell thee.” 16 While he was still talking, another one came in and said, “The fire of GOD fell from heaven. It burnt the sheep and shepherds and devoured them; and I alone have escaped to tell thee.” 17 While he was still talking, yet another one came in and said: “The Chaldean sent out three companies, poured down on the camels, carried them off and put the boys to the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell thee.” 18 While he was yet talking, another one came in and said; “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their oldest brother, 19 when a mighty wind¹⁵ came in from the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house. It fell down on the young people. They are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell thee.”

20 Then Job rose up and tore his cloak, shaved his head, and fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 He said; “Naked I came out of my mother’s belly and naked I shall return there.¹⁶ THE LORD gives, and THE LORD takes; blessed be the name of THE LORD.” 22 But throughout all that Job never sinned or even charged GOD with folly.

Comments

1. We must remember that the whole story begins with the word *A man*. In fact, there are four words used throughout the text which might all roughly be translated by the English word “man.” One, *geb_her*, speaks of man in his might, and perhaps should have been translated as “hero.” I have refrained from doing so only because there is another word, closely related to it, *gibbor*, which is more properly translated as “hero,” though our word is well on the way. This might be especially true here, since the form *gibbor* never actually appears in the Book of Job I have used the form “man” (*geb_her*).

Another word is *enos_h* of which I will have more to say in a later note. It speaks of man in all his frailty. I have translated it as “mortal.”

The third word, *’adam*, tends to be used by our author in a more generic sense, and at times I have translated it as “mankind,” or as “some man.” Normally, however, I have used the form “man” (*’adam*).

Our word *’ish* is of unknown origin. Some think that it comes from a root meaning “to be strong”; others take it to mean “weak.” It is the common word for “man.” The Book of Job is about a man who can raise to the state of the *gibbor*, a hero, and at times be no more than an *enos_h*, but finally and fully, he is an *’ish*, a man.

2. *There once was a man from the land of Uz, and his name was Job.* It all sounds like the beginning of some wonderful fairy tale, full of noble and

wealthy men from the mysterious Land of the East. In the Hebrew language the word for “east” can also mean “ancient,” and conjures up the dream of a child’s notion of wisdom and valor.

The language of Chapters 1, 2, and 42 differs markedly from that found in the central part of the book. Reading it is like turning from *Dick and Jane* to Shakespeare, and I have tried to reflect that difference in the translation. Most scholars believe that it was written by another hand, and perhaps it was; but it is not clear to what extent one can have such historical knowledge. On the other hand, a little more can be said of its literary effect.

The childlike nature of the text, both with regard to its diction and to the use of repetition, gives it a kind of never-never feeling, especially when contrasted with the stark reality felt in the rest of the text. The banter between God and Satan only adds to this feeling. It is almost the classic comic situation in which bad things happen to good people and in the end everybody lives more than happily ever after.

Whether it was an old folk tale which the author used to introduce his work, or whether a later thinker felt a need for some kind of comic relief after such trials; or even whether it was the author himself who saw the last chapter as the true culmination, is something we shall probably never know. In the course of these notes, however, I shall try to show that Job’s final acceptance of the comic is part of the most serious intent of the book.

3. The word *tam* is central to our understanding of the Book of Job. For an account of the role it plays see the note to 31:40.

4. The word *yirah*, which can imply respect for the divine, we have translated as FEAR. *Pahad* we have left as “fear.”

5. *Seven sons and three daughters*: Whether it is because of some perfection felt in them, or because they are odd and somehow unbalanced, I do not know, but the numbers seven and three have always had a magic ring to them.

6. The next thing we see is a round of family parties. Although the word used for “feasting” comes from the word “to drink,” and implies that wine was served, the fact that the sisters were invited would seem to imply that they were wholesome and goodnatured affairs. We all take it as part of the charm of the story that the sisters are invited and barely take any notice of the fact that they never host the parties themselves. We take it for granted that they have no independent wealth. It is not wrong of us to do so at this point, and in fact we would lose the spirit of the day if we did. See the note to 42:15, however.

7. The Hebrew makes it clear that while these days were ample and full, they marked a special time of the year. From every indication, they were in no sense religious holidays, but simply full of human goodnaturedness.

8. Literally “blessed,” but it is used euphemistically.

9. Job trusts his children, but only partly trusts goodnaturedness. He seems to have full trust in their actions, but supposes that no one is in full control of the thoughts that can flit into and out of a human mind.

10. Mitchell's "came to testify" fails to capture the friendly nature of the encounter. While the verb does imply a certain amount of formality, it still keeps us in mind of the party mood of verses 4 and 5.

11. Here follows a list of the names of God, the words we have used to translate them, and the places they occur:

<i>YAHOVAH</i>	THE LORD	1:6–2:7, 38:1–42:11
<i>elohim</i>	GOD	1:6–2:10, 5:8, 28:23, 34:9, 38:7
<i>el</i>	God	3:3–40:1
<i>shaddai</i>	The Almighty	5:17–40:2
<i>adonai</i>	The Lord	28:28

For the moment, we shall restrict our discussion to the first two chapters.

"THE LORD" is, in the main, the one in whose presence the meeting occurred (1:6, 2:1, 2:7) or the one speaking or directly spoken to (1:7, 1:8, 1:9, 1:12, 2:2, 2:3, 2:4, 2:6). There is, however, one important exception to this rule:

1:22 THE LORD gives, and THE LORD takes; blessed be the name of THE LORD.

The word "GOD," on the other hand, except insofar as it is used in the expression "Sons of GOD" consistently refers to man's awareness of God.

1:1 He was a simple and straightforward man, a GOD-fearing man who turned away from evil.

2:3 Then THE LORD said to the Satan: "Did you happen to notice my man Job. There is no one like him on Earth. He is a simple and straightforward man, a GOD-fearing man and one who turns away from evil."

1:5 He himself would get up early in the morning to make burnt offerings for each of his children; for "Perhaps," Job said, "my children have sinned, and cursed GOD in their hearts."

1:6 One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves before THE LORD, and the Satan came along with them.

2:1 One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves before THE LORD, and the Satan came along with them.

1:9 Then the Satan answered THE LORD and said: "What, do you think that Job FEARS GOD for nothing?"

1:22 But throughout all that Job never sinned or even charged GOD with folly.

2:9 "Curse GOD and die!"

2:10 "If we accept the good from GOD, must we not also accept the evil?"

12. The word "satan" has been translated in so many ways that it's hard to know where to begin. Clearly the author has some traditional usage in mind which he is either using or toying with. But there are so many of them. We'd best have a look.

The term first comes up in the story of Balaam:

Num. 22:21 So Balaam rose in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. But God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his ADVERSARY. Now he was riding on the ass, and his two servants were with him.

Num. 22:32 And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your ass these three times? Behold, I have come forth to WITHSTAND you, because your way is perverse before me;"

It would be best if the reader could reread Numbers 21–24, 31. It is not clear that the angel is a being called "Satan." Rather, "being a satan" seems to be an activity of the moment that any angel might be required to perform. It would not be easy to give a full articulation of that action, because Balaam is a very complicated character. (See R. Sacks, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, [Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990], pp. 200ff.)

Here, the angel's job seems to be to prevent Balaam from doing a wrongful act.

In the Book of Samuel, the term is used for a man whose original intention seems to be directed toward another's good, but whose actions nevertheless turn out to be otherwise.

1Sam. 29:4 But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him; and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him; he shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an ADVERSARY to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here?"

2Sam. 19:21 Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD'S anointed?" But David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall any one be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?"

In the Book of Kings, the term "Satan" is used for the leaders of the nations who, unbeknownst to themselves, become God's way of chastening His people:

1Kings 5:4 But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet.

1Kings 11:13–25 “However I will not tear away all the kingdom; but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.” And the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the royal house in Edom. but Hadad fled to Egypt. . . And Hadad found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him in marriage the sister of his own wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. And the sister of Tahpenes bore him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh’s house; and Genubath was in Pharaoh’s house among the sons of Pharaoh. But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, “Let me depart, that I may go to my own country.” But Pharaoh said to him, “What have you lacked with me that you are now seeking to go to your own country?” And he said to him, “Only let me go.” God also raised up as an *adversary* to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. And he gathered men about him and became leader of a marauding band, after the slaughter by David; and they went to Damascus, and dwelt there, and made him king in Damascus. He was an *adversary* of Israel all the days of Solomon, doing mischief as Hadad did; and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

Strangely enough, it is only in the Book of Chronicles, the book that normally goes out of its way to avoid anything that tends to appear close to the mythic, such as the giants, that we see the Satan we know:

1Chron. 21:1 Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.

Throughout the Book of Psalms, the Satan is the hated hater who accuses:

Ps. 38:19 Those who are my foes without cause are mighty, and many are those who hate me wrongfully. Those who render me evil for good are my adversaries because I follow after good.

Ps. 71:13 May my accusers be put to shame and consumed; with scorn and disgrace may they be covered who seek my hurt.

Ps. 109:4 In return for my love they accuse me, even as I make prayer for them. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser bring him to trial.

When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! He clothed himself with cursing as his coat, may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones! May it be like a garment which he wraps round him, like a belt with which he daily girds himself! May this be the reward of my accusers from the LORD, of those who speak evil against my life! . . . But thou, O

GOD my Lord, deal on my behalf for thy name's sake; because thy steadfast love is good, deliver me! May my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a mantle!

In Zecharaia there is the Satan who rebukes because he cannot cleanse.

Zech. 3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel."

Our Satan is all of these, and he is none of them. As we shall see, he is convinced that man is radically incapable of being just. Deep underneath man's coat of decency lies a thick skin of self-interest. The rest is mere show. For him, God's high hopes for man are not well founded. Through the imagery of *skin* which runs throughout the book, Satan hopes to show God that if man were ever to face the unmediated nature of the world around him, he would show himself a bitter and vicious animal.

We leave Satan because we see a richer way, but he never arouses our hatred.

13. He uses the reflexive form of the verb, which normally means "a walking about for its own sake without any direct external goal." When the text says of God that He is "going for a walk" in the garden, there is a strong implication that He has not come there intentionally for the purpose of checking up on Adam. In the same way, when God says to Abram, "Walk before me and be perfect," He wants to look at Abram's general way of being rather than at any particular goal or accomplishment. Even when He invites him to "Walk through. . . the land which I shall give you," He means to enjoy it quietly without a sense of immediate possession.

Here too, the Adversary is claiming a certain innocence.

14. "slave" or "servant"

15. The word can mean "breath," "wind," or "spirit."

16. Job's perhaps almost thoughtless blurring of the distinction between his own mother and the great mother earth may be seen as a first and naive glimpse into a world larger than the world of man into which he was born. Here, as I say, the thought is almost thoughtless. We see it as only a seed, yet we shall see it grow until its roots are sturdy enough to crack the strongest city wall.

CHAPTER TWO

1 One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves before THE LORD, and the Satan came along with them.

2 “Well,” said THE LORD to the Satan “where have you been?”

“Oh,” said the Satan to THE LORD, “wandering around Earth, just went down there to go for a walk.”

3 Then THE LORD said to the Satan: “Did you happen to notice my man Job. There is no one like him on Earth. He is a simple and straightforward man (*ish*) a GOD-fearing man and one who turns away from evil. He is still holding tight to his simplicity, and you have beguiled¹ me into destroying him for nothing.

4 Then the Satan answered THE LORD and said: “Well, ‘Skin under² skin!’ Everything a man (*ish*) has he will give for his life. 5 But just reach out your hand and get to his bones and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face for sure.”

6 “Well all right,” said THE LORD, “he is in your hands now; just don’t kill him.”

7 Then the Satan went out from the presence of THE LORD and struck Job with boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head,³ 8 and he took a potsherd and scratched himself as he sat in the ashes, 9 and his wife said to him, “You are still holding tight to your simplicity. Curse GOD and die!”

10 But he said to her, “You talk like a worthless woman. If we accept the good from GOD, must we not also accept the evil?”

But throughout all that Job never sinned in speech.

11 Now when Job’s three friends had heard of all the evils that had come upon him, they came each from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite,⁴ Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamatite. They conferred with one another and planned to come together to console him and to show him compassion. 12 But when they raised⁵ their eyes from afar they could hardly recognize him. They lifted up their voices and cried. Then each tore his robe and threw dust over his head heavenward. 13 Seven days and seven nights they sat with him on the ground and no one spoke a word because they saw that his suffering was very great.⁶

Comments

1. The root *Satan* sounds like, but is not etymologically connected to the root *Sa^{tan}*.

2. *B^{ad}* The Hebrew word means “away from” or “out through,” as in the phrase “to look out through a lattice.”

Judg. 5:28 Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice: “Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?”

It can also mean “beyond,” “under,” and hence “in place of,” or “on behalf of.”

No one seems to know what the Hebrew expression means. Most have translated “Skin for skin,” on the assumption that it was a saying current among traders in furs and hides, although it is not clear what may have been meant by the expression or how it may have applied to this situation.

I have taken the Satan to mean that while Job may have the superficial look of a God-fearing man, once that surface has been scratched one will find another protective layer behind it—one based on self-interest only.

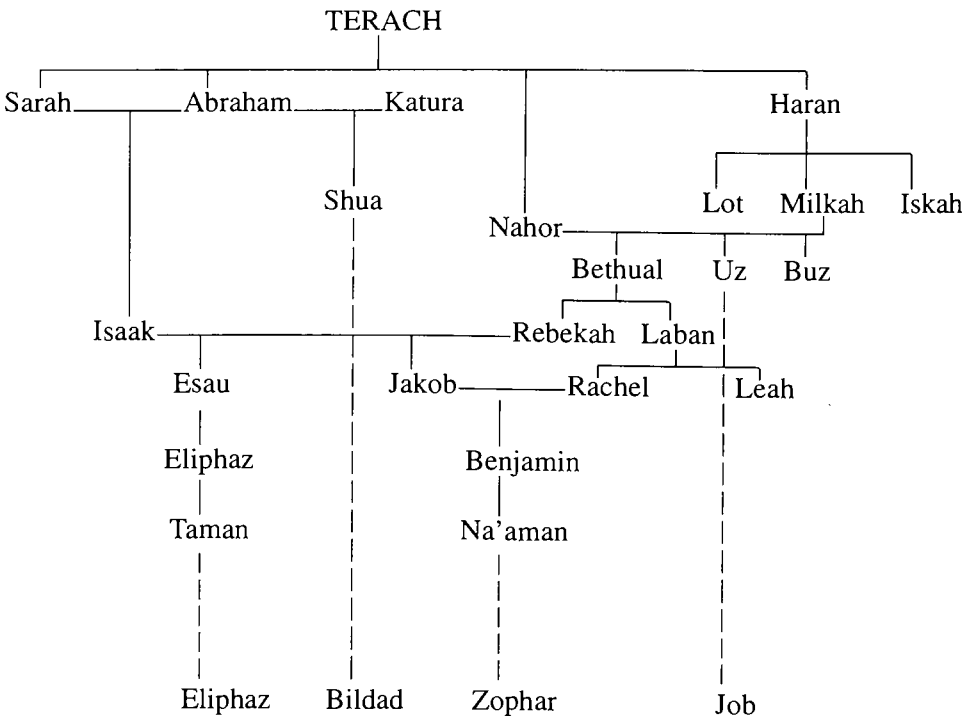
In light of the importance that the imagery of skin gains throughout the main body of the book, one is sorely tempted to believe that its author was the author of at least this phrase as well, but, of course, that is not the kind of thing that one can know.

3. It is interesting to note that Satan did not in fact try to “get to his bones and his flesh,” but attacked Job’s skin, the surface of his being. Job had said “Naked I came out of my mother’s belly and naked I shall return there.” The Adversary implied in verse 5 that Job was not as naked as he pretended but had an inner thicker coat of self-protection and is now out to prove it.

4. In English, “Yemen.”

5. This word will be translated as “bear” except as otherwise noted.

6. So far as one can tell, the genealogies of characters seem to be as follows:



As we can see, the Book of Job presents itself as being tangentially aware of the book that tells the tale of the genesis of the Son of Israel. It also presents most of the characters involved, all but one, as being tangentially related to that people. This aspect of the book will not change even when we meet the next character, Elihu, although it will complicate the matter somewhat. This book, then, insofar as it speaks of a human world, has as its principal subject matter a much wider world than the Torah.

Job is a descendent of the two nonchosen brothers of Abraham, Nahor and Haran. Bildad is a descendent of Abraham and the wife he had taken after our attention had been drawn away from him and to Isaak. Eliphaz is from the line of Esau, another nonchosen brother.

All these men, however, come from Terach. Of him we read:

Gen. 11:31 Terach took Abram his son and . . . to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there.

Terach, the common grandfather, was the man who, on purely human grounds, saw or felt in need of leaving his father's house and of going to the land of Canaan, but, because of those grounds, did not go all the way. Three of the men, then, seem to be heirs to such a tradition.

The last to join the discussion, Zophar, is either a son or perhaps a grandson of Benjamin.

CHAPTER THREE

1 Then, Job opened his mouth and spurned¹ his day. **2** Job answered and said **3** "May the day of my birth be lost² in oblivion and with it that night in which it was said 'A MAN (*GEB_HER*)³ has been conceived⁴.' **4** May that day be a day of darkness. May God from on high not seek it out nor any brightness radiate upon it; **5** but let darkness⁵ and the Shadow of Death⁶ redeem⁷ it, and may a cloud dwell above it. May that which warms⁸ the day terrify it. **6** Let the murk consume that night that it not be counted among the days of the year or enter into the number of its months. **7** Thus shall that night become hard and sterile with no sound of joy in it. **8** Those who despise the sea⁹, and those who are determined to lay open the Leviathan¹⁰ will curse¹¹ it. **9** Let its morning stars darken. Let it hope for the light, but let there be none. May it not see the eyelid of dawn open, **10** for it closed not the doors of my mother's belly but hid my eyes from toil.¹²

11 Why did I not come out of the womb and die, exit the belly and perish?¹³ **12** Why were there knees to receive me, and what were those breasts to me that I should have sucked?¹⁴ **13** Else would I have been at ease and had my quiet. **14** I could have slept and had my rest with kings and counselors of the earth, who rebuild ruins for themselves, **15** or with princes who had silver and yet filled their houses with gold. **16** Why was I not like a stillborn hidden away or as a

scion that never came into the light? **17** There the guilty cast off their rage and there rest those whose power is spent. **18** There prisoners are wholly at ease for they do not even hear the driver's voice. **19** Small and great, all¹⁵ are there, and the slave is free of his lord.

20 Why does He give light to those whom toil has consumed, or life to the bitter of soul?¹⁶ **21** to those who wait for death when there is none? or who dig for it more than for subterranean treasure? **22** whose delight reaches exaltation, and who rejoice because they have found the grave? **23** or to a man (*geb_her*) whose way has been lost and whom God has hedged about? **24** Sighs do as my bread and my roaring pours out as water. **25** I feared a fear and it came to pass and what I dreaded has come upon me.¹⁷ **26** I was not at ease, I was not quiet, I had no rest, but rage came.”

Comments

1. The Hebrew word literally means “to make light of,” and does not necessarily imply that the object is animate.

2. Throughout we have distinguished between:

<i>ne'ebhad</i>	to be lost
<i>math</i>	to die
<i>gawa'</i>	to perish

“To be lost” often has the double significance of (1) “not being where everything is” (my hat is lost, it is not where it should be) or (2) of “being where nothing is, and hence of being out of contact with every other person or thing” (I am lost, I am in a strange place where I should not be). This side of things can best be seen by remembering that our word *ne'ebhad* is related to the word Abaddon, the place of oblivion. This ambiguity is often critical for understanding any given passage. “To perish,” on the other hand, often comes close to meaning “to vanish, to cease to be.”

3. Others say “male” or “man-child.” “Hero” may be a bit too strong, but I was tempted in that direction in order to bring out the great feeling of joy which the word implies must have been felt that day by all the members of Job's family. Such a translation would have better served to bring out the irony of the verse. The very being of a hero lies in his being remembered, but for Job, this day and everything in it is to be forgotten. Mitchell's “night that forced me from the womb,” loses all the poignant contrast between the great joy felt by all on that day and the secret horrors it contained.

This sentence will echo and re-echo throughout the whole. The Book of Job, as we shall see, is a constant play between the way in which a lovely surface can obscure a darker center and the way in which our view of the deeper intent of things can obscure our view of their simple surface.

4. Sa'adiah, in his translation into Arabic, with some real justification translates “born is a . . .,” and even cites some parallel texts. While there can be little

doubt that Job is indeed thinking of the day of his birth, it may be important to retain the fact that he speaks of it in terms of its more hidden causes.

5. Seven times during the course of these first ten verses we read the words “darkness” and “night.” There are also words like “oblivion” and a host of others all saying the same, as if that day had contained a thing which no eye, human or divine, should ever have seen. Job’s first reaction is to let it be abandoned in hopes that it, his own beginnings, would shrivel up and be gone from sight.

6. *Salmaweth* is a compound word, coming from the two roots *sal*, “shadow” and *moth*, “death.” Unlike English, Hebrew grammar does not allow for the possibility of compound nouns except in the case of proper nouns where it abounds. This would argue for the notion that *salmaweth* is the proper name of a place. On the other hand, it is possible that the name became generic, as we speak of “an Einstein.” Perhaps the reader can get a better feeling for the problem by seeing how the word is used outside the Book of Job.

- Ps. 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
- Ps. 44:18 Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from thy way, that thou shouldst have broken us in the place of jackals, and covered us with the Shadow of Death.
- Ps. 107:10 Some sat in darkness and in the Shadow of Death, prisoners in affliction and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he brought them out of darkness and the Shadow of Death, and broke their bonds asunder. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men!
- Isa. 9:1 But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of the Shadow of Death, on them has light shined.
- Jer. 2:6 They did not say, “Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and the Shadow of Death in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?”
- Jer. 13:16 Give glory to the LORD your God before he brings darkness, before your feet stumble on the twilight mountains, and while you look for light he turns it into gloom and makes it the Shadow of

Death. But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock has been taken captive.

Amos 5:8 He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns the Shadow of Death into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name.

At any rate, if it is a place, it does not seem to be identical with Death itself as we know it from verses like:

Ps. 6:5 For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?

Rather, it seems to be a place here on earth full of desolation and fear where no man dwells and death is ever near.

Although Job at one time will speak of it as a land to which he is going and from which he will "not return,"

Job 10:21 Well, I will be going soon, going to a land of darkness and the Shadow of Death and I will not return; to a land that glows in murk, the Shadow of Death and without order—a land whose radiation is murk.

At other times he thinks of it as a place which contains the hidden things that can be brought out into the light.

Job 12:22 He unveils deep things from out of the darkness; He leads the Shadow of Death out into the light.

Job 28:3 He [man] explores everything to its limit, even to this rock of murk and the Shadow of Death.

7. *yig'alehu*: the Revised Standard has "claim," but King James has "stain."

Although there is another word *ga'al*, which quite frequently appears in the variant form *ga'al*, and which normally means "to defile," or "to pollute," the normal meaning of the word *ga'al* is "redeem." God "redeemed" Israel from Egypt. A man has a duty to "redeem" his kinsman who has been taken captive. The Torah seems to presuppose that prior to the giving of the Law at Sinai it was the duty of a man to "redeem" the blood of a murdered kinsman. Such an interpretation would imply that in Job's mind there is still a place for "the day" itself, but it is a place far from any human habitation.

Gersonides suggests that both meanings are intended and that in fact in this circumstance they come to the same thing. By finding a place for the discarded day within itself, darkness defiles it for us. At any rate, the words "let *salmaweth* and darkness redeem it" are very curious. They are the first beginnings of a

thought which will grow and transform itself throughout the whole of the book. They imply that even at this early stage, Job dreams of a place, perhaps only in the gloom and the darkness, where there is room for the day which should not have been, a place where it can be itself; but for now, it is merely a passing thought and is quickly dropped.

8. It would be hard to find many works of which the Italian expression *traduttore traditore* is more true than the Book of Job. It is obscure both in word and in grammatical form. Many words appear once and never again in the whole of the literature.

The word *kimm^erir^e* could come from the root *mrr* or “bitter,” but that is grammatically unlikely. The more likely root is *kmr* which can mean either “to blacken” or “to warm.” Usually it is taken in the former sense, like a cloud or an eclipse. But since many men fear these things it would seem more likely that Job is thinking of those creatures that fear the sunlight and crawl under rocks and dead tree stumps.

9. Or “day,” but the connection with the Leviathan makes “sea” more likely.

10. The Leviathan, which will be more fully described in Chapter 40, is mentioned in three other passages in the Bible:

Isa. 27:1 And on that day the Lord shall punish the Leviathan.

Ps. 74:14 You crushed the head of the Leviathan and gave it as food to the people of the island.

Ps. 104:25 So is this the great and wide sea, wherein are creeping things innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; and there goes the Leviathan whom you have made to play with.

As we can see, there is a certain ambivalence within the biblical tradition toward the Leviathan, at least if we are to assume that God is not the bad child who breaks his toys, and so at this point it is not yet clear whether we are to admire those who would “lay open the Leviathan” or whether we might not develop feelings of quite a different sort.

The question is: Are the frightful things in nature, “the lions and tigers, and bears,” to be destroyed one day by the hand of God so that on that day the world might truly become a world for man? or do they have a certain beauty of their own apart from all human need, a frightful beauty, and yet one to which man can be open and under which he first learns to be man?

I would like to suggest that the Book of Job is an account of a man’s attempt to face this ambivalence in order to discover under which welkin justice lies.

11. Not the same word as found in verse 1.

12. Mitchell’s “from this sorrow,” loses the all-pervasive character of toil as Job sees the world at this point. The world is full of blind Promethean hope which has been stripped away for Job, and now he must lead a life which never should have been.

13. In a certain way, the changes, or we might even say the education, that we see take place in Job throughout the book are reflected in his own musings and those of others on the womb and the belly. The first set of musings is:

Job 1:21 “Naked I came out of my mother’s belly and naked I shall return there. THE LORD gives, and THE LORD takes; blessed be the name of THE LORD.”

Job 3:9 May it not see the eyelid of dawn open, for it closed not the gates of my mother’s belly but hid my eyes from toil. Why did I not come out of the womb and die, exit the belly and perish?

Job 10:18 Why did You bring me out of the womb? Had I only perished without ever an eye to see me. I would be as though I had not been, as though I had been led from the belly to the grave.

The womb, a quiet place, seems almost contiguous with death, as if nothingness were the norm. To the comic Job, life is a gift, almost a flight of fancy, yet one to be lived dutifully and then left. To the troubled Job, nothingness is a comfortable nothingness. To be is not to be, and not to be is to be. Life is an aberration in time full of meaningless distinctions.

Job 3:19 Small and great, all are there, and the slave is free of his lord.

Insofar as it was the source of his own generative power, it meant nothing more to him than the source of hatred and contention:

Job 19:17 My breath is repulsive to my wife, and to the sons of my own belly I am loathsome.

Job 24:20 The womb will forget him and the worms will find him sweet.

The others, too, except for Bildad, saw nothing there but empty rage.

Eliphaz

Job 15:1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: Should a wise man even answer such blustery thoughts and fill his own belly with the east wind?

Job 15:35 Their belly brews deceit.

Zophar

Job 20:20 Since he knew no peace from his belly, nothing dear to him shall escape; there will be no survivor to enjoy it and thus nothing of his merit shall endure.

Job 20:23 As he is about to fill his belly, God will send out His burning anger upon him and rain down upon him even to his very bowels.

Elihu

Job 32:18 I am full of words, and the wind in my belly presses upon me.

In Job's recollections and musings on the past, however, things were not that way. The womb was the beginning of all that was warm and near:

Job 31:15 Did not He who made me in my mother's belly make him as well?
Did He not form us in the same womb?
Job 31:18 From my mother's belly I was their mother's guide.

By the end of the book, the womb or belly has become for Job and perhaps for the reader, that mighty, turbulent, and often ferocious source out of which there has emerged a world full of life and living creatures, a world larger, stranger, and more violent, but at times curiously more tender, than any man had ever seen. But at all times it is breathtakingly beautiful, and we stand in awe of that which does not know us.

Job 38:29 From what belly does ice emerge, and who gave birth to the frost of heaven?
Job 40:15 But look now, here is Behemoth whom I made along with you. He eats fodder just like the cattle, but look at the strength in his loins. His might is in the muscles of his belly.

14. Mitchell's "why were there knees to hold me, breasts to keep me alive?" fails to capture the fact that Job is blaming himself for his own participation in the great lie of false hope. His first act was to cling to life by allowing himself to be attracted to his mother's breast.

15. In general the reader is warned about the use of the word "all" in this translation. Hebrew is more likely to use "men are X" where English would use "all men are X." In these cases we have often decided to go with the normal English usage.

16. Man has a certain light, an innate sense of what is just and what is unjust. For Job, no man can ignore that light as long as he finds it within himself, and yet it is in constant opposition to the manifest will of God as seen in daily events. Would we not be better off without that light? The world makes too much sense to make no sense, and yet it makes no sense. If Job had no reason, the world would no longer look unreasonable, and he could sleep more soundly.

17. Here Job seems to admit that the beguiling character of the day of his birth was not total and absolute. Even when things were going well for him and the surface of the world made sense to him, he was uneasy. Perhaps it all looked too Hollywoodan to him. Good things happened to good people, and bad things happened to bad people so far as he could tell, yet he was not at ease. Seeing no reason for perfection, he was distrustful. He seemed to have known that if there were no reason behind it, it could not last, and that one day he and God would come to blows.

These thoughts had come to Job not in the form of thought, but in the form of unarticulated fear. Job's present discontent arises, as he sees it, from the sudden realization that the surface of the world as it lay before him has fallen out of harmony with the wisdom of the ages. But how sudden was that realization? Job had always felt, felt in the form of fear, that his commitment to the importance of the simple world of appearance as it lay before man would one day come into conflict with his understanding of that world as it had been formed by the wisdom of the fathers handed down from the ages.

CHAPTER FOUR

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, **2** "How can one speak and be more than wearisome?¹ But who can refrain from words? **3** It was you who always disciplined² and strengthened so many frail hands, **4** you who had the words to pick up those that were stumbling and bolster the knees that were about to bend. **5** But now it has come upon you, and it is indeed wearisome. It has found you out and you are stunned. **6** But may not that FEAR itself be your surety, and your hope, the simplicity of your ways?³ **7** Think back now, who being innocent was ever lost? Where have the upright been annihilated? **8** So far as I can see,⁴ those who plow evil and sow tribulation reap them. **9** One breath⁵ from God, and they are lost; a puff of his nostrils⁶ and they're finished. **10** An old lion may roar and the savage lion give voice, but the teeth of that spirited lion will be broken. **11** The lioness is lost for lack of prey, and the young ones will be scattered.⁷ **12** A word stole upon me but my ear caught only a trace, **13** as one gropes in a night vision when deep sleep falls upon mortals. **14** Fear came upon me and a trembling, making all my bones to quake. **15** A wisp of a breath fluttered over me fixing each hair upon my flesh. **16** It halted. I could not recognize its form, just a shape there before my eyes, and then there was silence. Then I heard a voice saying: **17** Shall a mortal be more just than his God? or a man (*geb_her*) more pure than his maker?⁸

18 If He put no trust in His servants⁹ and to His angels lays charge of folly, **19** what of those who dwell in a house of clay, whose foundation is but dust? He will crush them like a moth. **20** They are beaten from morning till evening. Forever they are lost and no note is taken. **21** Their tent rope is pulled out from under them¹⁰ and they die without reason.¹¹

Comments

1. It is of utmost importance to note the genuine good will with which Eliphaz begins to speak. Only in that way can we catch a glimpse of what it was that made loving friends turn against Job so brutally.

2. See note to 33:15.

3. Eliphaz first tries to pull Job into being his old self. From his way of understanding, Job's questioning indicates that he has forgotten his simplicity. He has taken "FEAR" (*yirah*), for "fear" (*pachad*). For him the two actions seem to be almost identical. FEAR of one who is no longer trusted turns into fear.

4. The words "*ca'asher ra'iti*" are common enough in Hebrew, but they normally mean "when I saw," and so they are taken by Gordis. He may be right, and if so, the rest of my remark may be ignored. If, on the other hand, the majority of translators are right, Eliphaz is not simply using a thoughtless idiom. The words may imply that Eliphaz is not totally unaware of the fact that the world may look different to a man who is not *tam*, "simple."

5. The word can mean "breath," "wind," or "spirit."

6. Literally "nose." Usually used to signify "anger," and often translated as such.

7. At this point we can begin to see Eliphaz pulling away from his friend. For Job's friends and for Job as well the only proper home for man is the home of man, the home of man as it has been defined by the wisdom of the fathers. The only proper concern for man is his fellow man. Not to be at home within that world is to be an outcast and a man of sin. Throughout all of what follows we must constantly remind ourselves that our daily lives depend upon such a world. Only in that way can we begin to understand why good men might turn brutal when that world is suddenly found to be under attack. But for Job that world has begun to crack. Job deeply believes in a just God and yet he has seen the just in meaningless pain. The wise men have assured him that all will work out for the best, but it does not.

This moment, as we see, is not one of calm doubt and curiosity, but of belief, confusion, and indignation, a rage more like the anger modern optometrists tell us that men feel when they have been fitted with a pair of glasses that turns the world upside down, leaving the world of perception at odds with their understanding of the world they have always known to call home; but this time there are no glasses. Throughout the book, we shall see Job trying to find a home, first in one of these worlds, the wisdom of the fathers, then in the other, the world of the surface where the innocent die in pain and suffering. But each world keeps blasting into the other, inverting it and pulling it out of focus. When speech cannot come together with the world, it gives way to anger, rage, and madness.

8. Eliphaz has posed the central question of the book. But does the question even make sense? Is there any standard for justice apart from the will of God in the light of which His actions can be inquired into? Even if there is, what is its relation to what we humans feel as being just and unjust? If they should prove not to be the same, what, then, is the status of those human feelings? Job knows that all this is a question which must be faced one day, but how and in what terms? He is not yet ready for it.

9. or “slaves.”

10. In verse 18 Eliphaz begins to face the question he has implicitly raised. In itself the world is totally indifferent, if not essentially hostile to human life. Human concerns for justice which remain within the plane of the human cannot be of divine concern. It is all no more than a tent which by its outer surface looks much like a solid structure, but which at the mere pull of a pin can crumple out flat.

11. It is unclear whether this phrase refers to the thoughtless way in which the tent rope is pulled, or to the fact that they died without understanding why.

CHAPTER FIVE

1 “Cry out! Is there anyone to answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn now?”¹ 2 For indignation can kill a fool and jealousy murder a dunce.² 3 I have seen the fool take root and suddenly entered³ into his hut. 4 His sons shrank back from help. They were beaten at the gate; and to save them there was none. 5 All he has harvested the hungry shall devour even taking out from under the thorns: and the thirsty shall go panting after their wealth.⁴ 6 Evil does not come out of the dust nor does tribulation sprout from the ground: 7 but a man (*‘adam*) is born to tribulation sure as sparks fly upwards.

8 Nonetheless I would make my appeal to GOD and put my matter before that⁵ 9 who accomplishes deeds great beyond inquiry, marvels which have no number. 10 He who gives out rain over the face of the earth and sends water into the fields,⁶ 11 He can raise the despondent on high giving sanctuary to the mournful. 12 He has shattered the devices of the crafty and their own hands cannot save them. 13 He traps the wise in their own craftiness as the advice of those contorted ones dashes headlong. 14 They encounter darkness by day and grope in the noonday sun as if it were night. 15 But the needy He saves from the cutting edge of the sword, and the poor from the hand of the mighty. 16 The downtrodden will have hope, and the mouth of injustice will be stopped.

17 Indeed, happy is the mortal whom God disciplines, that has no contempt for the bonds of the Almighty; 18 for He causes pain, but He binds up, He wounds, but His hands heal. 19 From six troubles He will deliver you, even in seven no evil will touch you. 20 In famine He will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. 21 When tongues scourge, you will be secure and shall have no FEAR of violence when it comes; 22 but at violence and starvation you will laugh. Have no FEAR of the beasts of the earth, 23 for you have a covenant⁷ with the rocks in the field, and the beasts⁸ of the fields will bring you peace. 24 You will be certain of harmony in your tent. You shall tend to your flock⁹ and nothing will go amiss.¹⁰ 25 You shall know that your seed will be great and your offspring will be as the grass of the earth. 26 You shall come to your grave in full vigor like a whole shock of wheat standing tall

in the time of its harvest. 27 We have searched it out, and thus it is. Listen and you shall know for yourself.”

Comments

1. It is unclear exactly what Eliphaz means by “the holy ones,” but the implication seems to be that nothing within the world as Job knows it can be holy. Within the limited world open to human comprehension there is nothing between man and unfriendly nature. Job’s questions will go unanswered and his cries unheard.

2. Normally there is a distinction made between the *’awil* (fool) who is considered morally guilty, and the *peteh* (dupe), but for Eliphaz the difference is irrelevant. Well intentioned or not, the frustration which must arise out of daily defeat in the unfriendly world that lacks the holy must lead to destructive if not self-destructive anger.

3. Literally “pierced.”

4. The text is very obscure.

5. “He will crush them like a moth.” [4:19]/ “Nonetheless I would make my appeal to God and put my matter before that God . . .” [5:8]. While both Eliphaz and Job accept these two statements, for the one they live together snugly in the same world, but for the other they rip his world in two. To Eliphaz there is always time for trust, and so for him all things make sense, but for Job, to *make an appeal* to one who can *crush them like a moth* leads only to madness.

6. Nature is not nature as it presents itself within the plane of human understanding. It is the same God who “gives out rain over the face of the earth and sends water into the fields” that “can raise the despondent on high giving sanctuary to the mournful.” But this can be seen only by those for whom rain is not looked upon as simply a part of given nature, but as a *marvel*.

7. *B^erith*, the word used for Abraham’s covenant with God; peace in this most fearful world is only achieved by a divine covenant with the rocks and the beasts. Threatening boulders are not held back in their places by any innate forces to be found within the rock itself, but by a divine covenant freely established by the God who answers those who come to him.

But all of Job’s arguments presuppose the relevance of the way things appear to naked man. They imply taking seriously what we have called the surface of things; that fire goes up, that dogs bark, and that innocent men sometimes seem to suffer. If arguments presuppose intelligibility, then Job’s arguments presuppose the relevance of the way things are in themselves. In other words, they presuppose either something like natures in the ancient sense, or laws of nature in the modern sense.

It is hard to know to what extent or in whatever vague way Eliphaz could have been aware of such an alternative. It is clear, however, that he knows that

the notion that the rocks and beasts obey a covenant cuts deeply into Job's words.

8. living things

9. Greenberg: "When you visit your wife."

10. Literally "sin."

CHAPTER SIX

1 Then Job answered and said, **2** "Would that my indignation could truly be weighed, my calamities all laid out together on a scale! **3** then would it raise up even the sands of the seas.¹ And thus I speak without care, **4** for the arrows of the Almighty are in me and my spirit drinks in their venom.² The terrors of God are arrayed against me. **5** Will the wild ass bray when there is grass? Does the ox bellow at his fodder? **6** Can what is tasteless be eaten without salt or does the slime of an egg white have any taste.³ **7** My soul refuses to touch them. They are like a contagion in my daily bread.⁴

8 Who will see to it that my request comes to light; that God grant my hopes? **9** Would that God were pleased to crush me, loose his hand and cut me off! **10** That would come to me as compassion. Let me spring up in my writhing though He spare me not; for never have I disavowed the words of the Holy One.⁵ **11** What strength have I, that I should wait in expectations? What is my end that I should prolong my life? **12** Is my strength the strength of a rock? Do I have flesh of bronze? **13** No, I have no support within me and all resourcefulness has been driven out.⁶

14 To those in despair, the kindness of friends is due but the FEAR of the Almighty has forsaken them all. **15** My brothers have betrayed me like a wadi, a running brook that has gone dry.⁷ **16** They crystal over with ice and invert to black.⁸ They hide themselves in snow. **17** They thaw and disappear. In the heat they vanish from their place. **18** Their beds twist and turn. They flow out into the vastness and are lost. **19** The caravans of Tema look to them; the band from Sheba hopes for them, **20** but find themselves lost because they trusted.⁹ They arrived and were confounded.¹⁰

21 So now you are as nothing and at sight of terror, you have taken FRIGHT.¹¹ **22** But did I ever say to you 'Give me'; 'Offer the bribe for me out of your wealth'; **23** 'Deliver me from the hand of the foe'¹² or 'Redeem me from the hands of the most terrifying'?

24 Teach me and I will hold my peace. Only show me where I have erred.¹³ **25** How forceful honest words are, but what proofs are they that come from you! **26** Are you busy devising a proof in words while taking the testimony of a despairing man to be no more than the wind?¹⁴ **27** Would you cast down even an orphan or sell out a friend? **28** Come, face me; I'll not lie to you.

29 Stop, I beg you! Let there be no injustice. Give in! For yet my stand smacks of what is right.¹⁵ 30 There is no injustice on my tongue, and yet does not my palate know the taste of ruination.”

Comments

1. Job has almost no answer for Eliphaz. As we began to see in the note to 5:8, the parts can be stated and agreed upon. But their relationships to one another, whether they lie together in peace, or contend in anguish and in anger, or even what kinds of things can or cannot lie together, those are things which Job and Eliphaz may not be able to share. Job’s anguish, then, cannot be laid out on a common scale.

2. The word for “venom” also means “fury,” and will play an important role in the story. Job presents himself as *drinking in the venom-fury*. His thoughts and feelings are complicated and even contradictory, but they are still intelligible.

3. Verses 5 through 9 give a pretty good idea of how Job thinks about what we today, after the coming to be of philosophy, would call the relationship of cause and effect. It is not so far from the thought lying behind the Latin *causa*, or the Greek *aitia*, both of which originally meant something like “to be responsible” or “to be guilty,” and one can see in verse 6 the immediacy of the concept for Job. Through the immediacy of the example of taste, one can see the power that exists in the concept of cause and effect, taken in that sense, to pull Job back into the surface plane, the world of growing corn and barking dogs, of temporary joys and undeserved pain.

At this point in his understanding, coming to terms with the world around him is to experience it as it shows itself to him, as deeply as he can, and so he *drinks in the fury*.

Even if the others, Eliphaz and the rest, cannot see the world as Job sees it, they should be able to tell by looking at Job himself that something in the world around him has gone awry, but of course they cannot. But perhaps the surface is after all only the surface, and perhaps the others are right in pointing to a deeper wisdom underlying it. Even then, thought Job, the surface should indicate the way just as wisdom should give solidity to the surface. But here all seems to be at odds.

4. This is the closest that Job can come to telling the others what his world is like, this world whose parts do not fit together. It is like food that cannot be eaten. The rejection is immediate and total. But for Job it is not just a single dish; it is the mainstay of his life. For him there is no other world which is not filled with the contagion of disparity.

5 All we can gather from this remark is that whatever it was that Job saw that cleaved his world in two, it did not have its origins in any native antipathy toward the holy.

6. Here Job, in his imagination, can envisage a being with the inner strength to maintain itself in the midst of a crumbling world, but Job knows that at this point he is no such man.

7. At first the metaphor seems to be dead and to have no meaning whatsoever. What could it mean for a man to be like a wadi? and yet, once a very simple and straightforward definition of a wadi, “a running brook that has gone dry,” has been articulated in speech, the metaphor begins to sing with life, and the reader is left with a slight feeling of shame for not having understood what Job was saying. Then, one after another, the many disparate ways in which the metaphor holds begin to pour out.

8. Things known and trusted are not what they are. Soft and skipping waters, which should flow with ease, can turn hard and immobile. The surface of the ice, which should be crystal clear, can suddenly turn black, dark as the sea or as Egypt’s night, all depending upon how it is struck by the light; it is called Newton’s rings.

9. Mitchell has done a particularly poor job of catching the wonders of this simile. When, in verse 19, he replaces “the caravans of Tema and the band of Sheba,” with “pilgrims,” we lose the fact that these were men who knew the desert well, its every rock and dune. If we, the readers, cannot feel their trust, we cannot feel their horror when they suddenly feel lost in a familiar land.

The reader must remember that Eliphaz, to whom this speech is addressed, was himself a Temanite. Job is trying to give Eliphaz some insight into his thoughts and feelings. He has the almost self-contradictory task of making confusion intelligible for him.

10. The moment we hear Job pronounce the word “trusted,” we cannot help remembering that he, too, once had a whole world he thought he could trust, a world he thought he knew as well as the men of Sheba knew the desert.

11. By translating “At the sight of misfortune, you take fright,” Greenberg was able to catch the play on the Hebrew words for “to see,” and “to fear” in a most wonderful way.

12. *sar*: The root meaning is “to be narrow.” The word itself has two quite different meanings, both of which must always be kept in mind. On the one hand, it is an inner feeling of being cramped, or of living within a narrow and constricting horizon. On the other hand, it can mean an outward foe. This ambiguity in so many ways catches the ambivalence and waverings in Job’s soul. Is it That Old Foe pressing Job down from above? Or is it Job straining to break out of a narrow and fixed confinement?

Job, then, is also asking the question: “But did I ever say to you ‘Deliver me from the hand of narrowness?’”

13. The word used implies a wrong done inadvertently.

14. Job is beginning to see the double power of words. Words without vision, how they can distort a world of pain into a vision of loveliness without ever knowing that they have done so. It is all so strangely like the first time Panerge met Pantagruel.

15. Job seems to know that no matter how much a man may protest against him, there is in each of us the slight but uncomfortable feeling that perhaps Job is right after all.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 “Does not a mortal have a term of duty to serve here on earth and are not his days like the days of a hired servant? 2 Like a slave he yearns for the shadows, and like a hireling he hopes for his wages. 3 So have I been allotted months of emptiness. Nights of toil have they apportioned me. 4 I lie down and say ‘When shall I arise?’ and night drags on and I am sated with tossing till morning twilight.¹

5 My flesh is clothed in maggots and clumps of earth.² My skin has become hard and begins to ooze. 6 The days fly by me swifter than the weaver’s shuttle, and reach their culmination in an empty hope. 7 Remember that life is but a wind and that never will the sight of happiness return to my eyes. 8 The eye that sees me takes no note of me; your eye is upon me, and I am not.³ 9 As a cloud that reaches to its fullness and is gone, so he who descends into The Pit arises no more. 10 He will not return home again, and no one there will recognize him any longer.⁴

11 No, I cannot restrain speech, but will speak out of the narrowness⁵ constricting my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. 12 Am I the sea or some monster that You set watch over me?⁶ 13 When I said that my bed will show me compassion and my couch bear my complaint, 14 You frightened me with dreams and terrified me with visions 15 and I preferred strangulation and death to my own substance. 16 I have contempt.⁷ I will not live forever; Let me be, for my days are but the mist of a breath.

17 What is a mortal that thou shouldst magnify him? And that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him?

18 Yes, and inspect him every morning and test him every minute. 19 When will you let me be? You’ll not even let me alone to swallow my own spit. 20 Supposing I have sinned, what have I done to you, Oh Thou Great Watcher Of Man (*‘adam’*)?⁹ Why have you set me on course against you so that I become a burden even to myself? 21 Why can you not pardon my transgressions or bear my perversions?¹⁰ For now I shall lie down in the dust.¹¹ You will seek for me, but I am not.”¹²

Comments

1. There is a strange and eerie almost Kafka-like feeling to the next set of verses. God is never mentioned in them, and everything is stated in the indefinite third person plural or in the passive voice. Job presents man as feeling a

horrible and meaningless but absolute and almost sacred duty to some nameless and totally unknown power.

This sense of duty, this sense that there is something to which, and to which alone a man must devote his entire life, Job feels these things, too. Some may try to name it or endow it with intent and love and are at home with it, but for Job it has no name; it has no intent.

We moderns may want to call this feeling by the name of compulsion. We moderns would begin to look for the causes of these feelings within man himself, but on all counts, the book suggests that there is something beyond man that Job has yet to see.

2. dust

3. The Hebrew has a singularly chilling effect which I have not quite been able to achieve in English. The original simply reads *“nechah bi w^e’eneni*. Partly it lies in the simplicity of the language: *“nechah* (your eyes) *bi* (are upon [actually “in”] me). The main force of the twist, however, is felt in the final word, *w^e’eneni*. While it is clearly felt as one simple word, it is composed of three parts. The first part, *we*, when it first hits the ear, simply means “and,” but what follows it can suddenly and retroactively twist it into a “but,” or a “nonetheless” or even place an “in spite of fact that . . .” in front of the first word. Thoughts that are set up to go together are suddenly seen not to go together. (For a further discussion of the problem, see the note to 8:2.)

The second part, *ain*, means “nought,” or “nothing,” or “nonbeing.”

The third part, *ni*, is a suffix formed from the first person singular pronoun, and, as a suffix, it means “my.” The literal meaning of the word as a whole, then, would be “and my nonbeing (is).”

Actually the word is not all that uncommon. It often occurs in such phrases as “I am not giving you straw” and “for I am not in your midst,” but when it stands bare and alone it suddenly dissolves the world into nothing.

4. A man caught between two worlds is a man who will wander into many worlds, or into none, looking for a home. Time, the liar, if time were not and he were not, then the turmoil would not be. If Job could only convince himself that he did not exist, that he was a thing of the surface, was only a superficial being, then he could return to Eliphaz and the rest . . . and the rest.

5. But then the feeling of being cramped and crushed (see note to 6:23) itself persuades him again that he is. This is an important turning point for Job. From his last considerations, he knows that to take his own existence seriously will require a return to the surface. That superficial world which he had rejected for the sake of human companionship must be reconsidered.

6. For Job the central idea to human society, that man is ever under the care and watchful eye of his maker, is crippling and ultimately fatal to the human spirit.

7. This feeling of contempt which he has for himself and for his life is to be understood in contrast to the “compassion” which he had spoken of in verse 13.

These two passions, contempt and compassion, which are presented here as polar opposites will continue to play that role till Job's final speech where their opposition will lead Job to a new and strange kind of harmony.

Bed and the pleasure of self-contained sleep should carve out a world for Job, a three-dimensional world which is all his own and which reflects and supports the surface world that Job has seen about him, but it does not. The feeling of being watched and therefore of being some kind of monster in need of being watched has so completely overwhelmed Job's inner world that even in his dreams he is tortured by an amorphous sense of guilt that arises out of the sense of being watched. Job's need to contact the outside world of his three friends is so great that its watching God has become the author of his dreams.

8. Verse 17 is meant to ring as a psalm, while what follows in the text is Job's ironic commentary. For Job, one need only think the tradition through to see its horrors, but that was a thing which no thoughtful and caring man had ever done before so far as he knew.

Ps. 8:4 What is man that you are always watching him, and the son of man
 that you are always checking up on him?

9. Again, Job seems to have in mind a variety of psalmlike verses which must have been on everybody's lips, such as:

Ps. 121:3 He will not let your foot be moved, he who keeps you will not
 slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
 The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
 . The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The
 LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time
 forth and for evermore.

But for Job they take on the cast of ironic horror.

10. See the note to Job 11:6.

11. Verses 11 through 21 seem to be Job's great discourse on the relationship between privacy and human dignity. To be constantly watched, and hence never to be one's self for one's self alone is, for Job, to be less than human. Even the act of complaining is itself a subhuman act, and Job must exhort himself to actually do it. To be watched as a thing out of its place is already to be out of place, or like a thing that cannot know its own place but must be watched and kept in, like the sea.

And so Job turns to his bed. Sleep is the one place that he had expected to be his place, but even there the outside can enter inside in the form of dreams and terrible night visions, making his place not his place, and for Job, a thing without a place is a contemptible thing.

Perhaps the one conscious act that, because of its totally internal nature, a man thinks he can perform in total privacy, is the act of swallowing his own

spit. Job feels that if the traditional understanding of God is true, even this has been denied him. Being permeated by God both in mind and in body, he feels untrusted, and hence untrustworthy.

When Job utters his psalmlike quotation, we can see how those words which must have meant so much to him in the past have suddenly become full of an ironical terror.

If there is anything to this understanding of the passage, then, in contrast to the word “contempt,” the “compassion” spoken of in verse 13 must mean “leaving room for . . .” or “recognizing the place of another.” This is of some importance since the two words “contempt” and “compassion” will play an increasingly critical role in the text, although they will never come together again until Job’s final speech.

Much of the remainder of the book will be devoted to an attempt to understand what it means to have compassion for another. The fundamental problem is to learn to recognize the full existence of the other as other, and its relation to the recognition of self as self.

12. Although the problem is nowhere near as striking as it was, still see note to 7:8.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said, **2** “How long will you continue to recite these things with¹ words of such mighty wind? **3** Will God pervert judgement?² Will the Almighty pervert right? **4** If your sons have sinned against Him will He not drive them into the hands of their transgression? **5** But if you seek God out and implore The Almighty, **6** and if you are pure and upright, surely then He will rouse Himself up for you. He will make your righteous hut to flourish. **7** And though your beginnings be small, your legacy will grow great indeed.³

8 Only ask of the first generations. Seat yourself firmly upon what their fathers had searched out; **9** for we are only of a yesterday and know nothing, our days are but a shadow passing over the land.⁴ **10** Will they not teach you and speak to you as the words come tumbling out of their heart? **11** Can papyrus grow⁵ where there is no marsh? or can reed flourish without water? **12** While yet in their tender days, they wither before any grass, still unpicked. **13** Such is the course for all those who forget God, and for him all hope will vanish.⁶ The profane man is lost **14** for he who feels a loathing for his own sense of trust will come to rely upon a spider web.⁷

15 He will lean upon his house but it will not hold; he will hold fast to it but it will not stand.

16 It may sit fresh under the sun and shoots may spring up in his garden, **17** with roots twining round a knoll and clinging to the house of stone. **18** Yet his

own habitat will devour him and deny him saying ‘I have never seen you!’⁸ **19** Such are the delights of his ways;⁹ and out of the dust another will spring.¹⁰ **20** But surely God will neither have contempt¹¹ for a simple man¹² nor strengthen the hand of the evildoer. **21** He will fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy. **22** Those who hate you will be clothed in shame, and the tent of the guilty will vanish.”

Comments

1. The Hebrew which I translated by the word “with” is simply the particle *we*. This particle is a general connective and is usually translated as “and.” To have some understanding of the problem facing the translator, the reader need only note that the word “and” in the sentence “You mean you were in town and you didn’t call” is by no means your simple bread-and-butter “and.” It can mean “but,” or “when” or a thousand others, including, more poignantly, “in spite of the fact that. . . .”

In the Book of Job the problem is particularly acute. Well-connected arguments can so easily turn into a bunch of sentences all lying in a heap. The reader is hereby warned that I have translated *we* in a thousand different ways. Otherwise the sentence would have read: “How long will you continue to recite these things and your words are such a mighty wind?”

2. *Mis_hpat*: I was not able to find a single English word to use as a consistent translation of this word. It can mean “judgement,” both in the sense of a “general law” and in the sense of a “specific judgement made by a given judge.” It can also mean a “trial” or the argument or “case” prepared on one side or the other. Others, with some justification, have translated it “Right.” Unless otherwise noted, I shall use either “judgement” or “case.”

3. Bildad will start his argument proper only in verse 8, and it will have a great deal to do with the relation of fathers to sons and of sons to fathers. Before beginning his argument, however, he wanted to make it clear that he thought that as far as any actual punishment for any actual individual sin is concerned, each man must suffer for his own.

4. Bildad’s argument seems to be that wisdom is not available to the human mind outside the context of a human and hence a political tradition reaching back to the fathers. The span of a single lifetime is too short to gather the experience or the insight which would be needed even to begin an approach to a way of life dedicated to an autonomous inquiry into the surface of things, even such a life that someone like Socrates might one day lead.

The combined wisdom of the fathers who, over many ages, have slowly planted our roots by living through life, is to be trusted beyond the inquiries of a single man who must have held himself back from life in order to question it, no matter how thoughtful that attempt may have been.

Although these roots can become obscured or lost through adversity and doubt, any search to discover wisdom must be a search to rediscover it. Wisdom can only be found within the confines of a long-established, well-nurtured home.

5. “show its majestic pride.”

6. Bildad even seems to have compassion and a kind of love for the tender reed who goes it alone, the man who does not seat himself firmly in the ways of fathers or nourish himself in the waters of tradition, but tries to search out wisdom for himself. But much as he may love such a reed, he sees it as a thing that cannot last. Other plants may be out there that can stand without the marsh, but not man, the tender reed. Such men have forgotten God, and are lost.

7. Others translate: “Whose confidence is a thread of gossamer” (Greenberg). Or “Whose confidence breaks in sunder” (RSV). The heart of the problem is the word *yaqut*, from the root *qut*. The difficulty is that there are two such roots. One is an assumed variant form of *qtt*, “to break” or “to snap,” which appears nowhere else in the Bible. This is by no means, however, a foolish suggestion. After all, the root *qum* is clearly related to the root *qmm*, and such interchanges often occur. On the other hand, there is another root *qut* which is a rather common variant form of *qus*, “to feel a loathing.” It can be found in this form in Job 10:1 as well as three times in the Book of Psalms, and four times in Ezra.

If this reading is correct, Bildad may have in mind something like the rather sycophantic way in which that arch-Machiavellian, Joab, fawns upon God’s altar at the end of his life.

8. Even a lonely reed like Job needs a context within which to inquire—a home with a grassy knoll. The language and content of his questions presuppose and are in good part derived from the path he has disowned. It was a comfortable home, and one on which he still must lean but which can no longer bear his weight. Ultimately, his rejection of the wisdom of his home will cause his home to reject him, and for Bildad, a man without a home is a man who has no place to stand.

9. Intended with an irony somewhere between pity and sarcasm.

10. Bildad seems to know that Job’s problem is an eternal problem and that there will always be men like Job.

11. It is important to note that Bildad uses the word “contempt,” which will turn out to be so critical for our understanding of the book as a whole. Cf. note to 42:6.

12. Bildad’s alternative to the man of inquiry is the simple man, as he understands it. That was the word used for Job so often in the first chapters. In fact, except for Zophar, Satan, and the Voice in the Tempest, all the characters in the drama in one way or another think of simplicity as a high if not the highest human virtue, though they do not all agree on what the simple is. For Bildad this is to be understood in contradistinction to the man of inquiry. As far as the others are concerned, see the note to 31:40.

CHAPTER NINE

1 Then Job answered and said, **2** “Yes, all that I know, but then what can make a mortal’s justice apparent to God? **3** Even if one wanted to go to trial with Him, He would not answer, no not one in a thousand.¹ **4** Wise of heart—mighty in power, who can stand fast against Him and remain unbroken? **5** He who can transport the mountains and they feel it not; or overturn them in His anger,² **6** Who can cause the earth to reel from its place till its pillars quake!³ **7** He who says a word to the sun, and it does not rise; Who seals up the stars, **8** and Who by Himself spreads out the heavens and tramples on the tier of the sea; **9** Who made Arcturus and Orion, the Pleiades, and the Chambers of the South; **10** Who accomplishes great things, there is no finding them out—wonders without number.⁴

11 He passes by me but I cannot see Him. He moves on, but I do not comprehend Him. **12** He snatches up and who can stop Him. Who can say to him, ‘What is it you are about to do?’ **13** But God will not turn back His anger. Under His rule even the ministers of Rahab bend low.⁵

14 I would answer him, choosing my words against Him with care, **15** but even though I am in the right still I cannot do it. Yet I must plead for what seems to me just.⁶

16 Even if I were to summon Him and He were to answer me, even then I do not believe⁷ that he would pay me any mind, **17** for He is the one that can crush me for a hair or multiplies my wounds gratis. **18** He will not let me catch my breath, but sates me with bitterness. **19** If trial be by strength, He is the mighty one, and if by court of law, who will plead my case? **20** Though I am just my own mouth would condemn me. I am simple but He will show me perverse. **21** I am simple but I no longer care and have only contempt for my life.⁸

22 It’s all one. Therefore I say that simple or guilty He destroys all. **23** When the whip suddenly brings death, He mocks as the innocent despair. **24** The earth has been placed into the hands of the guilty. He has covered the eyes of its judges. If it be not He, then where is that one?⁹

25 My days are swifter than a post. They take flight for they have seen no good. **26** They pass through with the reed boats; they swoop down like an eagle upon its prey. **27** Even if I should say ‘Let me forget my complaint, abandon my long visage, and put on a cheerful look,’ **28** I would still feel the dread of all my grief, since I know that you will never find me pure. **29** I will still be found guilty. Why then toil for an airy nothing? **30** If I were to wash in snowy waters and cleanse my hands with lye, **31** You would dip me in the muck till even my cloths would hold me in abomination.¹⁰

32 He is not a man (*‘ish*) as I am, that I can answer Him, that we can come together under judgement. **33** There is no arbitrator between us who can lay his hand on us both! **34** But let Him turn his rod away from me and not frighten me

with His terror, 35 then I would speak out without FEAR of Him; for in myself I am none of these things.¹¹

Comments

1. Job now thinks that there may be a critical sense in which Bildad may be right. The distinction between the thoughtful and the thoughtless may not be visible from the highest point of view. He begins to fear that at that level the surface of things may completely disappear. On the one hand, this conclusion leaves him confused and perhaps a bit frightened. On the other hand, this confusion will ultimately force Job to peer into a world well beyond the narrowness of his own native borders.

2. For the sake of consistency, and to allow the reader to do his own reading, we have kept to the following convention, although it did seem somewhat arbitrary at times:

<i>'ap_h</i>	<i>ka'as</i>	<i>hamah</i>	<i>gur</i>	<i>hat_h</i>
"anger"	"indignation"	"fury"	"terror"	"dread"

3. "RAGE."

4. From these verses one can get a wonderful sense of the duality contained in the word "fear." In them Job is constantly pulled from terror to awe and back to terror. He is both drawn and repelled by a world that is too large to contain him. It is awesome, but he can find no place in it for himself or his simple surface understanding of human justice.

5. In verse 1 Job showed that he had recognized Bildad's good will and realizes the truth of what he had said, but he also knew that he had not yet addressed himself to the question raised by Eliphaz in 4:17, "Shall a man be more just than his God? or a mortal more pure than his maker?"

For the moment at least he is content to raise the question in its enormity without trying to answer it. God seems to live in a world so far above the cares of mortal justice that even to raise the question now seems meaningless. The motions in that world are so large that to him it seems unavoidable that the little things will be crushed and those who are small enough to see the things that fall through the cracks are too small to be heard.

6. Job must not only come to terms with two conflicting worlds, he must act in them as well, and what each world commands the other has forbidden.

Actions cannot be performed in a world. They are forever performed in THE world, and their consequences reverberate throughout all worlds. Either way Job cannot do what he knows he must do.

In these verses Job presents the fundamental problem of the book. Job is caught by a divided duty. God is God, and yet what seems just cannot seem unjust. Justice demands articulation, yet the act of articulation points back to the speaker who feels perverse when he considers the enormity of the distinc-

tion between himself and his notion of God, and he falls silent. But then he again becomes aware of his own innocence, and justice again begins to raise her demands. This constant, unresolvable cycle leads him into bitterness and confusion.

7. Or “I cannot trust.”

8. Job’s sociality, his need for human companions and fellowship is so great that when they condemn and reject him, he takes the only course left open to him. He rejoins society by joining them in his own self-condemnation.

When facing the world around him and the conditions it has placed upon his being, Job feels out of place, contorted, and perverse, and yet, since he knows of no crime or guilt, he knows of no way of expiation. He even begins to feel guilty of the sin of having seen his own innocence.

Divine wisdom and everyday justice; each seems to mock and jeer at the other until the whole turns meaningless.

9. The question is, of course, intended to be rhetorical. For Job there can be no second God who is Lord over the surface, no one else who could be guilty. If the tart is gone, some knave must have stolen it.

10. Even at this point Job could put a false face over the surface and go on back to his friends; let it all rest in oblivion as he had once thought to do. Sometimes that old trick really works. Smile at the day, and the day smiles right back at you; but not this time. That ugly surface world and the feelings of dread and guilt which come from having seen it will not go away. Once the surface has been seen, it cannot be unseen.

11. This seems to be somewhere near the heart of things as they have been ever since the world began to fall out of focus. Job knows that he is guilty in the only world that he ever knew, and yet he knows that he is not guilty.

Job had grown up with his friends in a comfortable world with its do’s and its don’ts. It all made so much sense, and in the main, things turned out for the best. By all the standards of that world, a world which he knows and lives by, he, Job, is a guilty man; and yet when he honestly tries to look into himself to find something that would make sense out of what has happened, he finds an innocent man.

Words like “inside” and “outside” begin to lose their meaning. Is his innocence out there on a surface that deeper wisdom cannot comprehend? Or is it to be found only within himself?

CHAPTER TEN

1 My spirits feel a loathing towards life. I will unleash my complaint and speak in the bitterness of my soul. **2** To God I say: ‘Do not condemn me, but let me know the cause of this struggle against me.’ **3** Does it seem good to You that You oppress, that You have contempt² for the toil of your own hand, but

radiate upon the counsel of the guilty **4** Have You eyes of flesh? Can You see as mortals see? **5** Can time mean to You what time means to man?³ Do Your years pass by as our years, **6** that You probe back into my perversions and track down my sin?⁴ **7** Somewhere in Your mind I am not guilty, and yet there is none to save me from Your hand.

8 Your hands toiled over me and made me and yet from all about they devour me. **9** Remember that You made me as clay and that You will return me to dust. **10** You poured me out like milk and thickened me like cheese. **11** With skin and flesh You clothed me and knit me together with bones and sinews. **12** Your dealings with me were full of life and loving care. Your guardianship watched over my spirit. **13** But You treasured all these things up in Your heart.⁵ I know what You have in mind; **14** if I sin You'll be watching and You'll not clear me from my perversion. **15** Well, if I have been guilty the grief is mine, but even when I am innocent I have been so sated with reproach that no feeling of honor is left in me and I see only my feebleness.⁶ **16** You must feel the majestic pride of a lion in hunting me? Must you always use me to manifest your wonders? **17** Continually You bring new witnesses against me feeding Your indignation against me. Army after army are upon me.

18 Why did You bring me out of the womb? Had I only perished without ever an eye to see me, **19** I would be as though I had not been, as though I had been led from the belly to the grave. **20** So little time remains. Forbear! Leave me a bit that I may be cheerful. **21** Well, I will be going soon, going to a land of darkness and the Shadow of Death and I will not return; **22** to a land that glows in murk, the Shadow of Death and without order—A land whose radiation is murk.’”

Comments

1. Back in Chapter 4, Job had said: “I would answer him, choosing my words against Him with care,” and now the process has begun, although he knows that there will be no court and no judge. Despite the bitterness and confusion in his soul, he begins his brief like an ordinary brief, asking for the grounds of God’s complaint, but by verse 4 he sees more deeply why there can be no court.

2. Job intends this statement as an answer to what Bildad had said in the last speech:

8:20 But surely God will neither have contempt for a simple man nor strengthen the hand of the evildoer. He will fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy.

On the relation between contempt and laughter see also the note to 30:1.

3. Literally, “Are Your days like the days of a mortal or your years like the years of a man (*geb_her*)?”

Job seems to be saying that if God can feel neither the dragging nor the rushing of time, He can understand neither punishment nor human suffering. Hope and fear are both meaningless apart from the human sense of time. If God cannot feel them He cannot understand His own judgements.

4. Job is saying that if, as Psalms say, *a thousand years in His sight are as but yesterday when they are past*, He cannot understand the sins of Job’s youth as being just that, the sins of his youth, an act of a long ago dead past.

5. That’s what made it all so hard for Job to understand. God had seemed to make each thing in nature, including Job himself, with such perfection, love, and care. For the most part everything seemed to him to be so full of love and life, and yet in this case everything had gone so wrong. It was all so crazy and mixed up.

6. This is, perhaps, Job’s deepest insight into the nature of his own feelings and thoughts. Job knows that like all men he has surely made some mistakes in his life, and perhaps more than most men, he knows that he has always been the one to suffer on account of them. But the present situation is different and beyond such reasonable bounds.

Job feels that he is beginning to lose his struggle with the outside world, the world of Eliphaz and the rest of them, as well as with the world of pain. In order to come to terms with the noise of all of these accusations, and remain part of that outer world, his only source of human relationship, he finds himself beginning to believe in his own guilt even though he knows that he is not guilty. He lives with this contradiction only by taking his mind away from that which is best in him and seeing only his own frailties.